LIBERTY PROTECTED BY LAW:
RACE, RIGHTS, AND THE CIVIL WAR IN ILLINOIS

BY

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DISSESSATION

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Abstract

Illinois was a hostile place for free blacks to live before the Civil War. Its racial laws, built on the principles of white supremacy and exclusivity, were among the most restrictive in the antebellum North. Illinois’s legal code discouraged blacks from moving to the state and severely circumscribed the rights of those who did. Yet, only weeks before the Civil War ended, Illinois lawmakers repealed the state’s most oppressive black laws. This dissertation explores how the war destabilized the racial order that white Illinoisans had constructed. It travels from the home front to the frontlines in order to understand the ways civilians and soldiers responded to a war that evolved into an assault on slavery. As Illinois soldiers became willing participants in the process of emancipation, Republicans back at home strove to eliminate the vestiges of slavery by striking down state statutes that denied blacks natural rights and equal protection under the law.
To my parents, Nancy and Steve
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It takes a village to write a dissertation. This project never would have made it out infancy without the guidance and support I have received along the way.

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Introduction:

The Pendulum of War:
Home Front, Politics, and Military

On an August afternoon in 1859, Felix Morris paid $63 to purchase George Bowlen at a public auction. The buying and selling of human property was a common event throughout the South, but this particular incident attracted national attention. George Bowlen was a free black man, not a slave, and the auction took place at Carrollton, Illinois, a small town fifty miles southwest of the state capital. Bowlen’s crime, for which he was punished with sixteen months of forced labor, was living in the free state of Illinois.¹

The statute criminalizing black settlement in Illinois was one example of the discriminatory legislation operating in the state prior to the Civil War. These “black laws” sought to impede blacks from settling in Illinois and subjugated those who did. Marginalized from political and civil life, the small population of blacks in the Prairie State lived without many of the basic legal protections and civil rights enjoyed by free blacks in other northern states. The law in Illinois viewed blacks as foreigners and, unlike European immigrants, denied them a lawful path to citizenship and the privileges associated with it.

This changed during the Civil War. Two months before the Confederate surrender at Appomattox Court House, the Illinois general assembly repealed the state’s most extreme black laws, including the prohibition on black immigration. Five years later, a new state constitution removed all references to race. In a very short span of time, the legal barriers that excluded blacks from participation in civic and political life weakened. Although racial discrimination in

various forms persisted throughout Reconstruction and beyond, the war had produced a new understanding of freedom in Illinois.

This dissertation tells the story of how Illinois went from having, in the words of one historian regarding the 1853 black exclusion law, “undoubtedly the most severe anti-Negro measure passed by a free state” to striking down that and other black laws twelve years later.² The Civil War was a transformative event, not only for the South but across the nation. It forced northern whites to consider what the future status of free blacks would be in the reunited country. The Illinois legislature repealed the 1853 black law only days after ratifying the Thirteenth Amendment, beginning the process of Reconstruction in Illinois. Neither of these events were inevitable outcomes of the war. Nor did they go uncontested. Examining how they came to pass sheds light on the evolution of white racial attitudes during the war.

The few historians who have studied Illinois’s black laws identify the Civil War as playing a pivotal role in their repeal. Stephen Middleton, a leading historian on midwestern black laws, suspects that without the war, “reform probably would not have come to Illinois before the twentieth century.”³ Noted journalist and historian Irving Dilliard claims that the closing years of the war “brought a deep change in sentiment in the Illinois legislature.”⁴ Roger Bridges, the foremost historian on nineteenth-century Illinois blacks, writes, “the logic propelled by the results of the Civil War” led to the repeal of the black laws.⁵ Bridges rightly identifies the role of black activists in raising awareness about the black laws, but leaves unanswered the matter of

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why the legislature acted when it did. All these studies identify the war as a main factor in bringing about the repeal of the black laws, but they stop short of explaining *why* it led to this specific outcome.  

To fully grasp why the war brought about major reform in Illinois’s racial code, this dissertation follows the lead of Jennifer Weber’s study on northern dissent by focusing on three interrelated wartime spheres: the home front, politics, and the military. Despite the physical separation of these spheres, they remained interconnected throughout the war. As a volunteer force, Union soldiers brought the values and beliefs of their families and communities with them to the battlefield. Through letters and newspapers they stayed abreast of events at home. In turn, by sharing their first-hand accounts from the front lines, soldiers influenced how their friends and families perceived the war. Northern civilians and soldiers alike remained especially attentive to national and state politics. Their criticisms of elected officials deepened partisan rifts and determined elections. Separately, each of these arenas offers a glimpse into the racial attitudes of Illinoisans. Examining them together provides insight into why these attitudes changed over time, revealing how a war for reunification turned into a battle for black rights in Illinois.

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6 Arthur C. Cole, who wrote the only monograph about Illinois during the war, offers an alternative understanding of the abolishment of the black laws. Instead of the war creating conditions favorable for repeal, Cole claims that it actually prevented Republicans from being able to do so in 1861 by disrupting normal legislative proceedings. This interpretation places responsibility for the black laws on “Democratic rule.” However, Republicans did in fact have the opportunity to repeal the black laws on the eve of the Civil War but voted to keep them in force, as discussed in chapter 2. Cole, *The Era of the Civil War, 1848-1870* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 388.

The Home Front

Civil War history has come a long way from its fixation on battles and the generals who fought them. The last fifty years have seen a sharp uptick in studies about the Civil War home front. This new wave of scholarship has given voice to historical actors, such as women and slaves, who have been ignored by traditional narratives. The southern home front has received the lion’s share of attention due to its overlap with the battlefield and the profound upheaval of its labor and social systems. Recently, historians have begun to seriously examine the manifold ways in which the Civil War penetrated and affected northern communities, as well as how the North’s civilian population interpreted and shaped the course of the war. Philip S. Pauldan’s *A People’s Contest*, published in 1988, was the first modern volume to examine northern society during the war, followed six years later by J. Matthew Gallman’s *The North Fights the Civil War*. Although these works established the northern home front as a legitimate area of study, they concluded that the war was first and foremost a local event, fought by separate communities across the North.

Following Pauldan and Gallman’s findings, historians have narrowed their focus to city and state studies, demonstrating that there were multiple northern home fronts rather than a single, united one. A recent collection of essays focusing on how the Midwest experienced the Civil War illustrates the value of applying a regional focus to the northern home front. *Union*

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Heartland shows the profound impact of the war on an area that saw little in the way of military
combat but sent hundreds of thousands of its residents to the front lines.\textsuperscript{10} Contending with a
reduced labor force, the men and women who remained at home toiled on their farms in order to
feed themselves and the Union Army. The predominantly rural landscape of the Northwest (as it
was then often called) posed hardships for fractured families.\textsuperscript{11} This isolation limited the ability
of women to participate in mobilization efforts that took place in more urban areas, and
households were rearranged as wives moved in with their in-laws for the duration of the war.
The Midwest also differentiated itself from the older states of the East by its unique demographic
composition. Although the region remained wracked by sectional tension, the intermingling of
southerners and northerners produced a distinct Western identity.\textsuperscript{12} These antagonisms erupted
during the war, creating a hotbed of dissent that gained its strongest foothold in the lower
Midwest.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{10} Ginette Aley and J. L. Anderson, eds., Union Heartland: The Midwestern Home Front during the Civil War
(Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013). Midwestern states include Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Michigan,
Ohio, Minnesota, and Wisconsin.

\textsuperscript{11} In 1860, New England and the Mid-Atlantic states were 63 and 65 percent rural, respectively. The Midwest was
88 percent rural. Aley and Anderson, “The Great National Struggle in the Heart of the Union: An Introduction,” in
Union Heartland, 3.

\textsuperscript{12} Nicole Etcheson, The Emerging Midwest: Upland Southerners and the Political Culture of the Old Northwest,
1787-1861 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996). Etcheson argues that midwesterners developed a
regional identity in the first half of the nineteenth century but it gave way to sectionalism during the tumultuous
1850s. For other works exploring midwestern regionality, identity, and culture, see Andrew R. L. Cayton and Susan
E. Gray, eds., The American Midwest: Essays of Regional History (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001);
William N. Parker, “From Northwest to Midwest: Social Bases of a Regional History,” in Essays in Nineteenth
Century Economic History: The Old Northwest, ed. David C. Klingaman and Richard K. Vedder (Athens: Ohio
University Press, 1975), 3-34; Richard Lyle Power, Planting Corn Belt Culture: The Impress of the Upland
Southerner and Yankee in the Old Northwest (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1953); Susan Sessions Rugh,
Our Common Country: Family Farming, Culture, and Community in the Nineteenth-Century Midwest
(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001); and James R. Shortridge, The Middle West: Its Meaning in
American Culture (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989). For a survey of midwestern historiography, see
Andrew R. L. Cayton and Peter S. Onuf, The Midwest and the Nation: Rethinking the History of an American

\textsuperscript{13} Jennifer Weber’s Copperheads offers the best rejoinder to Frank L. Klement’s argument in The Copperheads in
the Middle West (1960) that Republicans concocted the threat of antiwar violence for their own political gain.
The roots of this discord stem from the Midwest’s complex relationship with slavery and race. Alexis de Tocqueville notably observed in the 1830s that racial prejudice in America was strong where slavery had been abolished but greatest where it never existed. Following the American Revolution, northeastern states set in motion immediate or gradual emancipation plans. Yet blacks there quickly discovered that their freedom came with strings attached. Laws, popular prejudice, and extralegal actions consigned free people of color to the periphery of society, separate and far from equal. Though ostensibly free, noted Tocqueville, northern blacks could partake in “neither the rights, pleasures, work, pains, nor even the grave with the man to whom he has been declared equal.”

States carved out of the Northwest Territory went even further in stigmatizing free blacks by passing the North’s most restrictive racial legislation. While a number of northeastern states enfranchised blacks, no midwestern states did. Laws banning black testimony or immigration appeared across the lower Midwest, as well as in California and Oregon, but were unheard of in the East. Fugitive slaves were least likely to find laws protecting their sanctuary in the Midwest. Discriminatory racial legislation in the North did not remain static, however. Throughout the antebellum period states revised and sometimes repealed their black laws. Yet, up to the Civil War, the Midwest validated Tocqueville’s claim and remained, legally speaking, the most hostile to free blacks within the North.

This animosity originated with the white settlers who moved to the Midwest early in the nineteenth century. They came chiefly from the Upland South and brought with them entrenched racial antipathies and a strong commitment to white supremacy, both of which became hallmarks of the communities they established. Though most desired to create a society free from slavery, they retained the racial biases and prejudices that the institution engendered. Because whites viewed blackness as a marker of slavery, the presence of free blacks was unsettling. As neither slaves nor citizens, they threatened the racially homogenous and egalitarian social order midwestern whites strove to create for themselves.

Illinois among the midwestern states offers a particularly compelling setting to study racial attitudes during the Civil War era. Stretching almost four hundred miles on its north-south axis, Illinois shares parallels of latitude with Boston, Massachusetts, and Winston-Salem, North Carolina. By mid-century its population reflected the cultural diversity found within this geographic span. A majority of the earliest white settlers in Illinois hailed from slave states and settled in southern Illinois. Beginning in the 1830s, waves of Yankees from New England, the

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Mid-Atlantic region, and elsewhere in the Midwest flooded the northern reaches of the state. In 1860, less than 3 percent of immigrants to northern Illinois were southerners.\textsuperscript{18} This geographic schism produced political, economic, religious, and ideological tensions between the northern and southern parts of the state that continue today. It also led to an incongruous racial legacy. Illinois was the first state to endorse black exclusion by popular vote and the only northern state to legally regard all blacks as slaves until proven otherwise.\textsuperscript{19} It was also the home of the author of the Emancipation Proclamation and the first state to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment.

In addition to its striking cultural geography, Illinois’s demographic history makes it a significant place of study. Although census takers had to inflate population figures in order to qualify Illinois for statehood in 1818, by 1860 it was the fourth largest state in the nation. Settlers swallowed up public lands and sunk their farm implements into the rich prairie loam, making the state the leading producer of corn and wheat by the start of the war.\textsuperscript{20} Farmers moved their products to market on railroad tracks boasting the second highest mileage in any state.\textsuperscript{21} Chicago, a boggy outpost in 1830, was the ninth largest city by 1860. As the region’s commercial center, it


\textsuperscript{19} In his book on northern personal liberty laws, Thomas D. Morris singles out Illinois as a “special problem,” explaining, “it is an important exception, but the only one, to the idea that people in the North incorporated into law the presumption that all men are born free and should not be deprived of that freedom except by due process.” Morris, \textit{Free Men All: The Personal Liberty Laws of the North, 1780-1861} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), xi-xii.

\textsuperscript{20} Cole, \textit{Era of the Civil War}, 75.

linked the state to national and overseas markets. In a very short span of time, Illinois’s place in the national imagination shifted from a wilderness to a mature and thriving society. Illinois cemented its national influence in 1860 by giving the North not one but two presidential candidates.

Given Illinois’s rising importance in national affairs, there has been surprisingly little attention given to its role in the Civil War. The 259,092 troops who fought under Illinois’s banner—the fourth highest amount contributed by any state—saw action in every major theater of war. Victor Hicken’s *Illinois in the Civil War* recounts their military exploits but largely ignores events at home. Conversely, Arthur C. Cole’s *The Era of the Civil War, 1848-1870* examines various aspects of Illinois society during wartime but seldom looks beyond the state’s borders to place Illinois within a wartime context. Illinois’s influence in shaping the course of the Civil War requires historians of the era to take a closer look at what was unfolding at home there. This is especially true in regards to race and rights. As one of the more conservative states in the North, Illinois’s evolution on these matters acts as a barometer of the consequences of emancipation in the free states. Nowhere were these consequences more visible in Illinois than in the political arena.

**The Political**

In the late 1990s, Michael Holt called for more attention to be paid to the nearly barren terrain of Civil War state legislatures, calling it “one of the greatest opportunities for fresh work

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on northern Civil War politics." However, most political histories continue to concentrate on national affairs, leaving a blind spot in state-level policymaking. Narrowing this focus is crucial for better understanding the linkages between party ideology and voter preference during wartime. As Republicans maintained control of the federal government during the war, examining politics at the state level provides a more nuanced exploration of the interplay between the political parties.

Illinois’s turbulent political arena offers a compelling venue to answer Holt’s call. Following a brief truce after the attack on Fort Sumter, Illinois Republicans and Democrats resumed their attacks on each other with a new ferocity. Extreme partisan hostility characterized Illinois politics for the duration of the war, demonstrating, for Illinois at least, that the two-party system remained alive and well during the national crisis. At stake was not only the nature and purpose of the war, but deciding whose vision of a reunited country would triumph.

While this dissertation focuses mainly on the trajectory of the Republican Party during the war, it does so by being attentive to the entanglements between it and the Democratic Party. Studies that neglect this dynamic fail to perceive how each party shaped the other’s trajectory. In Illinois, this is particularly evident in matters regarding slavery and race. Democratic criticisms of the war were tied to their hostility toward blacks. As Democrats ramped up their anti-war rhetoric, Republicans distanced themselves by staking out more radical ground. This Republican shift, however, was not simply partisan maneuvering. Republicans expressed a growing commitment to racial justice as black participation in the Union war effort expanded. They also

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26 The argument that anti-partisanship discourse prevailed during the war is made in Adam I. P. Smith, No Party Now: Politics in the Civil War North (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
demonstrated it with their actions. After retaking control of the state house in 1864, Republicans voted unanimously to repeal the state’s black laws.

To better understand the nature of how and why white racial views changed, it is necessary to understand contemporary perceptions of rights and their relationship to race. Lacking a unified, articulated position on black rights, members of the Republican Party embraced a wide spectrum of racial attitudes. At one extreme were those who refused to recognize the essential humanity of non-whites; at the other end were those who supported a fully integrated and egalitarian society. In the Republican mainstream, according to historian Eric Foner, were those who “asserted that free Negroes were human beings and citizens of the United States” and “should be given an ‘equal chance’ to prove [themselves] capable of economic advancement.” Although not always agreeing on what it meant to have an “equal chance,” most Republicans agreed that equality concerned natural rights as opposed to political rights.27

Natural rights were considered the most fundamental of rights, such as “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” as outlined in the Declaration of Independence. Innate and inviolable, natural rights played a salient role in the Republican view of free labor by allowing workers to pursue their own economic advancement without artificial barriers blocking their progress. Natural rights also guaranteed that individuals would be secure in their person and property. Many Republicans believed that this category of rights cut across racial lines. Abraham Lincoln expressed this sentiment in a debate with Stephen Douglas in 1858 when he asserted, “there is no reason in the world why the negro is not entitled to all the natural rights enumerated in the Declaration of Independence…in the right to eat the bread, without the leave of anybody else,

which his own hand earns, he is my equal and the equal of Judge Douglas, and the equal of every living man.”

This also meant blacks were entitled to equal protection under the law, which would safeguard one’s natural rights. Republicans drew a sharp distinction between natural rights, which were universal, and political rights. The latter, which included suffrage, holding office, and jury duty, were grounded by race and gender. These were privileges exclusive to white men.

If moderate Republicans believed that blacks were entitled to natural rights and citizenship status, then Illinois Republicans as a whole stood to the right of the national party’s center. In denying blacks fundamental natural rights, such as due process and the ability to move about freely, Illinois Republicans prior to the war formed the conservative wing of the party as it related to black equality. During the course of the war, they moved toward greater acceptance not only of black freedom but also of safeguarding that freedom by law. This meant extending natural rights to blacks in their own state. For a state that was so hostile to blacks that it criminalized their presence, this evolution was momentous. It resulted in the repeal of the black laws and signaled a growing acceptance among whites for black citizenship and national inclusion.

The transformation of Illinois Republicans’ stance on black rights helps bring to light the Civil War’s impact on white racial attitudes, a topic that remains hotly disputed despite receiving

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ongoing attention since the 1960s.\textsuperscript{31} Two recent works exemplify the divergence on this debate. In *The Union War*, Gary Gallagher contends that northern racism remained unbending throughout the war. Believing that historians have overstated the role of slavery to the northern war experience, Gallagher argues that federal emancipation was solely a matter of military expediency and was not viewed as a “grand moral imperative” by civilians or soldiers.\textsuperscript{32} On the other end of the spectrum, James Oakes’s *Freedom National* claims that Republicans were committed to ending slavery even before the first state seceded. The war simply provided a convenient pretext to put that desire into action.\textsuperscript{33}

Although both accounts offer two very different interpretations, they share the belief that continuity marked the northern war experience. In each narrative, there was no ideological shift in the North from 1861 to 1865. By contrast, this dissertation argues that a transformation did take place in northern racial views during the course of the war. Unlike the Republicans in Oakes’s work (who were centered in Washington, DC), Illinois Republicans did not possess abolitionist leanings when the war began, but they did by the end. Whereas the undifferentiated mass of northerners in Gallagher’s work held the same racial views before and after the war, Illinois residents evinced a shift in their thinking on race and rights. Some of the earliest indications of these transformations came from Illinoisans who were hundreds of miles away from home on the frontlines of the war.

\textsuperscript{31} It is also a topic about which claims are often asserted but rarely demonstrated. For example, in *Bright Radical Star*, Robert Dykstra identifies an “egalitarian moment” after the war when Iowa’s Republicans rallied behind black suffrage but fails to account for this shift.


The Military

In the 1940s Bell Irvin Wiley demonstrated the rich historical possibilities of focusing on the lives of rank-and-file Civil War soldiers. Scholarship over the last thirty years has built on Wiley’s useful but largely descriptive and heroic portrayals of Union and Confederate troops by analyzing their complex and evolving motivations, attitudes, and actions. Recent works have offered new interpretations of Civil War soldiers by placing their experiences into wider social and political contexts. Whereas Wiley doubted that even 10 percent of white northern soldiers “had any real interest in emancipation,” historians now claim that slavery played an influential role in white Union soldiers’ experiences and understandings of the war. Chandra Manning’s What This Cruel War Was Over makes the strongest case for this argument. Based on diaries, letters, and regimental newspapers of enlisted men, Manning argues that northern troops quickly recognized slavery as the cause of the war and rallied for its destruction.

The accounts left by Illinois soldiers support this assertion. Although the vast majority did not enlist to end slavery, they came to realize how vital the institution was to the southern war effort and supported emancipation as a military policy. As Manning stresses, Union troops’ feelings toward slavery were separate from their racial views. It did not follow that soldiers who came to support abolition also supported black rights. Yet, as Illinois soldiers labored, cooperated, and fought with former slaves, some became aware of the disjunction between their deep-seated prejudices and their actual experiences. Long-held ideologies were not hastily

discarded, but some members of Illinois’s fighting force emerged from the war aware of their
shared humanity with blacks and supportive of greater rights for them.\textsuperscript{36}

The process by which this unfolded was as varied as the individuals themselves, but one
theme that appeared repeatedly in the writings of Illinois Civil War soldiers was the desire for
slaves to be free. Though this seems obvious from today’s vantage point, it was not necessarily
apparent to antebellum whites. Slavery’s apologists built an ideological defense of the institution
on the claim that slaves were happy and content with their status. The thousands of slaves who
escaped to Union lines proved otherwise. Illinois soldiers recorded episode after episode of
slaves forging their own paths to freedom.

Twenty years after James McPherson asked who freed the slaves, debate continues over
how emancipation occurred and who was responsible for it.\textsuperscript{37} McPherson’s answer to his own
question—Abraham Lincoln—makes sense in a political and legal framework, as the president
put his influence and military authority behind emancipation. But the Emancipation
Proclamation would have been a non-starter without the slaves’ own aspirations and actions to be
free. Well before Lincoln announced emancipation as a war policy, slaves seized the opportunity
presented by the war to bring about their own freedom, compelling the federal government to
respond to the “contraband” issue. It was often the rank-and-file soldiers of the Union Army who
became the slaves’ first point of contact and their strongest allies in emancipation. Illinois

\textsuperscript{36} David A. Cecere has written about how the racial beliefs white Union soldiers left home with were both changed
or sustained during the war in “Carrying the Home Front to War: Soldiers, Race, and New England Culture during the
Civil War,” in Cimbala and Miller, \textit{Union Soldiers and the Northern Home Front}, 293-323.

\textsuperscript{37} James McPherson, “Who Freed the Slaves?,” \textit{Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society} 139 (March
the Slaves? Emancipation and Its Meaning in American Life,” in \textit{Union and Emancipation: Essays on Politics and
Race in the Civil War Era}, ed. David W. Blight and Brooks D. Simpson (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1997),
105-21.
soldiers watched as their camps and marching columns swelled with fleeing slaves. They were witnesses—and sometimes collaborators—in the drama of emancipation.

Illinois troops recorded their views on race and slavery in diaries, letters, and newspaper correspondence. These sources offer valuable insight into the diverse mentalities of those serving on the front lines. As abundant as this material is, the fragmentary nature of the surviving historical record makes the use of quantitative methods impractical. Therefore, it is all too easy to find proof of practically any viewpoint and pass it off as representative of all soldiers. Yet generalizations are necessary to give the past meaning.38

This dissertation aims to avoid the pitfalls of generalizing by presenting the complexities of Illinois soldiers’ racial attitudes. There was no single, shared reaction to emancipation. The incidences that prompted soldiers to reflect on their racial views were varied and personal. Nonetheless, these individualized experiences and anecdotes can become meaningful historical data by paying attention to shifts over time. When considered collectively, the instances when soldiers commented on their own or others’ changing views offer valuable indications of emerging patterns. Placing these patterns into a wider military or political context reduces the risk of mistaking impressionistic observations for developing trends. In order to convey the soldiers’ thoughts in their own words, quoted material throughout this work appears as close to the original as possible, including punctuation, spelling, capitalization, and emphasis. Occasionally, bracketed material has been added to facilitate readability and sic inserted to avoid confusion.

The Illinois soldiers who survived the crucible of war returned home to a state in transition. The white republic Illinoians had cultivated since statehood had begun to crumble in

38 Jason Phillips discusses the methodological hazards historians face when using Civil War soldiers’ writings and how to avoid them in “Battling Stereotypes: A Taxonomy of Common Soldiers in Civil War History,” History Compass 6, no. 6 (November 2008): 1407-25.
the wake of emancipation. The legislature’s repeal of the 1853 exclusion law decriminalized black immigration at the moment that the country gained four million free blacks. Thousands of former slaves who left the South settled in Illinois, helping to increase the black population by 277 percent during the 1860s.\textsuperscript{39} No longer barred from testifying against whites, Illinois blacks gained greater protection under the law. Constitutional amendments securing citizenship and voting rights further eroded barriers to civic and political participation. Although the hopes of securing meaningful and lasting racial equality faded by the end of Reconstruction, this failure does not invalidate the actual progress that was made. As one historian succinctly states, “victories need not be complete to be consequential.”\textsuperscript{40}

To fully appreciate the consequences of emancipation in Illinois, it is first necessary to consider the origins and significance of the state’s black laws. Chapter 1 examines the enactment of Illinois’s harshest black law, the 1853 exclusion act. Banning black immigration was the culmination of years of progressively severe legislation aimed at keeping blacks out of the state. The proposal for outright exclusion surfaced at the constitutional convention of 1847, igniting days of heated debate that exposed the geographical and ideological rifts in the state. The delegates finally reached a compromise by allowing the electorate to vote on the measure separately from the revised constitution. Illinois voters gave their overwhelming support to racial exclusion. The resulting law not only criminalized black immigration but also mandated that offenders who could not pay their fine were to be sold at a public auction. Although it was


\textsuperscript{40} Kantrowitz, \textit{More Than Freedom}, 163.
unevenly enforced, the exclusion law demonstrated how slavery shaped law in a free state and the extent to which Illinoisans desired to make their state a space of and for whites only.

As shown in chapter 2, this anti-black sentiment dominated Illinois politics up to the Civil War. During the election season of 1860, Democrats and Republicans sparred on a number of issues but found common ground on their commitment to white supremacy. Both parties campaigned on their fidelity to white interests over black rights. This message was especially crucial for Illinois Republicans, who believed they needed to counteract their abolitionist associations by stressing the benefits of containing slavery for white labor. Republicans stayed true to their campaign pledges once elected to office. The 1861 general assembly, controlled by Republicans for the first time, rejected any efforts to eliminate or revise the state’s black laws.

Chapter 3 moves from the legislative chambers in Springfield to the South as Illinois troops marched to war. For many enlisted men, this was their first direct encounter with slaves and the “peculiar institution.” Criticizing the poverty of the land and the people, they found little to recommend of slave society. The brutality endemic in the master-slave relationship disturbed numerous soldiers, who wrote letters home describing the violence they observed. They did not remain passive observers for long. Slaves, seizing the opportunity to secure their freedom, fled to Union lines. Many Illinois soldiers welcomed the military intelligence and physical labor contrabands provided. Occasionally, soldiers developed relationships and empathy with escaped slaves. Although they did not enlist to end slavery, a small but growing number of Illinois troops recognized early in the war that a lasting peace could only be secured by wiping it out completely. Back home, Republicans were slower to embrace abolition, but they moved in that direction by endorsing confiscation as a war measure.
As the war drug into a second year, antagonisms deepened on the home front. Chapter 4 examines the politicization of the war in 1862 as each party jockeyed for position as the perceived guardian of the nation. The year opened with another constitutional convention, which devolved into a political witch-hunt by the Democratic majority. Voters rejected the proposed constitution, but they did reaffirm their support for black exclusion. Unsurprisingly, when the War Department established a contraband camp at the southern tip of Illinois and relocated its occupants throughout the state, the public outcry was immediate and severe. During this time, President Lincoln announced plans for the Emancipation Proclamation, transforming the purpose and scope of the war. Discouraged by military setbacks and fearful of being overrun by freed slaves, Illinoisans made their displeasure felt in the fall of 1862 by sweeping Republicans out of office.

While some Illinois troops balked at the government’s handling of the war, others had already come to terms with waging a war against slavery. Chapter 5 focuses on the soldiers’ perspective of the evolving nature of the war. By 1863 many backed immediate emancipation and proclaimed themselves abolitionists. Although a humanitarian issue for some, most primarily regarded the Emancipation Proclamation as sound military policy. The question of what would become of freed slaves in the reunited country remained unanswered, and Illinois troops questioned the desirability of a racially diverse nation. However, the performance of black troops eroded long-held prejudices as white troops developed respect for and solidarity with their fellow comrades in arms.

Views on slavery and race were also evolving back in Illinois, as detailed in chapter 6. Democrats, emboldened after their recent electoral victory, turned the 1863 legislative session into a referendum on the war. Critical of the government’s handling of it, they proposed an
immediate armistice in hopes of achieving a negotiated peace. To many civilians and soldiers, this was nothing short of treason. Republicans distanced themselves from the Democrats’ anti-war and anti-black rhetoric by championing the expanding role of blacks in the Union effort. The election of 1864 pitted two different visions of America against each other. Whereas Democrats hoped to restore the country, Republicans saw the need to remake it without the corrosive influence of slavery. This meant recognizing the natural rights and basic civil liberties of the four million blacks who would soon become members of free society. It also meant guaranteeing these rights for blacks in Illinois. After winning back the state house, Illinois Republicans ratified the Thirteenth Amendment, becoming the first state to do so. They also did what their party refused to do four years earlier and repealed the state’s most repressive black laws. The consequences of emancipation were just beginning to be felt, and the struggle for equality would be a long, hard-fought battle. But Illinois in 1865 was a different place than it was just five years earlier, for blacks and whites alike.
Chapter 1:

“We Can Legislate on Them as We Please”:
Racial Borders in Illinois, 1847-1853

One hundred and sixty-two delegates gathered in Springfield, Illinois, during the summer months of 1847 to draft a new state constitution. Tasked with the arduous work of writing the governing document of the state, the delegates continually clashed over sectional and partisan issues. Long-winded speeches and ill-concealed enmity suffused the balmy interior of the state house as weeks dragged into months. Failure to achieve a quorum on multiple occasions testified to the weariness of the delegates. By the end of August, frustration and impatience was boiling over. A bemused reporter described an hour of the “utmost confusion” where most of the convention members were on their feet with “all kinds of missiles (harmless) flying from one end of the house to the other, everybody speaking, nobody listening, the PRESIDENT totally unable to be heard in his demands for order.”¹

Nonetheless, two days after this loss of decorum the delegates managed to complete their work by adopting a final version of a constitution to be submitted to the voters. The proposed constitution sought to rein in the power of the legislature by reducing the number and salary of representatives. It also gave the governor veto power and made supreme court justices elected positions. In a compromise measure over bank regulation, state banks were banned but the general assembly could endow corporations with banking powers, to be submitted to the electorate for approval. The proposed constitution was flawed by its myopic focus on remedying past wrongs rather than establishing a flexible legal framework to meet future needs. Still, Illinois voters saw it as an improvement over the original constitution and approved it by a large

margin (nearly four to one).\textsuperscript{2} In addition to the proposed constitution, voters were asked in a separate clause if the next general assembly should pass legislation to prohibit free blacks from immigrating to and settling in Illinois. Seventy percent responded in the affirmative, making Illinois the first free state to sanction the creation of a racialized border.\textsuperscript{3}

While extreme on its face, excluding persons of color from Illinois was the logical extension of a legal code that for decades had increasingly discouraged blacks from moving to the state and restricted the rights of those who did. Statutory law already controlled the movement of free blacks in the state and restricted their participation in civic life. The vast majority of white Illinoisans viewed free blacks as an unwelcome and threatening presence, despite the percentage of blacks in Illinois steadily declining during the antebellum era.\textsuperscript{4} Denied many of the privileges and responsibilities of citizenship, Illinois blacks occupied a liminal space that was neither truly free nor enslaved. Unlike foreign-born whites, they had no means of attaining full political rights or constitutional protections. By most legal and social norms, they were considered beyond the pale of membership in Illinois society. A report of the Illinois Senate Judiciary Committee in early 1847 declared, “this State cannot be regarded by them as their permanent haven” and warned that the time would soon come when “the African” would have to be removed from Illinois, “whether by peaceful means, or by violence.”\textsuperscript{5}

While such expulsion, forced or otherwise, never came to pass, a few months after this report was issued delegates at the constitutional convention began the work of limiting future


\textsuperscript{4} U.S. Bureau of the Census, \textit{Negro Population, 1790-1915}, prepared under the supervision of Sam L. Rogers, Director (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1918), 51. In 1810, blacks comprised 6.4 percent of Illinois’ population. This percentage decreased every decade before the war. In 1860, the black population of Illinois was 0.4 percent, the lowest in the state’s history.

\textsuperscript{5} \textit{Reports Made to the Senate and House of Representatives of the State of Illinois} (1846), 165-66.
black immigration. Over multiple days, members of the constitutional convention vociferously debated the merits of creating a racialized border to prevent further settlement of blacks in Illinois. Numerous slave states had laws against the entry of free blacks, but no free state had adopted a similar wholesale prohibition. In treading this new ground, the delegates inevitably confronted and reinforced the circumscribed and hierarchical meanings of freedom in a multiracial society.

This chapter examines the racial ideology underpinning the debates over black exclusion during the 1847 constitutional convention and the resulting 1853 law criminalizing black immigration. The convention debates are perhaps the single best window through which to understand how white Illinoisans understood racial privilege, social membership, and the ambiguous link between citizenship and its attendant rights in the years before the war. In affirming that blacks were irrevocably unfit for citizenship, the pro-exclusion delegates presaged the Dred Scott decision by ten years and formed the vanguard of what historian Mark Neely Jr. has called the “most important constitutional development” prior to the Civil War—“the growth of constitutional racism.”

The debate over black exclusion also exposed sectional fault lines in Illinois at a time when the nation was embroiled in the Mexican-American War. The country was polarized over the Wilmot Proviso, which would have kept slavery out of any land acquired from Mexico. However, the overwhelming support for black exclusion by Illinois voters demonstrated that racial antagonism existed comfortably alongside the growth of anti-slavery sentiment. When a black exclusion law was passed in 1853, many Illinoisans were outraged by it because it

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introduced a quasi-form of slavery into the state by selling black offenders at public auctions. Yet they continued to support the principle behind the law, which was that free blacks were an unassimilable and undesirable population.

Taken together, the convention debates regarding black exclusion and the subsequent enacting legislation illustrated the racial boundaries of membership in Illinois society. The 1853 exclusion law represented the desire for whites to create a “free white republic” both locally and nationally. As a form of immigration control, it treated blacks as a foreign presence. Whether whites believed free blacks to be immoral, lazy, indigent, or naturally unsuited to the climate, they shared an underlying assumption that free blacks were incapable of exercising the privileges and obligations of citizenship and were an unwelcome presence in white Illinois society.

**The Constitutional Convention of 1847**

On April 15, 1847, four days prior to the election of delegates to the Illinois constitution convention, George Bunsen announced his candidacy in the *Belleville Advocate*. A native of Germany, Bunsen explained that he left his home country to escape oppression and came to the United States in pursuit of freedom, which he defined as “the very same right with every other man to look for prosperity and enjoy it under the protection of the law while ruled by it.” In the free state of Illinois, Bunsen continued, “every and each citizen ought to be favored with the very same rights, while they equally bear the burdens of the government.” Elected by a healthy margin as one of the four representatives from southwestern St. Clair County, Bunsen

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9 *Belleville Advocate*, April 15, 1847.
demonstrated that for him freedom, citizenship, and “every other man” had limits when he voted in favor of black exclusion three months later.\textsuperscript{10}

As Bunsen and his 161 fellow delegates made their way to Springfield in early June to begin the work of rewriting the constitution, they most likely did not anticipate undertaking measures to ban black immigration, if only because specific legislation fell more within the purview of the legislature than the organic law of the state. Instead, the delegates were concerned with revamping a constitution that was nearly thirty years old and created at a time when the state’s population was well under a tenth of its present size.\textsuperscript{11} The call for a constitutional convention generally met with bipartisan support as a means to rein in the power of the legislature, whose zeal for internal improvement projects had left the state with a $13.5 million debt by 1841.\textsuperscript{12} While some newspapers held out hope that the delegates would rise above party interests,\textsuperscript{13} an impending clash over bank regulation and alien voting rights all but guaranteed that partisan rancor would enter the fray.\textsuperscript{14}

Democratic delegates outnumbered Whigs by 91-71, although during the course of the convention Whigs would prove to be more united than their opponents. The convention members had been born in twenty different states (slave and free states were nearly equally represented) as well as three foreign countries (Ireland, Germany, and Scotland). Only seven delegates claimed Illinois as their birthplace, exemplifying the country’s westward movement and Illinois’s

\textsuperscript{10} Pease, \textit{Illinois Election Returns}, 460.
\textsuperscript{13} For example, see the \textit{Alton Telegraph & Democratic Review}, April 9, 1847, the \textit{Sangamo Journal}, May 13, 1847, and the \textit{Rockford Forum}, March 3, 1847.
\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Sangamo Journal}, April 15, 1847.
migratory population. Once the convention proceedings began on June 7, it was soon apparent to many participants and observers that the delegates would not be returning home in short order. Making headway with a body of 162 members was a cumbersome and onerous task. One newspaper correspondent drolly commented that many delegates were stricken with “speech making mania” and it was “spreading to an alarming extent through the whole body.” This trend became even more widespread once racial politics entered into the proceedings.

The topic of race was first broached in the opening week of the convention on June 11. At this early stage in the proceedings, delegates were focused on amending procedural rules and offering up sundry resolutions. The convention reporter for the Sangamo Journal, Springfield’s Whig paper, declined to cover that morning’s activities, believing “the details would not interest the reader.” Yet a resolution proposed by James Campbell, a native Kentuckian and Democratic representative from west-central McDonough County, portended the struggle over black rights that would consume the convention in two weeks’ time. It was sandwiched between an amendment to make the assistant secretary of the convention the official copyist and a resolution setting the minimum square mileage of future counties. Campbell’s resolution proposed that “no negro, mulatto, Indian, or other person of mixed blood of the one-eighth blood, should ever be permitted, or in anywise allowed to attain, use or acquire citizenship or residence in this state from and after the adoption of the constitution, which this convention is now called to frame.”

15 Cole, Constitutional Debates of 1847, xvi-xvii; Seventh Census of the United States (1850), 717. Sixty percent of Illinois’ population in 1850 was born outside of the state.
16 Alton Telegraph & Democratic Review, July 2, 1847.
17 Sangamo Journal, June 15, 1847.
Campbell’s one-sentence resolution embodied the numerous complexities of racial identity in antebellum America. His construction of citizenship as a status that was not only attained or acquired but also used indicated that being a citizen was not simply a legal designation but also entailed certain acts. Far different from the conception of citizenship that emerged following the Civil War, which recognized individuals as possessing formal and universal rights, citizenship in the antebellum era was an amorphous concept that was locally variable and loosely connected to rights, privileges, and obligations. In 1862, thus, Attorney General Edward Bates, tasked with defining who was a citizen, despaired that “eighty years of practical enjoyment of citizenship, under the Constitution, have not sufficed to teach us either the exact meaning of the word, or the constituent elements of the thing we prize so highly.”

Rather than understanding citizenship as a category that delineated certain rights, legal scholar William Novak argues that it operated before the war as “the last form of membership in a continuum of public jurisdictions and civil associations,” where one’s personal status, social relations, and membership (or exclusion) from local associations determined the boundaries of one’s rights. In other words, the intersection of one’s statuses (race, gender, property, office, age, servitude) largely determined rights and obligations. One’s perceived capability of becoming a citizen was dependent on the ability to responsibly maintain and exercise these privileges, thus creating a self-reinforcing system of exclusion. In 1790 the federal government restricted

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naturalization to “free white persons” but the boundaries of citizenship and its attendant privileges were largely left to states to determine for themselves.\textsuperscript{21}

This understanding of how citizenship operated during the antebellum era helps clarify why Campbell wanted to prohibit persons of color from the “use” of citizenship. In mid-nineteenth century America, a common law construction of citizenship placed greater weight on public duties rather than private rights, where “the citizen thus became that of a kind of shareholder, obliged to support the collective effort to enhance the value of the general ‘stock’ in the industrialized society.”\textsuperscript{22} Citizenship was a mark of social acceptance and belonging. It was also grounded by race and gender. For white men, citizenship entailed public duties. As legal historian Ariela Gross has demonstrated, civic performances, such as sitting on juries, voting, owning and selling property, entering into contracts, bringing suits in court, and giving testimony, helped create and reinforce these categories. Such performances contributed to an informal understanding of citizenship that was about “membership in the polity…In the broad sense of participation in political and social life, only white people could become—and were seen as capable of becoming—citizens.”\textsuperscript{23} Preventing non-whites from securing citizenship, as Campbell’s resolution aimed to do, was less about policing citizenship as a formal category (which was indeterminate) than it was about delineating white privilege and ensuring that Illinois would be a state of, for, and by whites.

The substance of Campbell’s resolution was not without precedent. The first Illinois constitution had already created a racialized hierarchy of rights and statuses. It limited suffrage


to “white male inhabitants” over the age of twenty-one. Although white women could not vote, they were counted for the purposes of legislative apportionment while non-whites were not. The 1818 Constitution also specifically barred “negroes, mulattoes and Indians” from serving in the state militia. The First General Assembly passed a law prohibiting Indians, blacks, and mulattoes (defined as having “one fourth part or more of negro blood”) from testifying against whites in court, thereby severely compromising their ability to seek redress under the legal system. In later legislation, marriage and sexual relations between whites and blacks were criminalized, with penalties for transgressors including fines, jail time, and up to thirty-nine lashes. Since 1825, public schools were available to “every class of white citizens,” thereby barring most black children from an education. Moreover, discriminatory practices precluded many Illinois blacks from obtaining public land and gainful employment in the manner that whites could and did. These legal restrictions and a host of informal exclusions explain why in 1850 approximately 46 percent of black family heads were unemployed and 86 percent lacked any real property. In many ways, Campbell’s resolution merely reinforced the legal, social, and economic disabilities that served to illustrate how white Illinoisans saw blacks not simply as inferior but as threats to their civic and democratic ideals.

24 Illinois Constitution (1818), art. 2, sec. 27.

25 “The number of senators and representatives shall, at the first session of the general assembly, holden after the returns herein provided for are made, be fixed by the general assembly, and apportioned among the several counties or districts to be established by law, according to the number of white inhabitants.” Illinois Constitution (1818), art. 2, sec. 5.

26 Illinois Constitution (1818), art. 4, sec. 1.

27 Laws of the State of Illinois (1829), 111; Revised Statutes of the State of Illinois (1845), 391.

28 Revised Laws of Illinois (1833), 556; Robert L. McCaul, The Black Struggle for Public Schooling in Nineteenth-Century Illinois (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), 9-11; Harris, History of Negro Servitude, 228-33. There were a handful of colored and integrated schools in the state that black children could attend.

Yet in other ways his resolution went further than existing statutes in shoring up the boundaries of whiteness. In declaring those with as little as one-eighth black ancestry, as opposed to one-fourth, as non-white, Campbell hoped to make the privileges of whiteness even more exclusive. While the Sangamo Journal’s convention reporter overlooked the resolution, the paper’s editors did not. An editorial titled “Ultraism” acknowledged that Campbell’s resolution would apply only to Illinois. Yet it wondered how the “principles embraced in it” would apply to “our ‘fellow citizens’ in New Mexico—all of whom are mixed with Indian or negro blood beyond the line designated—one eighth.”30 The paper did not elaborate on why it pondered this question, but it speaks to the anxiety some felt over the Mexican-American War and the people who might be brought under the American flag as a consequence of it. The quotation marks around “fellow citizens” indicate an uncertainty (if not derision) over if and how they would be incorporated into the body politic, a situation the editors evidently found comparable to Campbell’s desire to demarcate and regulate racial categories in Illinois.

Campbell’s resolution also proposed a wholesale prohibition of non-white migration to Illinois, banning anyone having a great-grandparent with “mixed blood.” Racial exclusion was already a familiar practice in Illinois. Decades of violence, disease, and questionable land sales had taken their toll on the Native American population. The flood of white settlement in early nineteenth-century Illinois strained relations even further, culminating in the Black Hawk War of 1832. This forced the remaining organized tribes to cede their lands and relocate elsewhere. No reservations were subsequently created in Illinois, effectively ending 10,000 years of Native American presence.31 Historian Leslie Schwalm suggests that Midwesterners’ racial identity was

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30 Sangamo Journal, June 17, 1847.
shaped in part by the removal of Native Americans, as white supremacy was “premised on the right and ability” to exclude indigenous groups.\textsuperscript{32}

At the same time that white Illinoisans were pushing out undesirable inhabitants, they were also working to prevent free blacks from coming there. In 1813, the legislature of the Illinois Territory passed an act outlawing blacks and mulattoes from moving to Illinois. Those found guilty by a justice of the peace had fifteen days to leave the territory or else they would receive twenty-five to thirty-nine lashes on their backs.\textsuperscript{33} While this act did not survive past statehood, the first general assembly in 1819 created legislation that permitted only blacks possessing a certificate of freedom to legally move into the state. The certificate had to be signed and sealed by a judge or clerk and filed with the circuit court in the county of settlement. This created an onerous burden for a group that often did not have familiarity with or resources to navigate governmental bureaucracy. In a testament to how vulnerable the legal standing of Illinois blacks was, the law also stipulated that those found without a certificate of freedom “shall be deemed a runaway slave or servant” and their labor sold to the highest bidder for up to a year. Those who employed blacks without a certificate were subject to fines, thereby hindering the livelihood of blacks who were in Illinois illegally.\textsuperscript{34} A later statute required blacks entering the state to give a $1,000 bond in order to reside in the state.\textsuperscript{35} Legislators were also concerned with slave owners from bordering states emancipating their infirm or aged slaves in Illinois and therefore established stringent penalties for those who did.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{32} Leslie Schwalm, “‘Overrun with Free Negroes’: Emancipation and Wartime Migration in the Upper Midwest,” \textit{Civil War History} 50, no. 2 (June 2004): 148.


\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Laws of the State of Illinois} (1819), 354-56.

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Laws of the State of Illinois} (1829), 109.

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Laws of the State of Illinois} (1819), 354-55; \textit{Laws of the State of Illinois} (1831), 101.
Campbell’s resolution proposed to reform Illinois law by superseding these various legal obstacles to black immigration with an outright ban on it. While many of the delegates would soon show their support for this measure, their reluctance to wade into this morass, especially at this early juncture in the proceedings, may have contributed to the resolution being laid on the table until the first of December (at which time the convention would be long over).\textsuperscript{37}

It is impossible to say if the issue of black exclusion would have died there if it had not been for external agitation to repeal some if not all of Illinois’s black laws. The arrival of petitions beseeching the delegates to adopt a universal notion of natural rights undoubtedly inflamed passions among the delegates. The first of these petitions arrived on June 17, near the end of the second week of the convention. Humphrey Jones, delegate from Perry County in southwestern Illinois, presented a petition signed by fifty-eight white residents of his county. Believing that the “Declaration of Independence embracing \textit{sic} Human Rights constitute[s] the only solid basis for a permanent form of representative government,” the petition asked the delegates to “extend those principles and grant protection and security ‘irrespective of color’ which government owes its humblest subjects.” It desired the convention members “not to value us on account of the texture of our skins” and closed by invoking the American Revolution and the “great idea” that “Taxation & Representation should go together.”\textsuperscript{38}

Jones stated that many of the petitioners were Covenanters, a sect of Reformed Presbyterianism that had a strong presence in southwestern Illinois and a history of staunch

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Journal of the Convention} (1847), 31. Here, Robert Cross is named as introducing the motion to lay Campbell’s resolution on the table until December, whereas the \textit{Illinois State Register} (June 18, 1847) reported that William Thomas introduced it. Both Cross and Thomas voted against the black exclusion measure.

\textsuperscript{38} Secretary of State, “Constitutional Convention of 1847 Papers,” July 19-20 folder, Record Series 103.018, Illinois State Archives.
opposition to slavery.\textsuperscript{39} In appealing to the delegates to interpret the Declaration of Independence without respect to color, they advocated the principle of natural or absolute rights. The self-evident truths of life, liberty, and happiness constituted a “limited absolute equality” that all men inherently possessed. In the late 1820s, the respected chancellor James Kent described natural rights as including “the right of personal security, the right of personal liberty, and the right to acquire and enjoy property.”\textsuperscript{40} In antebellum America, these rights were distinguished from civic and political rights, which were deemed privileges granted by the state. Illinois’s constitution recognized the philosophy of limited absolute equality in the first section of its Bill of Rights, which stated, “all men are born equally free and independent, and have certain inherent and indefeasible rights; among which are those of enjoying and defending life and liberty, and of acquiring, possessing and protecting property and reputation, and of pursuing their own happiness.”\textsuperscript{41} However, the state’s discriminatory laws excluded blacks from the full protection of the law, making their liberty and property, not to mention happiness, insecure. The Perry County petitioners sought to incorporate blacks into the sphere of natural rights without specifying the statutory changes that would be required to do so. The idea that individuals should not be valued by their skin color was a radical notion, though it is difficult to determine how far beyond natural rights the petitioners desired to go. The final line of the petition about taxation and representation suggests the petitioners may have had far-reaching goals in the terms of black political rights. Yet, in referring to themselves as “citizens” and those they aimed to elevate as “subjects,” the petitioners underscored the differential statuses of those living in Illinois.


\textsuperscript{41} Illinois Constitution (1818), art. 8, sec. 1.
Immediately after presenting this petition, Jones made it clear that he was “opposed to the principal object sought to be affected by this petition.” Nonetheless, he argued, it was the duty of the convention to receive the petition of this “highly respectable portion of our fellow-citizens.”

Not all of the delegates agreed, and a debate over the merits of tabling the petition ensued. Stephen Logan, Abraham Lincoln’s former law partner, pointed out that declining to consider the petition would only serve to strengthen abolitionism in the state. Those who favored accepting the petition were careful to point out that they were not abolitionists but that they respected the right to petition. One delegate expressed his dislike of gag laws, referring to the recently ended practice in the U.S. House of Representatives of refusing to read or receive antislavery petitions. When it came time to vote, the delegates held up the right to petition by 100-48 and the Perry County petition was referred to committee.

Four days later, Richard Servant presented a similar petition from a group of his county’s constituents, this one with 156 names. Servant was a delegate from Randolph County, which borders Perry County to the west. The wording of Servant’s petition regarding the Declaration of Independence and human rights was identical to the one Jones presented, implying both derived from a common source (the Reformed Presbyterian Church also had a large presence in Randolph County). Like Jones, Servant testified to the respectable nature of the petitioners and the inviolability of the right of petition. This time, the petition was referred to committee without deliberation. A correspondent of the Alton Telegraph and Democratic Review praised the

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42 Cole, Constitutional Debates of 1847, 105. Of the fifty-eight petitioners, forty-eight can be identified in the 1850 Perry County Census. Of those, all were white males and all but four were farmers. The majority came from South Carolina and Ireland, reflecting the role of social networks in migration patterns. See Combined History of Randolph, Monroe, and Perry Counties, Illinois (Philadelphia: J. L. McDonough, 1883), 243.

43 Cole, Constitutional Debates of 1847, 105-6.

44 Secretary of State, “Constitutional Convention of 1847 Papers,” July 19-20 folder, Record Series 103.018, Illinois State Archives. Servant’s petition did not mention taxation and representation, nor did it criticize the wages of public servants, as did Jones’s petition.
convention for preserving the sacrosanct right of petition “on a subject as little likely to find favor as any that could be submitted to the consideration of the Convention.” The different characterizations of these petitions in the press exemplify the partisan slant of convention coverage. The Democratic Illinois State Register overstated that the petition aimed to extend “all rights to every class without distinction of color” whereas the convention reporter for the Whig Sangamo Journal reported that it desired a more moderate goal of granting “security and protection independent of color.”

The following day, June 22, James Knox introduced a resolution to restrict voting rights to white male citizens. The framers of the first state constitution had granted suffrage to all adult white males who had been in the state for at least six months in order to include French and other non-naturalized inhabitants in the franchise. However, the legality of alien voting had become hotly contested as foreign immigration to Illinois skyrocketed during the 1830s. Many of these newcomers came from Ireland to work on the canal and overwhelmingly voted Democratic. Illinois Whigs saw an opportunity to shore up their lackluster standing in the state and in 1839 initiated a court battle to restrict voting to U.S. citizens. The case made its way to the state supreme court and in a judgment that satisfied no one, the court evaded ruling on the constitutionality of alien voting. Democratic legislators retaliated by pushing through a bill in 1841 to increase the number of supreme court justices from four to nine, to be appointed by the

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45 Alton Telegraph and Democratic Review, July 2, 1847.
46 Illinois State Register, June 25, 1847; Sangamo Journal, July 1, 1847.
Democratically controlled legislature, and by passing a law unequivocally granting the right of suffrage to un-naturalized residents.\textsuperscript{48}

The “alien case” and stacking of the state supreme court far from settled the issue, however. Thus when Knox introduced his resolution barring non-citizens from the franchise, it only reignited a battle that many had anticipated leading up to the convention.\textsuperscript{49} But perhaps no one expected the amendment offered by Daniel Whitney, a delegate of far northern Boone County. Whitney, an early settler of Boone County (then still part of Winnebago County), was born in New York and moved to Illinois in the mid-1830s. A physician by trade, he was known locally as “the poor man’s friend” because he never turned away patients if they could not pay.\textsuperscript{50}

In his role as a delegate, Whitney proposed to strike the word “white” out of Knox’s resolution, thereby extending suffrage to all male citizens regardless of race. His amendment was defeated by a decisive vote of 137-8.\textsuperscript{51} Interestingly, in the coming days and weeks, the delegates would deny that blacks were citizens, which would theoretically render Whitney’s amendment meaningless. In any case, perhaps the surprising aspect of the vote was not how lopsided it was but that eight delegates endorsed, on record, black male suffrage. All eight were Whigs who were born in northeastern states and represented far northern Illinois counties.\textsuperscript{52}

This vote hinted at the geographical and ideological cleavages that had been deepening in Illinois over the past couple of decades. Illinois’s borders, which span almost four hundred miles


\textsuperscript{49}For example, see the \textit{Belleville Advocate}, April 15, 1847, and the \textit{Sangamo Journal} April 1, 1847.

\textsuperscript{50} \textit{The Past and Present of Boone County, Illinois} (Chicago: H. F. Kett, 1877), 333.

\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Journal of the Convention} (1847), 76.

\textsuperscript{52}Two of the eight delegates were born in Massachusetts, which permitted black suffrage; four were born in New York, which permitted black suffrage with a property qualification; and two were born in Connecticut, which allowed black landholders to vote until 1814. Collectively, these eight delegates represented Boone, Kane, Kendall, Lake, McHenry, and Winnebago counties.
along the north-south axis, helped to create diverse settlement populations within the state. Following natural waterways and overland trails, many of the earliest white Americans who settled in Illinois traveled westward from the Upland South to the American Bottom of the Mississippi River and its hinterland. They established a society of yeoman farmers with a southern backcountry culture that imprinted itself on the land through its settlement clusters along rivers in the forested southern portion of the state.\textsuperscript{53}

Some of these early white American migrants settled in Illinois with their slaves, hoping to transform Illinois into a slave society, while others came to escape the social, political, and economic stratification among whites that the institution engendered. Slavery had already existed on the Illinois prairie for nearly a century before their arrival. French colonizers brought the first black slaves to the rich soil of the American Bottom early in the eighteenth century. By mid-century the 768 French living in Illinois claimed nearly six hundred slaves.\textsuperscript{54} Although the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 banned slavery, the first governor of the territory interpreted this as a prospective rather than a retrospective law, thus maintaining the bondage of those already there.\textsuperscript{55} Illinois’ first constitution also took this stance, stating that slavery shall not “hereafter be introduced into this state” (emphasis added). It also explicitly permitted slave labor in the salt works near Shawneetown until 1825.

Additionally, Illinois’ first constitution retained the territorial practice of black indentured servitude. On paper, servants voluntarily contracted their labor for a specified period of time. This, however, was a legal fiction designed to skirt the prohibition on slavery. In reality,

\textsuperscript{53} Meyer, \textit{Making the Heartland Quilt}, 165-68.


\textsuperscript{55} Middleton, \textit{Black Laws in the Old Northwest}, xxvi.
the system was one of coercion and possession. Like chattel slaves, black servants could be bought and sold, and their status was heritable. The first general assembly passed an elaborate twenty-four-section statute, modeled on southern slave codes, to regulate the activities of bound laborers. For example, it forbade servants from traveling more than ten miles from their master’s home without a pass and prescribed whipping as a punishment in cases where “free persons are punishable by fines.” In all cases, the law viewed blacks as slaves or servants until proven otherwise.

Slavery’s ambivalent legal standing in Illinois bred political strife during the early years of statehood. The Panic of 1819 hit farmers in the young state hard. Some fretted that Missouri’s entrance into the Union as a slave state would cause potential settlers to bypass Illinois, depriving the state of desired laborers, bound and free. Those opposed to bringing slavery into Illinois touted the superiority of free white labor and its egalitarian influences, contrasted to the aristocratic order of slave societies. Countering the pro-slavery contingent, they argued that turning Illinois into a slave state would repulse the independent and hard-working settlers that the state needed to prosper. The handful of abolitionists in Illinois at that time, such as English-born Morris Birkbeck, also relied on economic arguments against slavery, recognizing their efficacy over moral suasion. Both sides warned against the increase of free blacks if their opponents were victorious. The anti-slavery group feared slave owners would manumit their slaves, creating a pool of infirm and impoverished dependents, while the pro-slavery crowd


57 Illinois Constitution (1818), art. 6, sec. 1-3; Laws of the State of Illinois (1819), 354-61.

suggested that fugitive slaves would seek sanctuary in Illinois as long it remained a free state.

The slavery issue came to a head in 1823-24 with a call for a constitutional convention to formally legalize slavery in Illinois (despite the uncertain legality of overriding the Northwest Ordinance). Following a fervent and occasionally violent campaign by pro- and anti-conventionists, voters rejected the referendum by 57 percent, effectively ending the slavery movement in Illinois.\(^5^9\) While the majority of Illinoisans resisted the extension of slavery into their state, they had no qualms about it existing elsewhere. This put them increasingly at odds with their new neighbors to the north.

Steam power and canals propelled stream of migrants to the northern reaches of Illinois starting in the 1830s. Coming from New England, the Mid-Atlantic states, and overseas (particularly Germany and Ireland), these newcomers introduced new economic and cultural norms in Illinois. Chicago rapidly grew into a manufacturing, financial, and transportation hub, its population mushrooming from 4,470 in 1840 to 109,260 in 1860.\(^6^0\) Eastern migrants brought a religiously inspired zeal for moral reform, including temperance, education, and abolitionism, as well as a mission to “civilize” the unbridled western lands.\(^6^1\) While most Yankees were not abolitionists or proponents of racial equality, they nevertheless tended to view slavery negatively, as a backward institution that stunted the South economically and sullied republican principles.\(^6^2\)

Northeastern transplants to Illinois had come from states where free blacks enjoyed varying


\(^6^0\) Meyer, *Making the Heartland Quilt*, 133-34.


degrees of civic and political rights and tended to interpret the Declaration of Independence broadly. While the cultural differences between northern and southern Illinoisans did not preclude the development of a distinct midwestern identity, the battle over slavery would expose the sectional rifts running across the state.\textsuperscript{63} If the vote on Knox’s amendment for black suffrage intimated the existence of this rupture, the debate over black exclusion, which was reignited at the convention near the end of June, revealed how deeply it ran.

The convention proceedings on June 24\textsuperscript{th} opened with mundane bickering over the procurement of ice for the delegates’ use. One member threatened to quit if he had to sweat out the remainder of the convention without being provided with lumps of ice.\textsuperscript{64} The afternoon session began with a series of resolutions pertaining to procedural matters and instructions to various committees. Then Benjamin Bond, a Whig lawyer representing Clinton County and son of Illinois’s first governor, introduced a resolution that would absorb the convention for the rest of that day and the next two. Bond’s resolution proposed that the Committee on Rights draft a clause “prohibiting free negroes from hereafter emigrating to, and settling within the bounds of this State.” It also strove to prohibit slaveholders from manumitting their slaves in Illinois with the enactment of penalties severe enough to prevent such action.\textsuperscript{65}

Bond followed up his resolution with a justification for why he was bringing forth this “test question” at the present time. His explanation established the framework for the ensuing debates over black rights, ascriptive racial inequality, the future of slavery, and who could lay claim to membership in Illinois and the nation. Bond began by telling the chamber that his motivation was to protect Illinoisans from free blacks who were a “great annoyance to the good

\textsuperscript{63} Etcheson, \textit{Emerging Midwest}, 94-102.
\textsuperscript{64} Cole, \textit{Constitutional Debates of 1847}, 190.
\textsuperscript{65} Sangamo Journal, July 1, 1847.
citizens of the State.” He distinguished between those who had a legitimate claim to be in Illinois (“citizens”) and those who existed at their sufferance (free blacks). Bond thus immediately established the premise that only whites could be considered citizens of the state. As for free blacks being an annoyance, Bond conceded that a few “honorable exceptions” existed but overall insisted that they were “idle and vicious.” Somehow, they simultaneously drove out free white laborers while being “too lazy and important to work themselves.” Moreover, in places where they formed neighborhoods, they encouraged and aided runaway slaves. Altogether, they “are not such a class of population as is desirable for the State of Illinois.”

Bond went on to explain that his policy was not born out of malice for blacks but would in fact be beneficial for them. By preventing Illinois from becoming a repository for old and infirm slaves, the cordon between free and slave states would be tightened; slavery itself would be put on the path of gradual extinction if quarantined within a fixed geography. While Bond believed blacks shared the same divinely inspired passion to be free as did whites, that freedom would never be realized in the United States. Unless blacks were granted “all the privileges of freemen in this republic,” their position would never improve. Unfortunately, Bond argued, “nature has drawn a line between them and ourselves,” which prevented blacks from being able to enjoy the privileges of free citizens. Slaves were much better off under the guidance of a concerned master than were blacks who were legally free but unable to care for themselves. The best scenario for all involved was to colonize blacks “to some other country, under the guidance of a benevolent institution.” Therefore, Bond’s black exclusion resolution had both a short-term goal of limiting Illinois’s black population and a long-term goal of eradicating slavery and

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66 Sangamo Journal, July 1, 8, 1847.
removing blacks from the country. The resulting population in America would be racially homogenous, where all shared equally in the protections and immunities of citizenship.\textsuperscript{67}

Shortly after the introduction of Bond’s resolution, Augustus Adams of northern Kane County moved to amend it by gutting the entire text and replacing it with a resolution that would prevent the legislature from passing any laws that would oppress persons of color. His resolution was laid on the table by a vote of 92-46,\textsuperscript{68} thereby allowing debate on Bond’s resolution to continue over the next three days. Sectional as opposed to partisan rifts materialized during this debate, while a third group from Central Illinois anxiously tried to shut down the discussion and avoid the topic altogether.

The small group of delegates who spoke out against Bond’s resolution was comprised mostly of liberal northerners who based their arguments largely on humanitarian grounds and the belief in universal natural rights. Selden Church of far northern Winnebago County, one of eight delegates who had voted in favor of Whitney’s resolution for universal male suffrage, rejected black exclusion as “behind the spirit of the age,” a violation of the “dictates of humanity,” and an infringement of the rights enshrined in the Declaration of Independence. Jesse Norton, representing northeastern Iroquois and Will counties, stated that he would not encourage blacks to move to Illinois or countenance anything approaching social or political equality. Nonetheless, he was opposed to prohibiting all blacks from attaining “footing on our soil” just because “some men of color are worthless and lazy.” Similarly, Archibald Williams of Adams and Highland counties in west central Illinois did not prefer to live among such a degraded race, but he would not deny them the “poor privilege of living on our soil.” Doing so, he maintained, would be better suited for the fourteenth, not the nineteenth, century. Williams embraced the

\textsuperscript{67} Sangamo Journal, July 1, 8, 1847.

\textsuperscript{68} Journal of the Convention (1847), 92-93.
environmental theory of racial difference, claiming that if even the heroes of Buena Vista and Cerro Gordo—two U.S. victories in the ongoing Mexican-American War—were enslaved in a foreign country, deprived of education and ennobling principles, their offspring would soon be as wretched as America’s slaves. Daniel Pickney of northern Ogle County renounced abolitionism as strongly as he supported colonization. Yet he could not help but feel that some of Illinois’s black laws were a “disgrace to any people claiming to be free, enlightened, and humane.” Slave owners, not their slaves, should be punished for freeing their slaves in Illinois. Moreover, Pickney reasoned, if the fear was the growth of an indigent population, why not apply it equally to the 20,000 paupers who crossed the Atlantic and would find their way to Illinois that year? Should not Illinois protect itself against “the rascality of red or green men, as well as black”?69

Opponents of the exclusion measure also attacked it as unconstitutional. Stephen Hurlbut of Boone and Winnebago counties, which border Wisconsin, maintained that some states recognized blacks as possessing the rights of citizenship and were therefore protected by the Constitution. How, he wondered, could Illinois create a law to contravene their liberties? Norton elaborated on this point by reading Article IV, section 2 of the Constitution: “The Citizens of each State shall be entitled to all Privileges and Immunities of Citizens in the several States.” Norton pointed out that the Constitution did not specify that these rights belonged only to white citizens. While Congress controlled the naturalization of foreigners (and limited it to whites in 1790), Norton contended that the Constitution intended for all native-born individuals to be citizens. If this constitutional guarantee was infringed, “where is our safety? Strike out and annul its provision in regards to one class, and where will you stop?”70

69 Sangamo Journal, July 1, 1847.
70 Sangamo Journal, July 1, 1847.
Norton reminded the convention about the difficulties Missouri faced in achieving statehood in 1820 due to its constitutional provision directing the legislature to exclude free blacks from coming into the state. That provision had stalled Missouri’s entrance into the Union as Congress debated whether or not free blacks were citizens. These debates exposed the sectional cleavages developing in the nation as many northern Federalists argued in favor of black citizenship and southern congressmen rejected it. This was, at that time, the most intense scrutiny at the federal level about the meaning of citizenship, who was eligible for it, and the ways in which rights were connected to that status. No consensus was reached, and Congress ended up dodging the issue altogether by granting Missouri statehood on the grounds that its black exclusion clause would not be construed so as to violate the privileges and immunities of American citizens, though who was a citizen remained unclear.\(^1\) When Missouri passed a black exclusion law in 1825, no congressional objections were raised.\(^2\) Norton also saw the issue of black rights in Illinois connected to the Mexican-American War. Anticipating the acquisition of Mexican states, Norton understood that “citizens of every hue, black, white, and yellow,” would soon be “knocking for admission into the Union…If they come into the Union, at all, they must come in with full and equal rights.” Freedom, he argued, must be accompanied by the “just and essential rights of freemen.” Norton closed his speech by predicting that the “whole north” of Illinois would rise against the exclusion clause and reject the proposed constitution.\(^3\)

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\(^2\) *Laws of the State of Missouri* (1825), 600-01. The 1825 Missouri exclusion law exempted blacks who could “produce a certificate, attested by the seal of some court of record in some one of the United States, evidencing that he is citizen of such state.”

\(^3\) *Sangamo Journal*, July 1, 1847.
Supporters of Bond’s resolution mounted a tenacious rebuttal to these objections of black exclusion. In doing so, sectional tensions were not merely hinted at but were made manifest. After a day of listening to criticisms of his proposal from northerners, Bond mockingly wondered how “wisdom stands confounded by the new-lights from the North. Once upon a time, wise men came from the East; but the scepter has departed from Judea—the order of things is changed.”

William Kinney of St. Clair County, located east of the Mississippi River across from St. Louis, accused those in the northern part of the state of being unaware of how “great a pest to society” free blacks were in southern Illinois due to its proximity to slave states. Edward West of Madison County, which sits directly north of St. Clair County, agreed, pointing out that northern counties might have five or fifteen black residents, whereas 500 lived in his county, thus “the evil was 500 times greater.” The 1845 Illinois census confirmed the demographic unevenness of black settlement in Illinois. Of the 4,905 blacks counted in the census, including indentured servants and slaves of French colonizers, the five counties with the largest number were in southern Illinois. There were 662 blacks living in Gallatin County, bordering Kentucky and Indiana in southeast Illinois, while only 146 lived in Cook County. James Singleton of Brown County in west central Illinois took offense at the suggestion that northern voters could potentially sink the constitution because of this issue: “Has Illinois no other point but the north? Is there no South, no East, no West in the State?” Let the northern section of the state have its

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74 Sangamo Journal, July 8, 1847.
75 Cole, Constitutional Debates of 1847, 218.
76 The five counties were Gallatin (662), Randolph (318), Madison (443), St. Clair (431), and Lawrence (275).
77 “State Census, 1845,” Reports Made to the Senate and House of Representatives of the State of Illinois (1846), 70-71.
“mixed society of free blacks and white population, with equal privilege.” Draw a line around it, Singleton proposed, so he and his constituents could “seek repose on its southern side.”78

Proponents of black exclusion also attacked the idea that the measure was unconstitutional and that blacks possessed citizenship or any of its attendant rights. If this were the case, Kinney pointed out, then Illinois would have to allow blacks moving to the state from New York to vote because they had (limited) voting rights there. This was a perversion of the privileges and immunities clause, which, Kinney argued, was designed to ensure all (male) citizens within a given state shared equal privileges.79 Singleton agreed, calling Hurlbut’s construction of the clause “too absurd to excite the least alarm.” Bond disputed Norton’s argument that the U.S. Constitution sanctioned black citizenship because it did not explicitly forbid it. In any case, Bond reasoned, Congress, through its constitutionally designated powers, did unambiguously limit naturalization to whites.80

More fundamentally, Bond and his allies maintained that the reason blacks lacked rights was because they were mentally and morally incapable of exercising the obligations of citizenship responsibly. Whites “can never make freedom a blessing to the black race,” Bond stated, “until the right of suffrage and that of office holding, with every other civil and social privilege, is extended to them; and I doubt whether then, unless you change the color of the skin.”81 Race and sex, not legal status, were the main determinants of one’s ability to participate in Illinois’s civic and political life. In Illinois, citizenship was not required for the right of suffrage, service in the militia, giving testimony in court, attending schools and academies,

78 Sangamo Journal, July 8, 1847.
79 Sangamo Journal, July 1, 1847.
80 Sangamo Journal, July 1, 1847.
81 Sangamo Journal, July 8, 1847.
incorporating towns, and acquiring and transferring property. James Brockman, delegate from Brown and Schuyler counties in west central Illinois, preferred for Illinois to become a slave state rather than live among free blacks because the “line of demarcation between the races was so obvious…they could have no rights in common with the citizens of the State.”  

James Davis of south-central Montgomery County concurred, believing it “vain” to attempt to destroy the barrier between the races. He hoped that “the tongue which now speaks may cleave to the roof of my mouth” before he consented that “negroes are entitled to the privileges of citizenship.”  

George Lemon, representing Dewitt County in Central Illinois, denied that blacks were “altogether human…If any gentleman thought they were, he would ask him to look at a negro’s foot (laughter.) What was his leg doing in the middle of it? If that was not sufficient, let him go and examine their nose; (roars of laughter) then look at their lips. Why, their sculls [sic] were three inches thicker than white people’s.”  

Most delegates were not so extreme as to question the basic humanity of blacks, but they did view them as a threat to the welfare of Illinois society. More than one delegate called Bond’s resolution a matter of urgent “public policy” and self-preservation. They argued that free blacks were idle, immoral, a drain on the social welfare system, and a deterrent to “good citizens” choosing Illinois as their home. Some saw the stakes as even higher. Edward West of Madison County believed exclusion was necessary in order to prevent future violence, such as that which occurred in his county in 1837 when Elijah Lovejoy was murdered by a group of anti-abolitionists. Bond believed that if Illinois kept its borders open to blacks, “the day will yet be

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82 Sangamo Journal, July 1, 1847.
83 Cole, Constitutional Debates of 1847, 212.
84 Cole, Constitutional Debates of 1847, 228.
85 Sangamo Journal, July 8, 1847.
86 Cole, Constitutional Debates of 1847, 218.
upon us when a war, not of expulsion, but of extermination, will be waged between the white and colored population; and one or the other must become extinct."\textsuperscript{87} Singleton also feared that a “Nat Turner will spring up to conduct a war of extermination against the whites…and the blood of our citizens [will] be the alarming price.”\textsuperscript{88}

Dire predictions aside, the pro-exclusion contingent claimed that restricting black immigration was sound state constitutional doctrine. The purpose of the constitutional convention, reasoned one delegate, was to restrict legislation upon certain subjects. Enshrining exclusion into the constitution will prevent “future agitation of the question.”\textsuperscript{89} Another pointed to the longevity of constitutional provisions over statutes: “I prefer that it should be a constitutional provision, in order to give it permanency, in order to avoid that fluctuation to which the laws of Illinois are very subject.”\textsuperscript{90}

A third group, comprised mainly of central Illinois delegates, rejected the argument that black exclusion fell within their purview as constitutional authors. Divided in their feelings toward the measure but preferring to avoid it altogether, they attempted to defuse sectional hostilities by arguing that the issue was best left to the legislature. John Palmer, delegate from Macoupin County and future governor, pleaded for the issue to be dropped because “the introduction of this subject was unwise and productive of no good.” Moreover, he worried that this topic might put the adoption of the constitution in jeopardy.\textsuperscript{91} Lincoln Knowlton of Peoria County regretted hearing “the terms north and south” and believed the convention should instead

\textsuperscript{87} Sangamo Journal, July 8, 1847.
\textsuperscript{88} Sangamo Journal, July 8, 1847.
\textsuperscript{89} Sangamo Journal, July 1, 1847.
\textsuperscript{90} Sangamo Journal, July 1, 1847.
\textsuperscript{91} Cole, Constitutional Debates of 1847, 208.
be promoting “the interests of the whole State.” Future campaign manager for Abraham Lincoln and Supreme Court justice David Davis, representing McLean County, reminded his colleagues that their job was to reform the great principles of government. Gilbert Turnbull of Henderson County and Thomas Geddes of Hancock felt similarly, believing the matter best suited for the legislature.

The delegates who wanted to cease discussing the topic of black exclusion got their wish granted, at least temporarily, when it was referred to the committee on the Bill of Rights. The convention correspondent for the Alton Telegraph and Democratic Review breathed a sigh of relief but knew the respite was ephemeral; debate on exclusion had “already produced more excitement than any thing before the Convention” and its inevitable resurgence would only bring “pernicious consequences.” Over the next two months, the convention delved into other pressing topics, including banking regulations, revenue provisions, constitutional amendment procedures, immigrant suffrage, and the number and salary of legislators. It was not until the penultimate week of the convention that the topic of black exclusion again surfaced. On August 23, as the delegates were finalizing the Bill of Rights, Bond again submitted his black exclusion amendment but with a new provision. As a concession to the fence sitters, he asked that it be voted on separately from the rest of the constitution. This reignited debate over the merits of black exclusion with the same arguments that had been made two months prior. When the time finally came to vote on Bond’s amendment, it passed 87-56. As foreshadowed by the debate

92 Cole, Constitutional Debates of 1847, 222.
93 Sangamo Journal, July 1, 1847.
94 Sangamo Journal, July 1, 1847; Cole, Constitutional Debates of 1847, 227.
95 Alton Telegraph and Democratic Review, July 2, 1847.
96 Cole, Constitutional Debates of 1847, 855-63; Journal of the Convention (1847), 455-56. The convention journal recorded the vote as 87-56 but listed only fifty-five names for those who voted in the negative.
over exclusion, the vote split more along sectional than party lines. Sixty-six Democrats and twenty-one Whigs voted for the measure while forty-four Whigs and eleven Democrats voted against it. Almost all of the southern delegates, with the exception of four representatives from southeastern counties, voted for it while the northern and central sections of the state were divided in their support of it.

In an interesting confluence of events, later that same day the convention also adopted an article declaring Illinois to be a free state. Curtis Harvey, a Democrat from Knox County who opposed Bond’s exclusion article, moved to add a section to the Bill of Rights that definitively outlawed slavery in Illinois, “except as a punishment for crime.” Harvey’s motion to declare slavery illegal in Illinois would have provoked acrimony earlier in the state’s history, but by 1847 it produced no debate in the convention. The failed movement of 1822-24 to make Illinois a slave state extinguished the prospect that slavery would ever take root in the Prairie State. In 1845, the Illinois Supreme Court ruled in Jarrot v. Jarrot that the one hundred remaining French-descended slaves in the state were henceforth free.\footnote{97 Paul Finkelman, \textit{An Imperfect Union: Slavery, Federalism, and Comity} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 150-51; “State Census, 1845,” 71.} Harvey’s amendment was adopted without even a vote tally recorded in the convention’s journal.\footnote{98 \textit{Journal of the Convention} (1847), 463.} The support for it came from both those who found slavery morally reprehensible and those who preferred to keep blacks out of Illinois. These were not necessarily mutually exclusive groups. As one of the delegates remarked, in Illinois “there are men who prefer the society of white men.”\footnote{99 \textit{Sangamo Journal}, July 1, 1847.}

This preference was dependent upon making Illinois a hostile and unwelcoming place for blacks to live. This point was well illustrated the following day in what amounted to little more than a footnote in the convention proceedings but signified the scope of white dominance in
Illinois. James Davis of Bond and Montgomery counties moved to add another section to the constitution that would prevent blacks and whites from intermarrying and would prohibit blacks from holding “any office of honor or profit in this state.” Statutory law already criminalized intermarriage, and the constitution banned blacks from voting, much less holding office, so Davis’s motion did not break any new ground. Perhaps he wished to engraft these prohibitions into the state’s organic law in order to emphasize Illinois’s stance on racial inequality or to make the alteration of these laws difficult in the future. Whatever his motivation, eighty-one of his fellow delegates felt similarly and the amendment was adopted.100 But later that same day, Ninian Wirt Edwards of Sangamon County moved to rescind the vote, believing that the enumerated prohibitions in the article amounted to “an implied admission of their [blacks’] possession of such rights, as citizens of this state and the United States, in the absence of such constitutional restrictions.” His argument convinced enough of his colleagues to reverse their vote and the article was omitted.101 Denying to blacks certain constitutional rights suggested they had rights to begin with. The delegates saw no value in opening their work up to such a dangerous interpretation.

On the last day in August, the delegates adopted a final version of the constitution to submit to the electorate. Only seven delegates, all Democrats, voted against it.102 The convention president, Newton Cloud, congratulated the assembled body and wished its members safe travels home before adjourning sine die.103 With the delegates’ work completed, it fell to the newspapers to influence the electorate to adopt or reject the proposed constitution. Although the majority of

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100 Journal of the Convention (1847), 469-70.
101 Journal of the Convention (1847), 475-76.
102 Of the seven who voted against the constitution, three represented Cook County and two represented St. Clair County, both of which had sizeable foreign immigrant populations. Their votes were likely in protest of the restriction on alien voting.
103 Cole, Constitutional Debates of 1847, 944-45.
delegates were Democrats, the failure to definitively prohibit banks and the denial of suffrage to aliens led some Democratic organs to denounce the revised constitution as a product of Whiggish principles. The *St. Clair Banner* criticized the proposed constitution as embodying “ultra federalism.”\(^{104}\) The *Weekly Chicago Democrat* predicted that if it passed, it would dissuade immigrants from coming to the state and “hasten the day when petty bank aristocracies shall corrupt our politics as they do in New York.”\(^{105}\) However, most newspapers, regardless of partisan affiliation, endorsed it, albeit tepidly. The Democratic *Joliet Signal* found it flawed but nonetheless did “not feel willing to vote against it, with the expectation of getting a better one.”\(^{106}\) The *Quincy Whig* admitted it was not wholly satisfactory but was reconciled to the fact that “it is as good a one as can be formed at the present day in this State.”\(^{107}\) While the proposed constitution did not garner effusive praise, most editors regarded it as an imperfect but necessary document for alleviating the state’s economic ills.

Because newspaper ink was mainly devoted to evaluating the constitution itself, the supplementary black exclusion article received comparatively less attention. But it did not go unnoticed. The *Illinois State Register* took a brief respite from bashing the proposed constitution in order to warn other northerners they may not understand the need for black exclusion but “the time is near when they will rue the day that they encouraged the immigration of run-away slaves, or vagrant free blacks. Let them mark our prediction.”\(^{108}\) The *Western Whig*, a paper out of Bloomington, printed a letter written by “Rollo,” who assailed Article XIV, the black exclusion article, on religious and humanitarian grounds and deplored the principle upon which whites

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\(^ {104} \) *St. Clair Banner*, reprinted in the *Illinois State Register*, September 10, 1847.

\(^ {105} \) *Weekly Chicago Democrat*, September 14, 1847.

\(^ {106} \) *Joliet Signal*, February 29, 1848.

\(^ {107} \) *Quincy Whig*, February 9, 1848.

\(^ {108} \) *Illinois State Register*, November 12, 1847.
treated blacks: “Might makes the right. We can therefore we will.” The paper’s editor countered Rollo’s argument by declaring that self-defense is a natural and honorable right, and the parts of the state that suffered from the scourge of free blacks had the prerogative to remedy their ills.\textsuperscript{109}

The press also voiced opposition to black exclusion, especially in northern Illinois. Chicago’s \textit{Western Citizen}, successor of the \textit{Genius of Liberty} and the Illinois Liberty Party mouthpiece, attacked Article XIV during the fall and winter months. It believed Illinois held a monopoly on disgrace for proposing such an amendment and blamed its existence on “the poorer population of the slave states” who had moved to Illinois.\textsuperscript{110} One correspondent to the paper accused the delegates of being the most “malignant and inveterate haters of the African race” and regretted that America’s black population “must learn with shame what [even] the monarchies of the Old World have never taught, viz: that the right to prairie soil is indefensibly and eternally based upon the texture of the skin! Wo! therefore, betide the colored man who dare set a lawless foot upon soil baptized in the name of pure democracy!”\textsuperscript{111} The \textit{Western Citizen} attacked the perception that free blacks in Illinois were idle and had to be supported by county welfare money by printing testimonials about hardworking, sober, and religious black families in Illinois.\textsuperscript{112} The Whig \textit{Rockford Forum} also weighed in on Article XIV, hoping “in the name of freedom and common decency” it would be rejected but feared that “the power of prejudice and darkness in this professedly banner State of Democracy, is too strong to exclude this contemptible provision from our Constitution.”\textsuperscript{113} Some Democratic papers also came out against the exclusion measure.

\textsuperscript{109} \textit{Western Whig}, December 25, 1847.
\textsuperscript{110} \textit{Western Citizen}, October 26, 1847.
\textsuperscript{111} \textit{Western Citizen}, November 23, 1847.
\textsuperscript{112} \textit{Western Citizen}, November 16, December 4, 1847.
\textsuperscript{113} \textit{Rockford Forum}, September 1, 1847.
The Chicago Democrat called the amendment a “mob law clause.”\textsuperscript{114} In central Illinois, the Peoria Democratic Press gave the disclaimer that “we do not speak as abolitionists” before stating, “we cannot consent to approve a measure which would degrade a being wearing the human form, and possessing the attributes of human nature, to a grade far below that which our Reformers are willing to allow to horses and cows.”\textsuperscript{115}

These sharp rebukes were shown to be voices in the wilderness come the day of the popular vote on the constitution. On March 6, 1848, Illinois voters gave the new constitution their stamp of approval by a vote of 60,585 (79 percent) to 15,903 (21 percent).\textsuperscript{116} Article XIV, the black exclusion clause, received slightly less support but still passed by a sizeable majority. Of the 71,558 votes cast, 70 percent (50,261) supported it and 30 percent (21,287) opposed it.

The sectional split that arose during the convention on black exclusion was mirrored in the voting patterns of the electorate. Southern and Central Illinois approved of the article by 85 and 81 percent respectively, while Northern Illinois rejected it by 62 percent.\textsuperscript{117} The strongest pockets of opposition were in northeastern Illinois, where voters in Boone County rejected it by 94 percent, Lake County by 85 percent, DuPage County by 84 percent, Winnebago County by 81 percent, and Cook County by 77 percent.\textsuperscript{118} In contrast, there were a number of counties in

\textsuperscript{114} Weekly Chicago Democrat, September 21, 1847.
\textsuperscript{115} Peoria Democratic Press, November 3, 1847.
\textsuperscript{116} Pease, Illinois Election Returns, 173.
\textsuperscript{117} Here, Southern Illinois is defined by the counties south of and including (from west to east): Calhoun, Jersey, Madison, Bond, Clinton, Marion, Clay, Richland, and Lawrence. Northern Illinois is defined by the counties north of and including (from west to east): Mercer, Henry, Bureau, Putnam, LaSalle, Grundy, and Will. Central Illinois includes the forty-seven counties in between. Percentages were calculated using the returns in Pease, Illinois Election Returns, 176-80.
\textsuperscript{118} Two counties in southeastern Illinois, Crawford and Hardin, were the only counties outside of Northern Illinois that voted against the exclusion amendment. Crawford County voters rejected exclusion 518-8 (98 percent) and Hardin County voters rejected it 222-2 (99%). These returns remain unexplained. Nothing in either county’s history suggests strong support for black rights and no contemporary newspaper accounts have been found that address this anomaly. There were no votes cast in either county for the Free Soil Party presidential candidate in the 1848 election. In 1862, when voters were again asked if they endorsed black exclusion, both counties supported it by more than 95
southern Illinois that gave it near unanimous approval, such as Saline, Monroe, Alexander, and Johnson. Although central Illinois as a whole supported exclusion slightly less than the southernmost counties, the majority of counties in the middle part of the state voted for it by margins exceeding 80 percent. The message was unmistakable: blacks were not welcome in Illinois.

**Auction Block on the Prairie**

Members of the Free Soil Party, which sought to prevent slavery from spreading into new territories and called for the federal government to divorce itself from the institution, were most likely to vote against the black exclusion measure. 119 Yet, as would become increasingly clear over the next decade, the growth of anti-slavery sentiment in Illinois was not necessarily correlated with concern for black rights. As the *Peoria Democratic Press* expressed succinctly in the summer of 1847, “it will shortly be understood that because a man refuses to bow the knee to the spirit of slavery, it does not necessarily follow that he is in favor of an indiscriminate mixture of colors, or that he desires to see the adoption of laws that would guarantee to the negro all the privileges—political and social—enjoyed by the white citizens.” 120 Thus most Illinoisans saw nothing peculiar or conflicting about approving a constitution that definitively prohibited slavery within the state while sanctioning a measure to exclude blacks from it. 121 A resident of Harding

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120 *Peoria Democratic Press*, June 9, 1847.

121 There were some who did perceive this situation as incongruous. Thomas Filer of Babcock’s Grove (now Lombard) wrote to the *Western Citizen* (October 5, 1847): “The convention declared that the negroes shall no longer be held in slavery; and then require[s] the legislature to pass such laws as would, if universally adopted, entirely exterminate the race. Thus the negroes are to be elevated from the condition of beasts of burden, and placed upon a level with the prairie wolves!”
in LaSalle County wrote to the *Western Citizen* lamenting how his neighbors voted in favor of black exclusion. They were people “who ‘hate slavery as bad as any body,’ but hate negroes worse…Ain[‘]t this Anti-Slavery with a vengance [sic]?”122

Nor was this sentiment unique to Illinois. Other northern states had considered similar exclusion laws and enacted legislation to discourage black immigration. As northeastern states began abolishing slavery in the late eighteenth century, many freed slaves were left in a legal limbo, deprived of many of the rights enjoyed by their white neighbors. Legal historian Kunal Parker has shown how in Massachusetts the process of emancipation transformed former slaves into “foreigners” by creating a remote origin for them (Africa). This allowed towns to deny them financial resources under the poor laws and subjected them to banishment.123 In the early 1820s, shortly after Missouri’s constitutional clause banning free blacks had caused a stir in Congress, Massachusetts’s legislature considered but ultimately decided against enacting a similar ban. Pennsylvania also deliberated black exclusion during its constitutional convention in 1837 but Thaddeus Stevens postponed the matter before it could move to committee.124

Midwestern states were more successful in erecting legal barriers to black settlement. Ohio (1804, 1807) and the Michigan Territory (1827) passed laws requiring free blacks to file certificates of freedom with a county clerk and enter into a $500 surety bond; the Indiana (1810) and Iowa territories (1839) also required a $500 surety bond.125 In 1849 Ohio bucked this trend by repealing its black immigration barriers. This move came after years of effort by black and

122 *Western Citizen*, March 14, 1848.
white civil rights reformers and a political bargain struck between Free Soilers and Democrats.\textsuperscript{126} However, Indiana and Iowa moved in the opposite direction and established complete bans on black settlement. In 1851, Indiana residents voted on a new constitution as well as a separate referendum to prohibit black immigration. Both passed, with the exclusion amendment receiving 84 percent approval. The Hoosier State followed this up the next year with enabling legislation that penalized those in violation of the ban with fines from 10 to 500 dollars and voided all contracts made with blacks who were in the state illegally.\textsuperscript{127} At Iowa’s first constitutional convention in 1844 a black exclusion clause was narrowly defeated, but in 1851 the legislature successfully passed a similar measure with a fine of two dollars per day for offenders.\textsuperscript{128} Out West, Oregon’s provisional government passed an exclusion ordinance in 1844. When Oregonians voted on a constitution in pursuance of statehood in 1857, a separate black exclusion clause received a larger margin of approval than did the constitution itself. Nearly a quarter of Oregon’s residents in 1860 had been born in the Old Northwest and numerous others had at one time lived there before moving on to Oregon. Another 22 percent of the population came from slave states, with almost half from Missouri. They would have most likely been familiar with the Midwest’s black laws and its desire to be free of slavery as well as blacks.\textsuperscript{129}

Although Illinois voters approved Article XIV in 1848, the Illinois general assembly would not pass enabling legislation until 1853. In the intervening years, Iowa and Indiana enacted their own bans on black settlement. Yet Illinois’s 1848 vote for exclusion was significant because it marked the first time that a free state sanctioned an absolute ban on black immigration.

\textsuperscript{126} Middleton, \textit{Race and the Legal Process in Early Ohio}, 115-56.
\textsuperscript{127} Berwanger, \textit{Frontier Against Slavery}, 45; Middleton, \textit{Black Laws in the Old Northwest}, 204-5.
\textsuperscript{129} Berwanger, \textit{Frontier Against Slavery}, 78-96.
Despite the numerous legal obstacles to black settlement in many northern states, none had gone so far as to declare an entire class of people exempt from the right of movement across its borders. Even if enforcement were problematic, which it would prove to be in Illinois, the adoption of Article XIV made manifest Illinois’s desire for racial homogeneity. Nine years to the day before Chief Justice Taney would declare that blacks were never and could never become U.S. citizens, Illinois voters declared blacks not only to be beyond the pale of citizenship but also deprived of the freedom of movement.

By creating the legal framework to proscribe black settlement within its borders, Illinois became a lodestar for other free states. At Indiana’s constitutional convention in 1850, the delegates debated the merits of criminalizing black immigration. One delegate warned his fellow members to “look around you and see what is being done. Illinois has shut her door against the immigration of negroes into her territory… unless we would become the Liberia of the South, it is necessary for us to act, and to act promptly.” In regards to the legality of exclusion, another delegate pointed to Illinois as providing legitimacy for it: “with regard to prohibiting them from coming here, I think we have a full right...I find that the surrounding States—at least the State west of us, Illinois, have got a clause in their Constitution similar to the one reported for us to act upon.” Yet another delegate pointed out that Illinois’s Article XIV contained no penal sanctions and the Illinois legislature had so far failed to pass enabling legislation. He therefore recommended that Indiana’s exclusion clause contain specific punishment for violators lest it be “as nugatory in its operations as the law of the State of Illinois.”

That delegate was correct in pointing out the dilatory nature of the Illinois legislature in passing a black exclusion law. Although Article XIV directed the general assembly “at its first

session under the amended constitution” to “pass such laws as will effectually prohibit free
persons of color from immigrating to and settling in this state,” the subsequent two legislatures
failed to accomplish this task. It was not from lack of trying, however. The 1849 legislature came
within a handful of votes of passing a bill to “prevent the immigration of free persons of color.”
It cleared the senate by a narrow 13-12 vote but failed in the house 34-31.131 The text of the bill
was not recorded in either chamber’s journal but a fragment of the floor debate recorded by a
newspaper reporter suggests that the enacting clause was the source of dispute. One senator
mentioned that the bill subjected offenders to forced labor and accused it of “creat[ing] a system
of Slavery in Illinois” as opposed to stopping free blacks from coming into the state. Another
described the bill’s punishments as including “fines, forfeitures, prisons and slavery.”132 Despite
rejecting the engrossed senate bill, the house voted 44-17 to postpone adjournment (which both
houses had already agreed to do in two days’ time) until an exclusion law could be passed. The
senate members rejected the house motion, perhaps because they believed a compromise bill
would be too difficult to negotiate or because their salaries would be halved if they stayed in
session for any longer.133 In any case, the general assembly adjourned without fulfilling the
obligations of Article XIV. This impasse was repeated in the next legislature, which convened in
January 1851. The senate passed an exclusion bill with a provision that the fines collected from
offenders be used to colonize Illinois free blacks in Liberia, but the bill stalled in the house.134

131 Journal of the Senate of the Sixteenth General Assembly of the State of Illinois, at Their Regular Session, Begun
and Held at Springfield, January 1, 1849 (Springfield: Charles H. Lanphier, 1849), 269-70; Journal of the House of
Representatives of the Sixteenth General Assembly of the State of Illinois, at Their Regular Session, Begun and Held
at Springfield, January 1, 1849 (Springfield: Charles H. Lanphier, 1849), 480.
133 Journal of the House (1849), 481-82; Journal of the Senate (1849), 382-83. The newly approved constitution
reduced the compensation for legislators from $2 per day to $1 per day for each day they remained in session after
134 Journal of the Senate of the Seventeenth General Assembly of the State of Illinois, at Their Regular Session,
Begun and Held at Springfield, January 6, 1851 (Springfield: Lanphier and Walker, 1851), 246-47.
The Eighteenth General Assembly, meeting in 1853, was finally able to pass a bill to prevent blacks from moving to the state. This was achieved in no small part due to the efforts of freshman representative John A. Logan, a lawyer from Southern Illinois whose father had served in the Illinois house for four terms.\footnote{Gary Ecelbarger, \textit{Black Jack Logan: An Extraordinary Life in Peace and War} (Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2005), 24-27. Logan represented Jackson and Franklin counties.} Perhaps it was his father’s prestige that helped him land a spot on the influential judiciary committee, but it was through his own cunning that he quickly made a name for himself. Wasting little time, on January 6, four days into the legislative session, the twenty-six year old Logan introduced a bill to satisfy Article XIV of the constitution.\footnote{Journal of the House of Representatives of the Eighteenth General Assembly, of the State of Illinois, Convened January 3, 1853 (Springfield: Lanphier and Walker, 1853), 22.} It was referred to the judiciary committee, where Logan himself authored it. His law partner wrote him to praise his actions, anticipating that “the harder the fight on such a measure[,] the greater will be the distinction.”\footnote{William Parrish to John Logan, January 16, 1853, quoted in Berwanger, \textit{Frontier Against Slavery}, 49 n. 46.}

The fight was indeed hard, for Logan’s bill was, in the words of one historian, “undoubtedly the most severe anti-Negro measure passed by a free state.”\footnote{Berwanger, \textit{Frontier Against Slavery}, 49.} Similar to the Indiana and Iowa black exclusion laws, Logan’s bill levied a fine on offenders. Any “negro, or mulatto, bond or free” remaining in the state for ten days with the intention of settling there would be tried before a jury of twelve men and, if found guilty, charged $50. However, unlike the other states’ laws, Logan’s bill specified measures to be taken if the offender could not pay the fee. In that case, a justice of the peace “shall, at public auction, proceed to sell said negro or mulatto to any person or persons who will pay said fine and costs, for the shortest time; and said purchaser shall have the right to compel said negro or mulatto to work for and serve out said time.” If the offender did not leave the state after the initial prosecution, he or she would be fined...
$100 and the process would be repeated indefinitely, with each subsequent offense increasing the fine by an additional $50. The complainant would receive half of the fine. Additionally, the law permitted slaveholders to travel through the state with their slaves, making Illinois one of three northern states granting this right of transit.\textsuperscript{139}

On February 2 the house resolved itself into a committee of the whole to discuss Logan’s bill, “An act to prevent the immigration of free negroes into this state.” One representative proposed an amendment to compel the winning bidder to pay the convicted individual $10 per month for his or her labor. Logan scoffed at the idea, believing it would be “a good speculation for any negro to get himself complained of and be set at work.” Another representative reminded the chamber that a bill of this nature was supposed to have been passed by the first legislature meeting after the adoption of the new constitution. Failing to have done so, he maintained that this bill was in violation of the state constitution. Representative H. W. Blodgett from Lake County found the bill to contravene both the U.S. Constitution and divine law. He wondered, “if it is a crime, to pass a geographical, a mere mathematical line, what becomes of all our notions of republican rights and liberty?” He preferred to “give every man a home upon our soil, and the privilege to be men.”\textsuperscript{140}

Others had different ideas of what constituted the privileges of men. St. Clair representative John Reynolds, who had served multiple terms in Congress in addition to being governor of Illinois, described seeing free blacks in Illinois, “huddled up in their snug shanties—these great lazy ‘buck niggers,’—setting up of nights, and taking a little wood from piles here and there. No matter what we may say or think about it, these fellows are not of the right

\textsuperscript{139} \textit{Laws of the State of Illinois} (1853), 57-60; Paul Finkelman, “Slavery, the ‘More Perfect Union,’ and the Prairie State,” \textit{Illinois Historical Journal} 80 (Winter 1987): 257.

\textsuperscript{140} \textit{Illinois State Journal}, February 4, 1853.
character or material to make good citizens of them.” Slaves were well cared for but “a free negro, what was he anywhere in our country?” Logan’s bill and colonization, he argued, were the best solutions to rid the state and country of the free black population. Unsurprisingly, Logan mounted a vigorous defense of his handiwork and lashed out at his opponents for betraying their own racial interests:

Nor can I understand how it is that men can become so fanatical in their notions as to forget that they are white. Forget the sympathy over the white man and have his bosom heaving with it for those persons of color. It had almost become an offense to be a white man. Unfortunate were these gentlemen in their birth that they could not have been ushered into existence with black skin and a wooly head.

Logan vowed to raise this issue at every legislative session until an appropriate law was passed.

He did not have to make good on his threat. The house passed his bill on February 5 by a vote of 45-23. One representative who voted against it mockingly suggested that the title of the bill should be changed to “An act to create an additional number of abolitionists in this state.” Logan’s bill next moved to the senate where “it was strenuously supported, and as strenuously resisted” before passing 13-9. Like the 1847 convention debates and 1848 popular vote on Article XIV, the vote on Logan’s bill revealed that sectional influences played a large role in how the legislators voted. In the senate, all five Whigs, four of whom represented central and southwestern counties, voted against it. Four Democrats, all from northern counties, joined the Whigs in opposing the bill. The house vote reveals a greater splintering of the parties. Of the

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143 Jones, Black Jack, 19.
144 Journal of the House (1853), 443-44.
sixteen Whigs in the chamber, seven voted for it, all of whom hailed from central and southeastern counties. The thirteen Democrats who opposed it came from northern and north-central counties. In general, the northernmost portion of the state voted as a bloc against the bill and the southernmost for it, with central Illinois fractured. After receiving the signature of Governor Matteson, the law went into force on February 12.146

Papers throughout the state on both sides of the partisan divide reacted swiftly and caustically against the black exclusion law. Putting an offender on the auction block in Illinois was a bridge too far. According to the northern Rockford Rock River Democrat, it amounted to a “virtual introduction of slavery into our free state.”147 In central Illinois, the Peoria Weekly Republican, a Whig paper, declared the law was “utterly at variance with the dictates of justice and humanity.”148 Criticism even came from southern Illinois papers. If Illinois were to have any blacks within its borders, the Whig Alton Telegraph preferred “that they should be free, instead of in a state of bondage.”149 The Democratic Belleville Advocate sarcastically suggested that a “manlier and bolder means” of disposing of the state’s black population would be through “general massacre and extermination.”150 The far southern and staunchly Democratic Jonesboro Gazette called the law “shameful” and a “disgrace.”151 The papers took some solace in the belief that the law would be a dead letter because no one would enforce it, especially in northern Illinois. The Chicago Tribune predicted that if someone did obey it, he “had better make his

146 Journal of the House (1853), 714; Laws of the State of Illinois (1853), 57.
147 Rockford Rock River Democrat, March 1, 1853.
148 Peoria Weekly Republican, quoted in Berwanger, Frontier Against Slavery, 50.
149 Alton Telegraph, reprinted in the Belleville Advocate, March 2, 1853.
150 Belleville Advocate, February 23, 1853.
151 Jonesboro Gazette, quoted in Berwanger, Frontier Against Slavery, 50.
arrangements beforehand to remove to Egypt, unless he is willing to live among people who shun and loathe him.”  

The reaction to the black exclusion law is better understood in the context of the Compromise of 1850. Many Illinoisans, particularly in the northern part of the state, were still incensed over the Fugitive Slave Law. This law not only infuriated those who saw slavery as immoral but also drew the ire of those who believed it infringed on their rights by compelling them to assist in the recovery of runaway slaves. The black exclusion law elicited similar outrage because Illinoisans perceived it as another example of slavery encroaching on their society. A resident of Vermont, Illinois, noted how “the Fugitive Slave Law has made more supporters of the cause of freedom than any other one thing that has ever been done; and I believe the Black Law of our State will make as many here as the Fugitive Law did.” However, that “cause of freedom” did not necessarily translate to a concern for black rights. Many shared the sentiment of the west-central Warsaw Express, which objected to the law for being “too stringent in its provision and too cruel in its penalties” but still believed “the object was a good one.” The Illinois State Register, one of the few papers to defend the law, reminded readers that only five years earlier they had voted by a 30,000 majority to exclude blacks from the state. The legislature was simply fulfilling its constitutional mandate. In any case, the paper reasoned, forced labor was merely one form of imprisonment, not at all akin to

152 Chicago Tribune, February 24, 1853.
154 National Era (Washington, DC), March 24, 1853.
155 Warsaw Express, reprinted in the Quincy Daily Whig, April 29, 1853.
slavery. If any sales were to take place under the law, it would be because the offenders “voluntarily” chose to “find an open market for themselves.”156

As the papers took measure of the law in their columns, Illinois blacks organized against it. In October 1853 they met in Chicago for the First Convention of the Colored Citizens of the State of Illinois. A group of prosperous business leaders from Chicago spearheaded the effort, including John Jones and Henry O. Wagoner, both of whom were veterans of the Colored National Convention movement. For three days, the convention delegates discussed issues relating to the welfare of the state’s black population and adopted a series of resolutions, including a denunciation of colonization and of all state laws that discriminated on account of color. The resolutions also established a framework for future reform efforts through the organization of a central committee, statewide auxiliary committees, petition drives, and lyceums. Much fanfare surrounded the visit by Frederick Douglass, who delivered a “happy and soul-stirring” speech to the convention.

Before adjourning, the delegates penned a letter to white Illinoisans, outlining their grievances and the unjustness of the black laws. They began by addressing it to their “Fellow Citizens,” a deliberate choice of words that underscored how they viewed their own place in American society and their relationship with whites. Though couched in friendly and flattering language, the delegates made clear they were not seeking any favors from whites. Instead what they desired was the abolishment of the laws that unjustly denied them their rights as American citizens. Understanding that the black laws were symptoms of a deeper malady, the delegates affirmed their claim to membership in the social compact: “We are Americans by birth, and we assure you that we are Americans in feeling…Thus we would address you, not as rebels, or as

156 Illinois State Register, February 23, March 14, 1853.
enemies, but as friends and fellow-countrymen, who desire to dwell among you in peace, and whose destinies are interwoven and linked with those of the American people.”

Although Illinois blacks continued their efforts to abolish the black laws throughout the 1850s, including holding a second convention in Alton in 1856 and forming a state repeal association, Illinois’s discriminatory statutes remained in force.

As part of a revisionist historiographical trend to counter earlier scholarship that portrayed antebellum white northerners, particularly the Republican Party, as fundamentally “negrophobic,” some historians have downplayed the significance of this and other black laws throughout the North. For example, Paul Finkelman argues that

the notorious immigration restrictions found in the statutes of the lower Midwest and other northern states were not quite as harsh as most historians have believed and were almost never enforced [emphasis in original]…Although the Illinois statute supports the notion of a repressive North, its sporadic and lax enforcement demonstrates that Illinois was indifferent about preventing blacks from entering the state.

Finkelman points to the increase in Illinois’s black population from 1850 to 1860 as evidence that the law was inconsequential. The black population did increase from 5,436 to 7,628 during that decade. However, the growth rate was not higher than the previous decade as Finkelman claims but was actually the lowest for any decade before the war. Moreover, the black population decreased from 0.6 percent of the Illinois population in 1850 to 0.4 percent in

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158 See Proceedings of the State Convention of Colored Citizens of the State of Illinois, Held in the City of Alton, Nov. 13th, 14th, 15th, 1856 (Chicago: Hays and Thompson, 1856).

159 Finkelman, “Prelude to the Fourteenth Amendment,” 419, 442.

160 From 1820 to 1830, the black growth rate in Illinois was 258 percent; from 1830 to 1840 it was 120 percent; from 1840 to 1850 it was 51 percent; and from 1850 to 1860 it was 40 percent.
1860. Finkelman correctly points out that the absolute number of blacks in Illinois increased in the decade before the war, which cannot entirely be attributed to the natural increase. Still, arguing that the exclusion law was a dead letter overlooks two important ways in which it operated to reinforce white dominance.

First, in a number of instances the law was utilized to detain and punish blacks in Illinois. The exclusion law was first put into force not long after its passage. During the summer of 1853, a man was arrested in Washington County for violating the law. He was imprisoned for six weeks and then sold for one month’s labor for $4.75. Later that fall, the Quincy Daily Whig reported a sale in its city where one of the bidders purportedly planned on taking the offender to the South in order to make his bondage permanent. The following year in 1854, seven men in Galena were arrested under the law on a single day, three of whom were cooks on a steamer in port. The informant was the constable, who stood to benefit financially from successful convictions. In early 1855, a group of whites in Salem took offense at a local “nigger taking upon himself lofty airs” and made a wager among themselves to see if they could have him arrested under the exclusion law, which they successfully accomplished in under two hours. A man convicted under the law in 1857 was spared forced labor when former Lieutenant Governor Gustave Koerner paid his fine before the auction, which had been advertised in notices posted throughout Belleville, could take place. Later that year, after twice assaulting a black barber

162 *Alton Weekly Courier*, July 1, 1853.
163 *Quincy Daily Whig*, November 22, 1853.
164 *Quincy Daily Whig*, July 7, 1854.
165 *The Independent... Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts (NY)*, February 15, 1855.
166 *New York Tribune*, May 12, 1857. In his memoirs, Koerner described another similar incident in 1853 when he prevented an auction about to take place by paying the fee of the offender. *Memoirs of Gustave Koerner, 1809-*
and damaging his property in Amboy, a group of whites used the exclusion law to exact their revenge. The barber was arrested but took advantage of a postponement of his trial to flee town.\textsuperscript{167} The \textit{American Missionary} carried a story written by a reverend who witnessed the law in action. A married couple was moving from Ohio to Wisconsin and decided to stay with friends in Marion County, Illinois, along the way. A dozen armed men seized the couple and took them to the justice of the peace for violating the exclusion law. They were tried and fined $100, which they paid before quickly leaving town.\textsuperscript{168} Prosecutions continued during the war, sometimes involving runaway slaves who joined up with Illinois troops as laborers in the South and subsequently returned home with them.\textsuperscript{169} In 1864 the Illinois Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the exclusion law, ruling it did not violate the state’s ban on slavery.\textsuperscript{170} In spite of this ruling, Republican Governor Richard Yates pardoned six men convicted under the exclusion law as one of his final acts before leaving office in January of 1865.\textsuperscript{171}

Second, and more importantly, the law underscored the vulnerability of blacks within Illinois society. Although only a fraction of those who came into Illinois illegally were ever arrested and prosecuted, the law posed an ever-present threat against the security of blacks in the state. The above examples demonstrate that the exclusion law could and was used as a method

\textsuperscript{167} \textit{Chicago Tribune}, July 28, 1857.

\textsuperscript{168} \textit{American Missionary}, reprinted in the \textit{Liberator} (MA), August 12, 1859.


\textsuperscript{170} \textit{Nelson v. The People}, 33 Ill. 390 (1864).

for whites to retaliate against those whom they disliked.\textsuperscript{172} It was therefore a method of social control. In the case of George Bowlin, who was auctioned off for a stretch of sixteen months in 1859, a local paper said of the case: “It is proper to add that if George had behaved himself decently since coming into the place, we believe no one would have thought of enforcing the statute against him.”\textsuperscript{173}

Unable to testify against whites in court, blacks in many ways lived at the mercy of their white neighbors. Kaskaskia-born John W. Menard, who would become the first African American elected to Congress in 1868, noted on a tour through Southern Illinois in 1861 that black Illinoisans “live by public sympathy rather than the protection of any law; for in Illinois there is no law for the colored man.”\textsuperscript{174} This was precisely the point made in 1853 by Representative John Reynolds of St. Clair County during the legislative debate over Logan’s exclusion bill: “whites have a perfect right to go wherever they choose, but with the negroes it is different; so we can legislate on them as we please.”\textsuperscript{175}

The law’s limited enforcement in no way lessened its power, which reinforced the reality that blacks were non-citizens who existed outside of the democratic process and did not belong

\textsuperscript{172} The black laws could also be used as a way for whites to retaliate against each other. In 1855 Joseph Spencer accused his brother-in-law William Dungey of being black. The accusation threatened Dungey’s economic, social, and legal standing as well as his marriage to a white woman. Dungey sued Spencer for slander and won. For a thorough examination of this case and the value of whiteness in antebellum Illinois, see Stacy Pratt McDermott, “‘Black Bill’ and the Privileges of Whiteness in Antebellum Illinois,” \textit{Journal of Illinois History} 12, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 2-26.

\textsuperscript{173} Carrollton Press, reprinted in the \textit{Illinois State Journal}, August 29, 1859.

\textsuperscript{174} Letter from John W. Menard to James Redpath, \textit{Pine and Palm}, October 12, 1861, \textit{Black Abolitionist Papers}.

\textsuperscript{175} \textit{Illinois State Journal}, February 4, 1853. In response to a petition sent to Illinois house of representatives in 1857 praying for the repeal or modification of the blacks laws, the house adopted by a vote of 50-17 a report denying the request and affirming that “this a government of the white man, and established for the white man.” \textit{Journal of the House of the Twentieth General Assembly of the State of Illinois, at Their Regular Session, Begun and Held at Springfield, January 5, 1857} (Springfield: Lanphier and Walker, 1857), 890; \textit{Reports Made to the General Assembly of Illinois} (1857), 728.
to the nation’s social and political communities. John Jones, the prominent activist for black rights in Illinois, understood this well:

I know that many friends think the blacks laws are a dead letter altogether, but…they are a living, active reality…Every other nation, kindred and tongue have prospered and gained property, and are recognized as part of the great commonwealth, with the exception of our own: we have been treated as strangers in the land of our birth, and as enemies, by those who should have been our friends.\[^{176}\]

The Illinois exclusion law did more than affirm that blacks had no rights that whites were bound to respect; as Jones stated, it declared them to be permanent outsiders whose presence was regrettable and unwelcome. Reynolds, like many white Illinoisans, wanted all free blacks to be “back on their own soil of Africa.”\[^{177}\] They were foreigners in America. Unlike immigrants from Europe, free blacks crippled rather than contributed to the country’s welfare.

Reynolds’s statement illustrates that the power of a mythic white republicanism by making the presence of blacks an unwelcome abnormality. Excluding blacks was a way for whites to project an idealized racial landscape, one that not only regulated and controlled black bodies but also attempted to remove their presence from the state. Illinois was following a model begun by New England decades earlier, where gradual emancipation was achieved by erasing the memory of slavery there.\[^{178}\] By positioning blacks as coming from elsewhere (be it Africa or the American South), Illinois whites could deny their claim to the soil of the Prairie State. The black person as imagined foreigner was expressed clearly in Chief Justice Roger Taney’s 1857 *Dred Scott* opinion, wherein he questioned, “can a negro, whose ancestors were imported into this country, and sold as slaves, become a member of the political community formed and brought


\[^{178}\] Melish, *Disowning Slavery*. 
into existence by the Constitution of the United States, and as such become entitled to all the rights, and privileges, and immunities, guaranteed by the instrument to the citizen?”

For Taney and most white Illinoisans in the decade before the Civil War, the answer was an affirmative “no.” They desired their state to be racially homogeneous and were unsettled by the presence of free persons of color who were neither slaves nor fellow citizens. Most countenanced slavery where it existed as long as it did not injure them in any way. The presence of free blacks in Illinois and across the North, however, was an aggravation, tangible proof that slave states were shirking their responsibilities and letting their affairs spill over into the North. Black exclusion and colonization were short- and long-term plans for dealing with that fallout. For many white Illinoisans, these tactics helped mitigate tension and maintain a truce with slave interests. Representative Reynolds closed his pro-exclusion speech on the floor of the house in 1853 by congratulating Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, and the Compromise of 1850 for conclusively settling “the question of slavery.”

Little did he know that the bottom was about to drop out the following year with the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, which overturned the Missouri Compromise and set off a firestorm in the North. The stage was set for accomplishing what the Free Soil Party had failed to do: building a powerful northern coalition pledged to halting the spread of slavery. On May 29, 1856, only days after John Brown’s band killed five at Pottawatomie Creek in Kansas and Preston Brooks assaulted Charles Sumner on the floor of the U.S. Senate, the Illinois Republican Party was launched. After decades of evasion, mitigation, and appeasement on the slavery issue, a motley group of Whigs, anti-Nebraska Democrats, Know-Nothings, and Free Soilers


assembled in Bloomington to make slavery their principal political concern. They affirmed the right of Congress to prohibit slavery in the territories and held that “justice, humanity, the principles of freedom as expressed in our declaration of independence, and our national constitution…require that that power should be exerted to prevent the extension of slavery into the territories heretofore free.”

But for Illinois blacks, these principles remained elusive in the years before the war. The burgeoning Republican Party offered little in the way of support for their rights. As shown during the election of 1860, Illinois Republicans remained committed to white supremacy and endorsed a conservative anti-slavery ideology that viewed blacks as unworthy of citizenship and obstacles in the pursuit of free labor and free land.

Chapter 2:

“It Is Not a Black, But a White Question”: Racial Politics on the Eve of the Civil War

On a July morning in 1860, under overcast skies and intermittent rain, Republicans in Pekin raised a 140-foot pole to drum up enthusiasm for their party’s candidates. A brass band played while families from the surrounding countryside streamed into town in carriages and on foot. On a nearby hilltop close to the Illinois River sat a wigwam, a makeshift meeting hall consisting of tiered seats under a board roof. A crowd estimated around 5,000 gathered there in the afternoon, eager to hear U.S. Senator Lyman Trumbull speak. The senator’s seat was up for election and whichever party won control of the state legislature in the fall would decide who would fill it. The present legislature, which was controlled by Democrats, had chosen Stephen Douglas over Abraham Lincoln for senator two years earlier. Unless the Republicans wrestled control from the Democrats in the general assembly, Trumbull would lose his seat. It was no coincidence that he came to Pekin, the seat of Tazewell County, to campaign. Located in the highly contested battleground of central Illinois, voters in Tazewell County were going to cast ballots for both a state senator and a state representative at the next election. The rain abated as Trumbull addressed the crowd. He spoke briefly on economic issues but focused mainly on the Democracy’s fanaticism for extending slavery westward. Trumbull contrasted this with the Republican creed, which “favors the giving of our public lands to free white men—not to negro slaves.” The audience cheered.¹

¹ Chicago Tribune, July 27, 1860.
Trumbull’s statement captured the guiding principle of Republican ideology and also exposed its ambiguities. Stopping the spread of slavery was the main issue that united different factions under the Republican banner. Many Republicans hoped that preventing slavery from expanding beyond its present borders would bring about a gradual, peaceful, and voluntary end to the institution. Lincoln believed the process would take “a hundred years at the least.” Yet the party was ill prepared to tackle the inevitable consequences of that belief—what to do with slaves once freed. Nor was there any consensus over the role free blacks should play in the nation’s social, civic, and political communities. Some, such as Trumbull, envisioned a racial landscape without any blacks, enslaved or free. In an 1858 speech at Chicago, the senator suggested establishing a colony in Central America to which free blacks and manumitted slaves could emigrate.

Many Illinois Republicans shared Trumbull’s vision of an exclusively white nation. The conservatism of Illinois Republicans’ racial beliefs manifested itself during the 1860 campaign. Vying with Democrats for recognition as the “white man’s party,” Illinois Republicans appealed to white supremacy and black exclusion. In doing so, they distanced themselves from their party’s more moderate racial views, which acknowledged the natural rights of free blacks and their entitlement to free labor. Many Illinois Republicans perceived blacks as foreigners and could not imagine them being vested members of their communities or the nation. They therefore supported and

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campaigned on the promise to sustain the legal structure that propped up white supremacy.

Nor was this empty campaign rhetoric. After winning majorities in both branches of the legislature for the first time, Republicans upheld the principles upon which they were elected. Arthur C. Cole’s *The Era of the Civil War* remains the defining work on Illinois during the Civil War era nearly one hundred years after its publication. Yet Cole widely misses the mark in claiming, “the republican assembly of 1861, to the disappointment of all radical antislavery leaders, had failed to eliminate these [black] laws on account of the sectional crisis.”

Far from being too occupied by national affairs, on the eve of the Civil War Illinois Republicans affirmed their commitment to legal inequality by refusing to alter or abolish any laws that denied basic natural and civil rights to the state’s black population.

“To Protect the Rights of the White Race”: The 1860 Election

In the presidential election of 1860, the sectional divisions that had intensified during the preceding decade could no longer be contained. Southern Democrats refused to tolerate anything less than full support for the expansion of slavery. They bolted the party, ran their own candidate, and vowed to secede if Lincoln were elected. Stephen A. Douglas won the nomination from the northern faction of the Democratic Party. In Illinois, with the exception of some pockets mainly in Egypt, most Democrats supported Douglas. Although there were four presidential contenders in 1860 (including the

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ephemeral Constitutional Union Party), the election in Illinois amounted to a battle between its two adopted sons.

The stakes of the election were high for Illinoisans not only at the national level but also at the state level. The party that controlled the state legislature would send a senator to Washington. Additionally, it would dictate the terms of congressional apportionment (which, based on the 1860 census, gave Illinois five additional congressional seats) as well as a new legislative apportionment act. The current legislative districting did not reflect the recent population increase in northern Illinois and therefore gave Democrats an advantage in maintaining control of the General Assembly. Republicans still fumed over Douglas’s appointment to the Senate in 1858 despite Republican legislators winning a majority of the popular vote.\(^5\) The *Quincy Whig Republican* advised its readers that capturing the legislature in 1860 was “far more important” than winning the presidency or governorship.\(^6\) Before Lincoln received the Republican nomination, the *Chicago Tribune* backed his candidacy as a way to increase Republican chances for the legislature: “Constables are worth more than Presidents in the long run, as a means of holding political power. The Legislature is of vastly more consequence to particular States than their delegations in Congress. We look to Mr. Lincoln to tow constables and General Assembly in power.”\(^7\)

Doing so would require gaining ground in the highly contested region of central Illinois, where Republicans failed to attract former Whigs four years earlier.\(^8\) The


\(^6\) *Quincy Whig Republican*, July 7, 1860.

\(^7\) *Chicago Tribune*, May 14, 1860.

sectional tensions that beset the nation were geographically reflected in Illinois; the northern counties were strongly Republican and the southern ones Democratic. Central Illinois, however, was a toss-up. Assessing the political landscape, the Republican Bloomington Pantagraph judged that “the real battle ground…is across the middle portion of the State… From the survey of the field, a tactician will see at a glance that the centre must be carried or the battle will be lost.”9 Contemplating a run for governor, Richard Yates wrote to a Republican Party activist that his strength lay in his ability to “neutralize the large democratic majorities in the centre, and at the same time carry the full party vote in all other parts of the State.”10

Illinois Republicans began the 1860 campaign with a tactical advantage by finalizing their state and presidential tickets more than a month before the fractured Democrats. The Illinois Republican State Convention met in early May 1860 at Decatur, where a large wigwam was constructed for the occasion. In addition to continuing to embrace free soil for the territories, the Decatur platform favored homestead legislation, called for the admission of Kansas as a free state, and courted immigrants with anti-nativist naturalization policies. A week later the Republican National Convention met in Chicago and nominated Lincoln for president. Similar in substance to the resolutions passed at Decatur, the national platform softened its rhetoric compared to the one four years earlier; slavery was no longer referred to as a remnant of “barbarism.” Yet, the

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9 Bloomington Pantagraph, May 15, 1860.

10 Richard Yates to J. T. Eccles, December 7, 1859, Joseph T. Eccles Papers, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.
1860 platform remained unwavering in its commitment to non-extension. Neither the national nor Illinois state platform mentioned race or took a position on black rights. From the spring months until the November election, Illinois residents participated in a spirited, contentious, and seemingly ubiquitous campaign. Andrew Heath, a school teacher in central Illinois, informed a New Hampshire cousin, “you never saw such enthusiasm as there is here.” A Beardstown resident described the political climate as one of “great agitation.” The Urbana Clarion, an independent paper, lamented that “politics seem to enter into everything, and very little attention is now paid to anything unless it be mixed up in some way with the political movements of the day.” The Clarion lasted until September, when it was sold to a new proprietor who printed it under a different name as a Douglas organ. Rallies, club meetings, parades, torchlight processions, and speeches held throughout the state attracted thousands of spectators. A bystander at a Republican rally in the western town of Carthage described the festive atmosphere: “At 9 o’clock the delegations could be seen approaching town from every direction, with flags and cannons innumerable, headed by brass bands and martial music; and by twelve o’clock our streets were completely jammed full of wagons and carriages of every description.” Many towns ceremoniously erected poles to honor a particular candidate or to hang an opponent in effigy. A Lincoln and Hamlin pole raised

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13 John Hearsher to David Harrower, August 26, 1860, David Harrower Papers, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.
14 Urbana Clarion, September 1, 1860.
16 Chicago Tribune, October 3, 1860.
in Avon (Fulton County) was 129 feet tall and “as graceful as the ‘tall cedars of Lebanon.””

The formation of a new political organization called the Wide Awakes injected additional enthusiasm into the campaign season. Comprised mainly of young, non-affluent, white males, the Wide Awakes canvassed for Lincoln by imitating military formations, replete with ranks, uniforms, drills, and torches. This national grassroots movement was particularly popular in battleground states. Local companies formed throughout Illinois. The Chicago Tribune reported that William H. Seward’s visit in October attracted 10,000 Wide Awakes, whose procession through the city measured three miles. Although they adopted a militaristic comportment, they were focused on organization and discipline, not violence. A brawl between “drunken Douglastites” and Wide Awakes in Mt. Vernon, which left one person with seven stab wounds, was an anomaly during an otherwise peaceful though energetic campaign.

Illinois Democrats tried to match the Wide Awakes through similar organizations such as the Hickory Club, Douglas Invincibles, Roundabouts, and Ever-Readies, but they never matched the size and enthusiasm of their Republican counterpart. This reflected larger organizational problems plaguing the Illinois Democratic Party. In early August, the Chicago Tribune praised the efficiency and productivity of local Republican groups

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17 Chicago Tribune, June 11, 1860.
19 Chicago Tribune, October 3, 1860.
20 Chicago Tribune, September 21, 1860.
throughout the state. But that same week, the *Illinois State Register*, one of the leading Douglas papers in the state, implored its readers that “*the state must be organized*.”

Democrats could not match the Republicans in terms of grassroots organization, number and quality of orators, breadth of canvassing, or strength of leadership, but this did not deter them from launching a relentless campaign to discredit their opponents by smearing them as “Black Republicans,” “Nigger Worshippers,” and “amalgamationists.”

In stump speeches and editorials throughout the state, Democrats raised the specter of racial equality and warned that a Republican victory would be fatal to white supremacy. Conflating anti-slavery with racial egalitarianism, Democrats accused the Republican Party of being “as openly and squarely committed in favor of the doctrine of negro equality as it is in favor of ‘freedom and free negroes.’” A vote for a Republican was a vote for “negroism, negro equality, abolitionism, Lovejoyism, Lincolnism and every other foulism.” Democratic papers needed no further proof of Republican intentions beyond the presence of blacks in political rallies. In an article titled “Another Nigger in the Crowd,” the *Quincy Herald* claimed that a “mulatto” marched in full uniform in a Wide Awakes procession at Colchester, demonstrating that “these republicans are beginning to reduce their theory of negro equality to practice.” A similar scene reportedly occurred at Rock Island, where a white and black man “join[ed]
When actual African Americans could not be found, Democrats created visual representations of them. At Griggsville, located 70 miles west of Springfield, Democrats replaced the flag on a Lincoln pole with one depicting a “big nigger.” Further south, in Carlinville, a Democrat procession began with a banner depicting “the head of a negro—with widely distended mouth,” followed by “a black man and white woman; the little niggers, big niggers, and Douglas himself just behind a huge nigger-head.”

Beyond attempting to discredit Republicans by associating them with black equality, Democrats promoted themselves as the defenders of white interests. Underlying this assertion was a belief that the possession of rights was a zero-sum formula: any improvement in the lives of African Americans would be at the detriment of whites. In an editorial entitled “The Greatest Danger to Illinois,” the Illinois State Register articulated these views by painting a nightmarish scenario of what would become of Illinois under Republican control. The prosperity of the state, argued the Register, was due to the Democratic “policy to make and preserve Illinois as a state for white people.” Laws that deterred blacks from coming to the state and turning Illinois into “an asylum for the worthless free negro population of the whole valley of the Mississippi” had successfully kept the black population low. Because Illinois was not “contaminated by the society of negroes,” immigrants of the “hardy, industrious, free white laboring and agricultural population” poured in from other states and Europe; “at present Illinois is known all the world over as the state where the white race has exclusive possession of the soil, and of

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28 *Fairfield Prairie Pioneer*, October 26, 1860.

29 Reuben B. Hatch to Ozias M. Hatch, May 23, 1860, O. M. Hatch Papers, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.

30 *Chicago Tribune*, August 7, 1860.
its government.” This white paradise was in peril if Republicans triumphed in November. They would repeal the blacks laws and “degrade the white man by abolishing the distinctions between the two races.” The state would become inundated by “idle, ignorant and broken down” blacks, who would drive away white immigrants. In this dystopian scenario, “the negro and the white man are to sit down together in all the freedom and equality of brothers of a common race.”

This perception of Illinois Republican racial ideology existed more in Democratic rhetoric than it did in reality. In fact, Illinois Democrats were hard pressed to find many concrete instances of pro-black Republican thought or deed in Illinois and therefore sought confirmation of their claims in the more liberal eastern states. For example, the *Prairie Pioneer* in Fairfield cited a Pittsburgh Republican paper that applauded efforts in New York to remove the property qualification for black voters, to which the *Pioneer* could only respond, “such it will soon be in Illinois.”

The need to smear Illinois Republicans by associating them with out-of-state radicals was indicative of the conservative orientation of the Northwest. In general, among northern states, racial prejudice was the most severe in the lower Midwest. The earliest white Americans who settled in the region came from the Upland South and hoped to create a roughly egalitarian society exclusively for whites. With one exception, the only free states to pass laws prohibiting black settlement were all located in the Midwest. Although New England immigrants infused the northern tier of Illinois with a reforming zeal and moral

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31 Illinois State Register, September 14, 1860.
32 Fairfield Prairie Pioneer, October 26, 1860.
33 Berwanger, *Frontier Against Slavery*, 78-81. That one exception was Oregon, which entered the Union in 1859 with a black exclusion clause in its constitution. At that time many of Oregon’s white migrants were born or had lived in the Old Northwest and would have likely been familiar with the black laws there.
aversion to slavery during the 1840s and 1850s, many in the state distrusted the anti-slavery movement and its relationship to abolitionism and racial equality. Illinois Republicans learned this lesson in the 1856 presidential election, when former Whigs in central and southern Illinois flocked to Fillmore over Frémont, thereby handing the state to Buchanan.34

Illinois Republicans understood the importance of distancing themselves from the radical wing of the party and consequently emphasized their conservative credentials during the 1860 campaign. Because it came into existence to battle forces that would destroy the nation’s founding principles, the Belleville Advocate declared that “the great conservative party of the country is the Republican party.” By striving to preserve the government as it is, the Republican Party is “not only not ultra, but essentially conservative.”35 Similarly, the Amboy Times stressed that the Republican Party was organized to “oppose a revolutionary party,” the one that overthrew the Missouri Compromise.36 Early in 1860, the Bureau County Republican proposed conducting a vigorous public speaking campaign in southern Illinois, where the Democracy was deeply entrenched. Conceding the region without a fight would legitimize their opponent’s characterization of them as radicals. Southern Illinoisans only needed “to learn our principles” in order “to embrace them.” Therefore, reasoned the Republican, “send down there our best men—such men as they have said we were afraid to send…Let them see

35 Belleville Advocate, February 17, 1860.
36 Amboy Times, July 26, 1860.
Lovejoy, with his horns, and his ‘iron-wooden shovel,’ and let them see that we are as conservative here as the Republicans in Egypt” [emphasis added].

This was exactly the strategy that Illinois Republicans adopted for the 1860 campaign. In addition to a thorough canvass of central Illinois, Republicans marshaled their resources to extract every Republican vote they could out of Egypt. Republicans from diverse political heritages—Democrats, Know-Nothings, and Whigs—mounted the hustings throughout southern Illinois. Hoping to attenuate their nativist association, Republicans heavily courted German immigrants, many of whom who had become increasingly disillusioned with the Democratic Party since the Kansas-Nebraska Act.

Gustavus Koerner and John Scheel delivered speeches in their native tongue to the large German populations in Madison and St. Clair counties. All this labor bore fruit. In June, the Chicago Tribune reported the establishment of nineteen new or realigned newspapers dedicated to the Republican cause in central and southern Illinois. These new Republican papers appeared as far south as Sparta and Shawneetown. “This is bearding the lion in his den,” quipped the Tribune. When the Democratic paper in Benton raised the Lincoln banner, John A. Logan purchased it rather than have a Republican organ in his town.

According to the editors of the Franklin County Democrat, they were forced “to sell at a

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37 Bureau County Republican, January 12, 1860.
38 James, “Lincoln’s Own State in the Election of 1860,” 303.
40 Chicago Tribune, September 1, 1860.
41 Chicago Tribune, June 11, 1860.
very ruinous sacrifice, or suffer the consequences of mob violence” if they did not turn the press over to “Dirty Work” Logan.42

One of the most interesting maneuvers used by the Republicans during the campaign was deploying Owen Lovejoy, brother of martyred abolitionist Elijah Lovejoy, to stump for the party throughout the state, including Egypt. Owen Lovejoy was a highly controversial figure in his own right. For seventeen years he had preached against slavery from his pulpit in Princeton, Illinois, and gained a reputation as one of the leading abolitionists in the state. In 1856 he was elected to Congress, where he continued to attack slavery as a sinful institution. During the 1856 and 1858 elections, Lovejoy mainly stumped within his own district, but in 1860 the Republican State Central Committee approved a plan for Lovejoy to go on a swing around the state. Lovejoy delivered more than one hundred speeches, the majority of which were outside his own congressional district.43 This was a seemingly baffling decision at a time when Republicans needed to reassure voters, especially those in the doubtful central counties, that they did not represent the radical views that Lovejoy espoused.

Using Lovejoy was a risky yet calculated move that was most likely based on the same theory proposed by the Bureau County Republican earlier that year: a known enemy is less potent than an imagined one. Lovejoy already had an infamous reputation in southern Illinois. Isolating him would invite Democratic charges of hypocrisy and deceit about the Republicans’ true intentions regarding slavery. This would bolster Stephen Douglas’s claim that the Republican creed in Illinois “assumes paler shades as

42 Jones, Black Jack, 61-62. For an account of this incident by the editors of the Franklin County Democrat, see the Illinois State Journal, September 20, 1860.

By directly confronting his detractors in hostile territory, Lovejoy could control his own message.

For the most part, Lovejoy’s speeches were centered around conventional Republican talking points: the benefits of homesteading, importance of keeping slavery out of the territories, and the erosion of constitutional liberties by the Slave Power. His notoriety attracted spectators who would otherwise never attend a Republican rally. A paper in Springfield commented on the “Douglasite[s]” who were “looking on and listening with their mouths wide open” while Lovejoy explained the differences between the Republican and Democratic homestead bills. In southern Illinois, Lovejoy frequently conducted a mock jury trial where he impaneled twelve audience members, had them swear an oath, and then presented a defense of the Republican Party against Democratic indictments. On one occasion, a jury that had nine Douglas supporters returned a unanimous verdict of “not guilty” for the Republican Party, indicating, as one newspaper correspondent observed, Lovejoy’s ability to “make a number of converts.”

Lovejoy did not conceal his abolitionism but he was careful to distance it from the Republican Party. At a campaign speech in Freeport, Lovejoy told his listeners, “personally, I may, in my opinions go further than the Republicans, but I go so far with them, my way, as they go. If I want to go to Chicago and you offer me a ride half way, I go with you as far as you go.” In regards to racial equality, Lovejoy also went further than many Illinois Republicans by embracing the universality of natural rights (a position

44 Congressional Globe, Senate, 36th Cong., 1st sess., February 29, 1860, 920.
47 Moore and Moore, His Brother’s Blood, 218.
also held by Lincoln), but he defended his beliefs within a conservative framework. At
the Chicago Wigwam in October, Lovejoy explained that he would not give up the
Declaration of Independence: “All men are entitled to life, to liberty, and to the fruit of
their own honest toil….And these Democrats in appealing to men’s prejudices against the
colored man, which is universal, are attempting to unloose this government from its old
granite moorings…This is what they call my radicalism, because I go back to the root of
the thing.” He followed this by declaring, “I know very well that the African race as a
race is not equal to ours. I know very well as a matter of fact, that in regard to the great
overwhelming majority, this government may be considered in a certain sense of
government for white men.”

Lovejoy remained silent on whether he was among that overwhelming majority.

Though seemingly illogical and potentially disastrous, the Republicans’ use of
Lovejoy to underscore their conservatism appeared to be a success. Rather than
sequestering Lovejoy, they used his reputation to their advantage and effectively pulled
off a political bait-and-switch. Take, for example, John Palmer’s introduction of Lovejoy
at a large rally in the southwestern town of Rockbridge:

Fellow-citizens: I suppose there is not in this vast assemblage a man, woman, or
child who has not heard Owen Lovejoy, the “raw head and bloody bones” of the
Republican party, and I have no doubt, from the reports which have been
circulated in reference to the gentleman, that many of you are prepared to see him
wearing all the outward insignia of the Prince of Darkness. In order, then, that you
may all have a fair view of the cloven feet, hoofs, horns, and tail of my
formidable friend, the rail has been taken away, and I now have the pleasure of
introducing him to you.  

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Instead of raining fire and brimstone upon the audience, Lovejoy delivered standard Republican rhetoric. The *Illinois State Journal* praised a speech Lovejoy gave in Springfield as a triumphant refutation of “the charge of abolitionism and negro equality which has so often and so malignantly been hurled against him, and [he] proved himself to be at least as moderate and conservative as any man or set of men in the nation.”

Referring to a speech he gave at Mattoon, a letter to the editors of the *Illinois State Journal* remarked that “Lovejoy excelled even himself, many saying that if these sentiments were Republican, then they were Republican, thus rebuking the extremist views that are supposed to be entertained by that gentleman. The ball of civil revolution is in accellerated [sic] motion from all directions.” A correspondent of the *New York Times* declared Lovejoy to be the king of Illinois stump speakers and the principal card played by the Republicans in Southern Illinois. A general impression prevails (and rightly) that he is furiously ultra, and he is ordinarily introduced as “the ogre”—“the man who takes a couple of darkies for breakfast,” &c. &c. Whereupon, a bland, portly gentleman appears, three parts benevolence and the rest fun and jollity, and the audience, after laughing with him for a couple of hours are ready to scout the notion of his being a fanatic.

In one case, Democrat James S. Martin, hoping to frighten voters away from the Republican Party, paid part of the expenses to bring Lovejoy to Marion County. Not far into the speech Martin realized he “had made a bad investment.”

A telling counterpoint to the Republican Party’s embrace of Lovejoy was its disavowal of “Long John” Wentworth, mayor of Chicago and editor of the *Chicago Democrat*, for advocating radical principles. Wentworth was a colorful but polarizing

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figure with unbridled personal ambition. He had already made a number of enemies in
the Republican Party when he joined it as an anti-Nebraska Democrat in 1856. One of
these was Norman Judd, chairman of the State Central Committee in 1858 and 1860.
Their feud had escalated to the point where Judd filed a $100,000 libel suit against
Wentworth in December of 1859 for insinuating in the Democrat that he was involved in
the canal script fraud. For the sake of party unity, Lincoln attempted to mediate a
compromise between the two. When the Republican State Convention met in Decatur
that following May, it snubbed Wentworth by passing him over as a delegate to the
National Convention, which was being held later that month in Chicago. The Republican
mayor of Chicago was an onlooker to the party’s national convention while Judd worked
the floor to orchestrate Lincoln’s nomination.  

The tone of the Democrat became extremely radical during the summer and fall
months leading up to the election. Wentworth sang the praises of John Brown, predicted
that Lincoln’s election would bring about universal emancipation, urged the repeal of the
state’s black laws, and called upon the State Committee to pay the fines of individuals
who were convicted under the Fugitive Slave Act. Democratic papers throughout the
state gleefully reprinted Wentworth’s editorials as proof of Republicans’ true radical
convictions. Many Republicans were outraged by Wentworth’s actions, viewing it as
retaliation for being slighted and an overt attempt to malign the party. His biographer
agrees, noting, “it was hard to believe that a man so renowned for his political cunning

54 Don E. Fehrenbacher, Chicago Giant: A Biography of “Long John” Wentworth (Madison: American
History Research Center, 1957), 162-75, 178-80.
55 For example, see Chicago Daily Democrat June 2, July 31, October 6, 7, 9, 20, 22, 1860.
could be unaware of the damage he was causing." Wentworth never showed his hand, so his intentions can only be conjectured. After the election, he continued to support black rights. In 1861 he successfully fought for the admission of a black student to a Chicago Normal program and personally handed her a diploma two years later. As a U.S. Representative from 1865-67 he supported the Civil Rights Bill and the Fourteenth Amendment. Thus is it possible that his burgeoning radicalism in 1860 was sincere, which, even if true, would still not exclude the possibility that he also used it as a weapon against his enemies.

Regardless of Wentworth’s motivations, the way in which other Republicans reacted to him reveals how firmly the party adhered to a conservative narrative. Wentworth was toxic and many Republicans could not disown him fast enough. The Greenville Advocate called Wentworth a traitor who is “laboring to defeat its nominees, by attributing to them doctrines which they never held, and by creating the impression that the party is pledged to the abolition of slavery wherever it exists.” A letter to the Chicago Tribune, signed by “A Republican,” accused Wentworth of playing the part of abolitionist “to furnish ammunition to the Dirty Work Logan’s [sic] to fire at Republicans—holding their party in Egypt responsible for Wentworth’s hypocritical ultraisms…The mask will be thrown off ere long, when he will resume his place as a pro slavery leader among the Irish Democracy. Let no Republican be deceived by his present dissimulation. He is a black-hearted traitor and spy in our camp.” The editors of the

56 Fehrenbacher, Chicago Giant, 180-81.
57 Fehrenbacher, Chicago Giant, 201; McCaul, Black Struggle for Public Schooling, 58-59.
58 Greenville Advocate, August 16, 1860, quoted in Fehrenbacher, Chicago Giant, 181.
59 “A Republican,” letter to the editor, Chicago Tribune, October 9, 1860.
Tribune complained that Wentworth’s “new born” doctrines, which “have no place in the Republican creed,” were used by Democrats so that “the hypocrisy of Republicans who deny them is rebuked, and in which Lincoln, Trumbull and their friends are made responsible for all the balderdash which John Wentworth is pleased to utter. ‘Did I not tell you so? Nigger equality.’” The Illinois State Journal was more circumspect but no less clear: “Mr. Wentworth speaks only for himself. Mr. Wentworth alone is responsible for what appears in his paper.”

Wentworth was an easy target for Illinois Republicans to censure because his views were so extreme. More problematic were those Republicans whose racial views were more moderate. Take, for example, the views of the party leader. In a speech at Chicago in 1858, Lincoln stated, “let us discard all this quibbling about this man and the other man—this race and that race and the other race being inferior, and therefore they must be placed in an inferior position—discarding our standard that we have left us. Let us discard all these things, and unite as one people throughout this land, until we shall once more stand up declaring that all men are created equal.” Democrats proved to have a keen recollection of these words two years later. To counter accusations that Lincoln endorsed complete racial equality, the Illinois State Journal, Lincoln’s unofficial organ, explained what Lincoln meant in that speech. He believed, the paper asserted, that the “abstract idea” of equality was true, but he “does not and never did desire the social and political equality of blacks and white.” Furthermore, reassured the paper, Lincoln “believes precisely as Henry Clay did, that the best remedy for the evils of such

60 Chicago Tribune, October 13, 1860.
pernicious intercourse and amalgamation, either under slave society or free society, is a SEPARATION OF THE RACES.  

The Journal did not venture to explain how such a separation could be achieved. Importantly, Lincoln’s embrace of “abstract” universal natural rights had no practical consequences for the legally sanctioned system of black oppression in Illinois.

Richard Yates, Republican candidate for governor, faced a similar but more tangible difficulty during the campaign. As a state representative in 1849, he voted against tabling a resolution that recommended the “tyrannical, iniquitous, and oppressive” black laws be “modified, amended, and altered.” He also obstructed any attempts to pass a law in accordance with the Fourteenth Article of the 1848 Constitution, which would prohibit immigration of blacks to the state. In 1860, Democratic editors and orators, including the nominee for governor, James Allen, revived Yates’s legislative record. Allen interpreted Yates’s vote against tabling the black law resolution as an endorsement of black suffrage and interracial marriage. The Prairie Pioneer labeled Yates as the “drivling [sic] negro-equality convicted candidate.” A lawyer at a Democratic club meeting in Bloomington claimed it proved that Yates intended to “remove all legal distinction, between whites and blacks in the state, and place them on a legal equality.”

While Democrats naturally construed Yates’s record in the most radical manner possible, Republicans downplayed its significance. The Scott County News correctly pointed out that the black laws resolution that Yates voted against tabling did not specify which laws

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63 Illinois State Journal, August 17, 1860.
64 Journal of the House (1849), 15, 480, 494-95, 510-11.
66 Fairfield Prairie Pioneer, August 31, 1860.
67 Illinois Statesman, reprinted in the Illinois State Register, August 9, 1860.
should be altered and to what extent. The News reasoned that the aim of the resolution was not to repeal any of the black laws but simply to “strip them of some of their unjust features,” such as withholding school funds from black taxpayers and selling any blacks caught without a certificate of freedom into bondage for a year. These two relatively benign examples offered by the News were unlikely to alarm whites because they did not undermine racial exclusion or white privilege. In any case, the paper added, “Yates simply voted against laying the resolution on the table. That is all.”

During the course of the campaign, Republicans did not just defend themselves against Democratic allegations of racial equality. They responded in kind by accusing Democrats of being the true fanatics for black rights and the ones gripped with “niggerism.” A “Catechism on Negro Equality” was reprinted in Republican newspapers throughout Illinois, which highlighted Democratic involvement in securing black citizenship and suffrage in some eastern states. In a few years’ time, many of these same papers would fully embrace those causes, but in 1860 they served as political ammunition. A correspondent to the Belleville Advocate asserted that the “wooly headed democracy” is the true “nigger party” because it relied on the influence of slaves through the three-fifths clause to control the federal government. Republicans could not resist calling out the hypocrisy of being labeled amalgamationists when the sexual relationships masters had with their slaves were widely known. J. Baker, a resident of Belleville, suggested the appellative of “Mulatto Democracy” as a fitting label for his opponents due

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69 *Aledo Weekly Record*, October 23, 1860.

70 *Belleville Advocate*, January 4, 1860.
to their desire to “Africanize” the population, whereas the name “Black Republicanism” was fitting because Republicans abhorred interracial mixing.\(^{71}\)

One of the most common ways in which Republicans turned the table on Democratic accusations of racial equality was by pointing out that it was Democrats, not they, who wanted to populate the territories with blacks. Republicans mockingly suggested that the Democratic motto should be “niggers for the niggerless.”\(^{72}\) By denying the right of whites to refuse to work alongside slaves, Democrats, argued the *Illinois State Journal*, “maintain the only practical ‘nigger equality’ that is maintained in this country…Republicans oppose the extension of slavery into the Territories because it compels the white laborer to work beside the negro, and degrades labor into the occupation of a menial.”\(^{73}\) The *Chicago Tribune* reasoned that “there will be no ‘nigger equality’ where there are no ‘niggers,’ and as the Republican party propose to save the Territories for free white men, while the Democracy leave a way open for their introduction, it is difficult to see how the slang phrase here quoted applied to any other party than themselves.”\(^{74}\)

As the last two quotations suggest, Illinois Republican strategy was not simply to counter Democratic charges of racial equality by holding up a mirror. Rather, Republicans went on the offensive by declaring that they were the true standard-bearers of white interests. This approach was not unique to Republicans in Illinois. With the exception of the Radical wing of the party, many mainstream Republicans across the

\(^{71}\) *Belleville Advocate*, September 28, 1860.

\(^{72}\) *Bureau County Republican*, June 7, 1860.

\(^{73}\) *Illinois State Journal*, October 1, 1860.

\(^{74}\) *Chicago Tribune*, September 5, 1860.
nation were predominantly concerned with slavery as a threat to white freedom. Yet because of the racial conservatism of the lower Midwest, Republicans living there overstated this aspect of their party’s ideology. Early in 1857, Republican state legislators and party supporters met in Springfield to define their principles. Included among their resolutions was a declaration that “the Republican party is emphatically the white man’s party, owing its first and highest fealty to him.”\(^{75}\) This sentiment remained paramount three years later. In an article titled “A Short Talk About Republicanism,” the *Chicago Tribune* stressed that “Republicanism seeks rather to protect the rights of the white race than to redress the wrongs inflicted upon the negro…As a political organization it has nothing to do with the question of abolishing slavery, or bettering the condition of the slaves.”\(^{76}\) Republicans in Illinois stressed that opposition to the spread of slavery was not based on moral concern for slaves but was instead motivated by the conviction that free labor was superior to slave labor because it allowed for social mobility, economic independence, and equality of opportunity. Slavery was free labor’s antithesis; it stifled innovation, precluded the development of a middle class, and stigmatized hard work. The *Tribune* pledged that the Republican Party could save whites from the “degradation which always follows from close contact with slavery.”\(^{77}\)

These defenses of white freedom were fundamental to the Republican vision of westward expansion and propagation of free labor. Without the safety valve of westward expansion, Republicans feared that urban areas would mushroom into teeming centers of destitution, violence, and vice. More importantly, they believed the West was a beacon

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\(^{75}\) *Chicago Tribune*, February 21, 1857.

\(^{76}\) *Chicago Tribune*, February 25, 1860.

\(^{77}\) *Chicago Tribune*, February 25, 1860.
for wage laborers that would allow them to become landowners and achieve economic independence. For Republicans, this was not simply an economic philosophy; it was essential for the survival of democracy. Because slavery was incompatible with free labor, the contest over western lands meant that the survival of one worldview depended on the extinction of the other.\footnote{Foner, \textit{Free Soil}, ix-xxxix, 11-73.} As judge Friedrich Hassaurek, a native of Germany living in Ohio, declared when he stumped in Illinois in July, “the question to be decided by the suffrages of the people at the coming election, is not a question of negro slavery; but it is a question whether those vast and beautiful Territories, now free, shall be preserved to the free labor of white men, or whether they shall be surrendered to the blight of slavery. It is not a black, but a white question.”\footnote{\textit{Illinois State Journal}, August 1, 1860.} When in 1858 Lincoln famously said, “this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free,” his words were not hyperbole. He and many in his party believed that the country would eventually “become all one thing, or all the other.”\footnote{Abraham Lincoln, “‘A House Divided’: Speech at Springfield, Illinois,” June 16, 1858, in Basler, \textit{Collected Works}, 2:461.} As the West went, so went the nation.

Consequently, Republicans championed public land reform through homesteading. This would allow settlers to obtain federal land for free or at low cost in exchange for improving the land and maintaining residency for a minimum length of time.

Homesteading gained momentum in the mid-1840s when Horace Greeley, editor of the influential \textit{New York Tribune}, embraced the cause as a way to alleviate poverty in the East. A few years later, the Free Soil Party’s platform included a plank endorsing the “free grant to actual settlers… of reasonable portions of the public lands,” thereby linking homesteading to the anti-slavery movement. Land reform found a natural and powerful
ally with the Republican Party.\(^\text{81}\) Pennsylvania Representative Galusha A. Grow, a leading proponent of homesteading, explained how it was not a form of charity but vital for the enjoyment of natural rights: “For if a man has a right on earth, he has a right to land enough to rear a habitation on. If he has a right to live, he has a right to the free use of whatever nature has provided for his sustenance—air to breathe, water to drink, and land enough to cultivate for his subsistence; for these are the necessary and indispensable means for the enjoyment of his ‘life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.’” Moreover, homesteading was a way to reign in speculation, which privileged “dollars and cents” over “bones and sinews.”\(^\text{82}\) Republicans envisioned the western tracts being populated by yeoman farmers, artisans, and small businessmen. Pro-slavery advocates feared such an outcome. In addition to the dearth of arable land in the West, 160-acre farms would be unfavorable to the establishment of plantation slavery. Homesteading would disproportionately attract Northerners and small freeholders, which would ultimately increase the number of free states and threaten the political ascendancy of the slave states.\(^\text{83}\)

Understanding the political and ideological importance of the West and its role in the struggle over slavery helps explain why Illinois Republicans appealed to white self-interest throughout the 1860 campaign. They assured voters that the West would be reserved not just for non-slaveholders but specifically for white non-slaveholders. Speaking in front of the Young Men’s Republican Club in Chicago in February of 1860,

\(^\text{81}\) George M. Stephenson, *The Political History of the Public Lands from 1840 to 1862: From Pre-Emption to Homestead* (Boston: Richard G. Badger, 1917), 111-12, 135-36.

\(^\text{82}\) *Congressional Globe*, House of Representatives, 36\(^{\text{th}}\) Cong., 1\(^{\text{st}}\) sess., February 29, 1860, 128.

\(^\text{83}\) Benjamin Arrington, “‘Free Homes for Free Men’: A Political History of the Homestead Act, 1774-1863” (PhD diss., University of Nebraska, 2012), 154-64.
Leonard Swett, anticipating a run for governor, stated that “the cardinal doctrine of Republicanism” is to keep the West “for the poor white men of this country, for your children and mine, for the white men of the North and white men of the South.”\textsuperscript{84} The \textit{Daily Warsaw City Bulletin} asked whether the “vast and beautiful expanse of Western Territory now free, shall be peopled solely by free white men, or by a mixed population of white men and negro slaves.”\textsuperscript{85} A sign at a Republican rally in Lebanon conveyed this sentiment more succinctly: “The Territories—‘For free white Men—not for Slaves.’”\textsuperscript{86} Out on the hustings James Cunningham, campaigning for U.S. Representative in the Seventh District, told his audience that “I am for giving our Young Men and Women a chance in life, and preventing anything like negro equality or amalgamation—keeping the negroes out of the way in all the territories which will soon be States.”\textsuperscript{87} The same abhorrence for living alongside African Americans that motivated Illinois voters to endorse a ban on black immigration in 1848 translated into a desire for black exclusion from the territories.

Yet, even more than the 1848 vote, excluding African Americans from the territories had less to do with anxiety about interacting with blacks than it did with affirming white Northerners’ vision for the country. If the West represented the nation’s future, it was one that had no place for blacks, free or enslaved. Take, for example, Owen Lovejoy’s idyllic portrait of the West. Arguing in favor of a homestead bill before the U.S. House of Representatives on March 26, 1860, Lovejoy conjured up the image of a

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\textsuperscript{84} \textit{Bloomington Pantagraph}, February 9, 1860.
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\textsuperscript{86} \textit{Belleville Advocate}, June 15, 1860.
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\textsuperscript{87} \textit{Chicago Tribune}, August 22, 1860.
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pioneer “who during the day cultivates the soil which he owns, and returning in the
evening to meet the ‘wee ones’ running out to meet their father, and to enter the white
painted cottage to partake of the frugal evening meal with the mother and children; and
who, ere seeking the repose of the night, bows in silent adoration or in out-spoken prayer,
and implores Heaven’s blessing on the loved circle of which he is the constituted
protector and provider.” This imagined settler is the embodiment of the free labor
ideology: independent, hard working, thrifty, sober, patriarchal, and pious. He is, in
Lovejoy’s words, a member of the “middle class.” Lovejoy did not have to explicitly
state that his settler was white for it to be understood as such. Most Northern whites
viewed free blacks as inherently servile and dependent, incapable of social mobility, and
beyond the pale of American citizenship, much less middle class status. And in case this
implicit recognition was not sufficient, the Homestead Bill of 1860 (which was ultimately
vetoed by Buchanan) limited its privileges to U.S. citizens, so African Americans would
most likely have been ineligible.

During the debate over homestead legislation in 1860, one Republican senator
declared that restricting western lands to whites would result in the “final settlement of
the whole negro question.” Many Republicans believed that isolating slavery would
ultimately asphyxiate it. But this far from settled the “negro question.” For what would
become of manumitted slaves in a country that excluded them physically from the

89 Foner, Free Soil, xxvi-xxviii, 297; David M. Streifford, “The American Colonization Society: An
Application of Republican Ideology to Early Antebellum Reform,” The Journal of Southern History 45, no.
90 Horace Greeley and John F. Cleveland, eds., A Political Textbook for 1860: Comprising a Brief View of
91 Stephenson, Public Lands, 199.
territories (as well as some northern states, Illinois included) and ideologically from membership in the nation? This was not a new question. Unable to envision free blacks as productive, equal members of society, early nineteenth-century emancipation schemes were frequently premised upon racial separation. The American Colonization Society (ACS) was founded in 1816 to settle free and manumitted blacks in Africa, thus providing a path to gradually ending slavery while maintaining a homogenous racial population in America. As one white supporter of colonization remarked about free blacks, they are “separated from us by the insurmountable barrier of colour, they can never amalgamate with us, but must remain forever a distinct and inferior race, repugnant to our republican feelings, and dangerous to our republican institutions.”

This was Thomas Jefferson’s “wolf by the ear” scenario. Although the ACS faltered during the later antebellum period due to financial and logistical hardships as well as attacks from both abolitionists and pro-slavery partisans, the organization sent more individuals to Liberia between 1848-1860 than during any other period.

During the 1850s, some African Americans increasingly embraced emigration as a means of liberating themselves from white oppression or as an opportunity to establish an independent black nation. H. Ford Douglas, who escaped slavery and moved to Illinois in the early 1850s, became an impassioned emigrationist in the years leading up to the war. He held out little hope that the condition of free blacks could be ameliorated in a country where they existed “by the sufferance” of whites and were “slaves of the

community...placed under a despotism more absolute, if possible, than that exercised by a slave driver south, over his victim.”

Nonetheless, Douglas labored to repeal the state’s black laws. In 1858 he traveled throughout Illinois to collect signatures for a petition to allow blacks to testify in court and was refused by Lyman Trumbull and Lincoln. Two years later, at a speech on Independence Day in Framingham, Massachusetts, Douglas derided the Republican Party for its “barren and unfruitful” pretense of freedom: “No party, it seems to me, is entitled to the sympathy of antislavery men, unless that party is willing to extend to the black man all the rights of a citizen. I care nothing about that antislavery which wants to make the territories free, while it is unwilling to extend to me, as a man, in the free states, all the rights of a man.”

Douglas spent the following year working as a traveling agent in the Northwest, soliciting emigrees for James Redpath’s Haiti campaign.

While emigration gained traction among blacks in Illinois in the decade before the war, it remained a divisive issue and most rejected it. The first Illinois black state convention, held in Chicago in 1853, adopted a resolution lambasting colonization as a scheme “directly calculated to increase pro-slavery prejudice, to depress our moral energies, to unsettle all our plans for improvement, and finally to perpetuate the wicked and horrible system of slavery.”

In response to the Illinois Colonization Society’s plans to seek funding from the legislature, a group of blacks met in Springfield early in 1858 to convey, in no uncertain terms, that they did not wish to be expelled from the “land of our

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95 Provincial Freeman (Ontario), March 8, 1856.
96 Liberator (MA), July 13, 1860.
nativity” and only desired to be “let alone, and simply protected in our ‘inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness’ as are other citizens of the state.”

A few months later, black Chicagoans met to discuss the merits of colonization. H. Ford Douglas’s resolution stating that emigration was the only path to the elevation of the race was rejected by all but one participant. Instead, the group adopted a resolution avowing, “we have already planted our trees in the American soil, and by the help of God, we mean to repose under the shade thereof.” In an oblique criticism of the 1853 anti-immigration law, another resolution stated, “we believe nature has not prescribed any particular locality on this broad and beautiful earth for the special benefit and peculiar privilege of any one class to the entire exclusion of all others, not purely Anglo-Saxon, consequently in this important regard, all men have a natural right to live where it may seem best to them.”

An announcement in the Chicago Tribune in August of 1860 about a meeting in Jacksonville to organize a colony of Illinoisans in Liberia met with a sharp rebuke the following day. In a letter to the editor, Joseph Stanley wished to inform those wiseacres that the colored people of the State of Illinois repudiate in toto any movement or scheme on the part of those who favor emigration to Liberia or elsewhere…As American born citizens we are opposed to it, because it gives to our political enemies an opportunity to make capital, and encourages them in expatriating us from our land of birth…In spite of our oppressors we are rising in education and respectability, and as we cleave with firmness and pertinacity to our native homes, attracting sympathy and friends, the aiders and abettors of this emigration scheme will be hated and shunned by every lover of humanity.

The “political enemies” Stanley referred to included a number of Illinois Republicans. As a corollary of gradual emancipation, many Republicans strongly

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100 Chicago Tribune, August 31, 1860.

101 Joseph Stanley, letter to the editor, Chicago Tribune, August 31, 1860.
supported colonization, and the question of what to do with freed slaves was a politically charged issue during the 1860 election. In Illinois, a number of Republican papers and organizations that repudiated the idea that freed slaves could be incorporated into American society endorsed plans to remove the black population from the country. In an article supporting the non-extension of slavery, the *Belleville Advocate* felt it necessary to inform its readers that “our instinctive repulsiveness to a mixture, and equality of the two races, will always refuse a liberation of negro slaves to remain in this country.” As a panacea for the nation’s ills, the *Bloomington Pantagraph* proposed that the government institute a homestead plan for blacks in Central or South America. This would, the paper argued, promote voluntary emancipation among slaveholders, relieve the Midwestern states of the “free black population, which they do not want amongst them,” and be an “act of kindness” for the colonized by removing them from the “feeling of repulsion” that naturally existed between the races. The editorial urged the Republican Party to adopt colonization as a plank in their platform.

Although neither the state nor national Republican platform did endorse colonization, some local Illinois clubs did. The Randolph County Republicans’ platform included a plank resolving “that the African element in our population is productive of small advantage to the negro, and of great detriment to the white race, and that we hail with gratitude the progress of the colonization scheme, by which the blacks may be placed in a separate and independent position.” The liberal-leaning *Aledo Weekly Record* rejected the premise that freed slaves had to be colonized overseas. Rather, it

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102 *Belleville Advocate*, April 20, 1860.
103 *Bloomington Pantagraph*, April 4, 1860.
104 *Belleville Advocate*, April 13, 1860.
believed that this “great problem...of the 19th century” could be remedied by carving out an “asylum” somewhere in the supposedly boundless and unoccupied western frontier. There, African Americans would be relieved of the “wicked prejudice” that impeded their progress in the U.S. and the government could provide “encouragement and assistance as would lead to their elevation...even if political equality should not be granted.”

During the campaign of 1860, Illinois Republicans did not obfuscate their commitment to white supremacy. While their stance on race was integral to their election strategy, it is hard to reconcile it with Eric Foner’s assertion that Republican “expressions of racism were political replies to Democratic accusations rather than gratuitous insults to the black race.” Beyond denying Democratic allegations of racial equality, mainstream Illinois Republicans explicitly and repeatedly advanced a racially homogenous vision of the country where blacks were obstacles to free labor and republican virtue. Whether this view came mainly from former Democrats, as Foner argues, or from others who joined the Republican Party, it was a fundamental component of mainstream Illinois Republican ideology in 1860.

**A Republican Sweep**

Cannon shots greeted the sunrise on November 6, 1860, in Springfield. A record number of Illinoisans went to the polls that day, 40 percent more than in 1856. Despite accusations by both of the major parties in Illinois that the other transported groups of voters from secure to doubtful counties in order to gain an illegal advantage, the day passed without any major disturbances. Lincoln spent the much of the evening reading

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105 *Aledo Weekly Record*, February 21, 1860.
returns at the Illinois and Mississippi Telegraph Company office on the Capitol Square, leaving alone sometime after one thirty in the morning once his victory was assured.  

Republicans in Illinois had much to celebrate once the election results were finalized. Although their victories did not come with overwhelming majorities, they were victories nonetheless and left no doubt that the Republican Party was a formidable power in Illinois. With 51 percent of the votes, Lincoln bested Douglas by a margin of 12,000 in Illinois. He received 65 percent of the vote in northern Illinois, 49 percent in the central region, and 31 percent in southern Illinois. By comparison, Frémont had mustered only 13 percent of the vote in southern Illinois four years earlier. The partisan make-up of the congressional representatives remained unchanged (four Republicans and five Democrats), but Republican candidates received a higher percentage of the vote compared to 1858 in all but one congressional district, including the two southernmost ones. The entire executive Republican state ticket was elected and, perhaps most significantly, the party captured majorities in both houses of the state legislature for the first time in its short history.


108 Here, Southern Illinois is defined by the counties south of and including (from west to east): Calhoun, Jersey, Madison, Bond, Clinton, Marion, Clay, Richland, and Lawrence. Northern Illinois is defined by the counties north of and including (from west to east): Mercer, Henry, Bureau, Putnam, LaSalle, Grundy, and Will. Central Illinois includes the forty-seven counties in between. Percentages were calculated using Howard W. Allen and Vincent A. Lacey, eds., Illinois Elections, 1818-1990: Candidates and County Returns for President, Governor, Senate, and House of Representatives (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University and Press, 1992), 144-45.


110 Allen and Lacey, Illinois Elections, 11-12.
A closer look at how Republicans captured the state legislature confirmed predictions that central Illinois would play a decisive role in the election’s outcome. The Democrats previously controlled the senate 14-11. The 1860 election gave Republicans a 13-12 majority. The two seats that Republicans picked up were from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth districts, which fell within and adjacent to the geographic center of the state.\textsuperscript{111} Richard Oglesby, the Republican candidate from the Sixteenth District and future governor of the state, won by 244 votes out of 22,890 cast. The Republican candidate in the Seventeenth District won by 137 votes out of 14,647 cast. At the county level, both districts exhibited the partisan divide along the north-south axis that characterized the state as a whole. The northernmost counties of each district gave the Republican candidate a majority, the southernmost ones went Democratic, and the counties in the middle were split by close margins.\textsuperscript{112}

The returns for state representatives are even more compelling. While thirteen of twenty-five senate seats held over from the previous election, the entire lower chamber of the state legislature was up for election, thus providing a more precise depiction of Illinois voter preferences in 1860. The preceding house had a Democratic majority of five (40-35). In 1860, Republicans lost a seat in Edgar County but captured seven Democratic ones to give them a majority in the house (41-34). Four of those seats gained were in central and west central Illinois, one was in a district comprising Wayne and Edwards

\textsuperscript{111} The Sixteenth District was composed of Champaign, Christian Dewitt, Macon, McLean, Moultrie, Piatt and Shelby counties. The Seventeenth District was composed of Cass, Logan, Mason, Menard, and Tazewell counties.

\textsuperscript{112} Secretary of State, “Record of Election Returns,” Record Series 103.033, Illinois State Archives. The returns from Champaign County in the Sixteenth District are missing in the official returns. These numbers were found in the \textit{Central Illinois Gazette}, November 7, 1860.
counties in the southeast, and two seats were from Madison County in the southwest. The Republican candidate in the district composed of Wayne and Edwards counties won by only fifteen votes. A Democrat running as a third-party independent split the Democratic vote, thus enabling a Republican to capture a legislative seat in the heart of Egypt. In Madison County, which had two representative seats, the two Republican candidates beat their two Democrat rivals by a total of 118 votes. The large population of German immigrants in Madison County, whom the Republicans aggressively courted during the campaign, most likely tipped the scales in favor of the Republicans. The margins of victory in the central districts were similarly narrow.

Although the legislature now had a combined Republican majority of seven, the party’s dominance in Illinois was tenuous. All told, fewer than 1,500 votes accounted for the margin of victory for the two senate and seven house seats that switched from Democrat in 1858 to Republican in 1860. While many of the conservative Whig and Know-Nothing voters who rebuffed the Republican Party in 1856 joined its ranks in 1860, their future loyalty was not assured. That future became even more precarious with the secession of South Carolina in December. Facing an unprecedented national crisis, Illinois Republicans were poised to take control of a state about which a Chicago Tribune correspondent had remarked three years earlier, “there is not between South Carolina and Massachusetts—representative of the two opposing principles in our government, slavery and freedom—a more deadly hostility than between the ninth and first Congressional

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113 The central Illinois districts that became Republican included half of the Twenty-Sixth (Sangamon County—the two seats were split between each party); the Thirty-Second (McDonough County); the Thirty-Fifth (Mason and Logan counties); and the Thirty-Ninth (Tazewell County).

114 Secretary of State, “Record of Election Returns,” Record Series 103.033, Illinois State Archives; Cole, Era of the Civil War, 123-24, 190.

districts in this State.” 116 Illinois Republicans’ response to southern secession and their actions during the upcoming legislative session would demonstrate how committed they were to the principles upon which they came into power.

**Maintaining the Status Quo: The Twenty-Second General Assembly**

By the time the Illinois legislature convened in Springfield on January 7, 1861, South Carolina had already seceded. Six additional states followed over the next few weeks. In his inaugural address to the legislature, incoming governor Richard Yates expressed his desire for a non-violent resolution to the crisis but spurned any potential compromise that would concede that “slavery is a blessing—that we must love and praise it—that we may not hope for its ultimate extinction.” 117 During the secession winter Republicans throughout the state remained unwavering in their pledge to preserve the Union but only on the basis of the non-extension of slavery. This was the mandate upon which they had been constitutionally elected and they remained resolute to uphold it “at whatever hazard and whatever cost.” 118 In early February, William Kellogg, Republican U.S. representative from the Peoria congressional district, proposed a compromise measure that would permit the admittance of new slave states to the Union. His fellow party members in Illinois vociferously condemned Kellogg as a turncoat and the measure as an act of surrender. 119 The only acceptable action for Republicans to take at the present

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116 *Chicago Tribune*, February 14, 1857.
117 *Journal of the Senate of the Twenty-Second General Assembly of the State of Illinois, at Their Regular Session, Begun and Held at Springfield, January 7, 1861* (Springfield: Bailhache and Baker, 1861), 73.
118 *Chicago Tribune*, February 23, 1861.
time, advised the *Illinois State Journal*, was “to do nothing.” Any retreat from the Chicago platform would legitimize the doctrine of secession. As Lincoln understood the stakes in the winter of 1860-61, “if we surrender, it is the end of us, and of the government.”

The secession crisis did impinge on the business of the Illinois legislature during its opening session. In response to Virginia’s call for a peace conference, to be held in Washington, DC, in February, the legislature passed a resolution calling for the governor to appoint five commissioners to represent Illinois. The language of the resolution incited acrimony between the two parties. In their minority report, Democrats advocated the adoption of a constitutional amendment safeguarding slavery to resolve sectional strife while Republicans, in their majority report, repudiated such a measure. Moreover, Democrats failed to secure a guarantee that at least two Democrats would be appointed to the commission. Partisan rancor surfaced again later in the session, when house Republicans sent to the senate a resolution pledging “the whole resources of the State of Illinois…to Federal authorities.” Democrats pounced on it, renouncing the use of military force to coerce reunion. They also tacked on numerous resolutions of their own, including, to the chagrin of Republicans, an endorsement of Kellogg’s compromise plan. The looming prospect of war prompted Yates to request that the legislature pass a militia organization bill, but no agreement could be reached on it before the end of the regular session. However, contrary to Arthur C. Cole’s claim that the secession crisis interfered with the repealing of the black laws, the vast majority of the body’s labors

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122 *Journal of the Senate* (1861), 225-30, 359-64.
were spent dealing with state and local matters. The legislature passed more than 500 laws during its term, the majority of which were private bills. It even adjourned for three working days (out of a forty-one day session) to travel to Bloomington for the dedication of the State Normal University.

Republicans in the senate made no attempts to amend the state’s black laws, although they twice stymied Democratic legislation relating to runaway slaves, inspired most likely by the highly publicized “Ottawa Rescue Case.” In October 1859, a group of white abolitionists in Ottawa forcibly liberated a runaway Missouri slave from the custody of a United States Deputy. The most severe sentence handed down to the participants by the district court of Chicago was a $100 fine and ten days in jail. On the fourth day of the legislative session, Andrew Kuykendall, Democrat senator from far southern Johnson County, introduced a bill that imposed harsh mandatory fines and jail time on anyone convicted of obstructing the capture of runaway slaves. The penalties surpassed those dictated by the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. The following day, William Underwood, a Democrat representing St. Clair and Monroe counties, introduced a similar bill titled, “An Act to Preserve the Peace and Prevent Lawless and Revolutionary Conduct.” It called for a jail sentence of up to seven years for anyone harboring or secreting a fugitive slave. The Chicago Tribune assailed Kuykendall’s bill as a “contemptuous disregard” of personal liberty, while the Belleville Advocate

123 Laws of the State of Illinois (1861).
124 Chicago Tribune, October 9, 1860; Darrel Dexter, Bondage in Egypt: Slavery in Southern Illinois (Cape Girardeau: Center for Regional History, Southeast Missouri State University, 2011), 289-95.
125 For the text of Kuykendall’s bill, see the Illinois State Journal, January 11, 1861.
126 For the text of Underwood’s bill, see the Illinois State Journal, January 12, 1861.
127 Chicago Tribune, January 11, 1861.
rhetorically asked, “who introduces the nigger?” Most Republicans conceded the constitutionality of fugitive slave laws but had no inclination to strengthen them with severe penalties for white offenders. Both bills died in committee.

The house confronted race more directly during its proceedings. On January 11, Democrat William Green of Massac County, a far southern county bordering on Kentucky, offered a resolution relating to Illinois’s black laws. He began by asserting, “it is the policy of this State to encourage its population by the white race, and to prevent its population by all or any of the darker races.” He then proposed that the judiciary committee investigate whether additional legislation was needed to “increase the effectiveness” of the 1853 black exclusion law. Without any discussion, Green’s resolution passed the house 65 to 7. Far from being too occupied with national events to overturn the state’s black laws, Green’s resolution demonstrates that house Republicans supported them. The roll call reveals that thirty-two out of thirty-nine Republicans voted for the resolution. The seven votes against it all came from Republican representatives of far northern counties (Kane, DeKalb, Boone, McHenry, Lake, Winnebago, Bureau, LaSalle, Livingston, Grundy, and Lee). Although the Judiciary Committee never reported back on the resolution (possibly because the chairman was one of the seven who voted against it), this vote clearly shows how committed Republicans were in 1861 to upholding the principle of racial exclusion.

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128 *Belleville Advocate*, January 18, 1861.
129 *Journal of the Senate* (1861), 38, 42.
130 *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Twenty-Second General Assembly of the State of Illinois, at Their Regular Session, Begun and Held at Springfield, January 7, 1861* (Springfield: Bailhache and Baker, 1861), 51-52. Three members were absent during this vote: one Democrat and two Republicans.
131 The roll call is printed in the *Illinois State Journal*, January 12, 1861.
Another opportunity for house Republicans to amend the state’s black laws came later that month. On January 30, 1861, representative John Newport of Winnebago, a native Ohioan and former Free Soil Party member, introduced a bill to “repeal certain acts therein named, regarding negroes, mulattoes and Indians.”\textsuperscript{132} The exact substance of this bill was not recorded but the only contemporary statute that mentioned “negroes, mulattoes and Indians” together was one that prohibited their giving testimony or evidence where a white person was a party. Therefore it is likely that Newport’s bill proposed to allow non-whites to testify against whites. However, before it could be read a second time, the bill was tabled by a 52-15 vote.\textsuperscript{133} Mirroring the voting patterns of those who opposed Green’s resolution, the fifteen Republicans who voted against tabling Newport’s bill all represented northern Illinois counties; Harvey Hogg of McLean County represented the southernmost support for the bill. The majority of Republicans, twenty-three out of thirty-eight, voted to table Newport’s bill.\textsuperscript{134}

Four years later, Republicans in the legislature would vote unanimously to repeal the state’s blacks laws. But on the eve of the Civil War they sanctioned a legal code that deprived African Americans of natural rights. In doing so, they remained consistent with their campaign message that the Republican Party was committed first and foremost to white rights. The liberal \textit{Waukegan Weekly Gazette}, printed in the northeast county of Lake, nonetheless expressed hope at the beginning of the legislative term that the time was opportune to do away with the black laws: “we have now got both branches of the Legislature and all the State Officers, and if those infamous laws are not repealed the

\textsuperscript{132} \textit{Illinois State Journal}, February 7, 1861.

\textsuperscript{133} \textit{Journal of the House} (1861), 274. Eight members were absent during this vote: five Democrats and three Republicans.

\textsuperscript{134} The roll call is printed in the \textit{Illinois State Journal}, January 31, 1861.
present winter, the Republican party of the State will in future be held responsible of their existence on the statute book…*We will wait and see.*” It did not have to wait long. The *Gazette*’s Springfield correspondent wrote a few weeks later that “no repeal of the black laws will be carried during this session. Our Legislature is too conservative for that.”

Over the next four years, many Illinoisans, Republicans and Democrats, would shed their conservatism as they embraced abolitionism and the universality of natural (if not political) rights. These unforeseen consequences of the Civil War were far on the horizon, however, when Illinoisans responded to a call to arms and marched south in order to keep their society as it was.

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135 *Waukegan Weekly Gazette*, January 19, February 9, 1861.
Chapter 3:
“Going to Freedom”:
Confiscation, Contrabands, and the Swell of Abolition

In the summer of 1861, Joshua Dickerson laid down his carpentry tools, bid his wife and children goodbye, and went to war. “It is the preservation of a government that has protected us all that I am here for,” he reassured the family he left in Champaign. Nor did his resolve waiver on the eve of battle. As he and his fellow soldiers of the Thirty-Eighth Illinois Infantry prepared to move to the front lines in the siege of Corinth at the end of May 1862, Dickerson asked his wife Elmira not to grieve for him if he should fall but instead to console herself that he died trying to save a “good government.”

Dickerson emerged from that battle unscathed, but the high esteem he held for his government did not fare as well. As Dickerson marched through the South, he witnessed the horrors of slavery firsthand. “It almost makes me blush to think that I have been born and raised under a government that has tolerated such an institution,” he admitted in the fall of 1863. Before the war, Dickerson opposed interfering with slavery where it existed. But after spending two years in the South, he now recognized it as the cause of the war and a curse that needed to be fully eradicated before peace could be restored. He was no longer fighting for a government to safeguard his family. He now professed to be engaged “in the cause of Human Liberty” for the “future happiness and prosperity of millions yet unborn.”

Dickerson’s evolution from self-described conservative to radical is exceptional in regard to how well he articulated his own transformation. But that experience was not

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1 Joshua Dickerson’s letters are located at the Illinois History and Lincoln Collections, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The quoted material is from letters dated February 2, 1862, May 24, 1862, November 19, 1863, and December 2, 1863.
unique among the 259,092 soldiers, sailors, and marines from Illinois who took up arms against the Confederacy. Like Dickerson, the majority of Illinois troops had initially marched to war in order to compel the seceding states back into the Union, restore the country, and preserve the self-government that had been bequeathed to them. They did not intend, nor did they desire, to strike against slavery. As historian Gary W. Gallagher asserts, “Union always remained the paramount goal” of northern soldiers.2

Gallagher is correct in arguing that the Union remained the preeminent concern for the more than two million people who took up arms against the Confederacy and for the millions at home they left behind. But their idea of the Union—what it stood for, what it should strive for—did not remain static. By the close of the war, many Northerners demanded that reunification could only be achieved by the guarantee of slavery’s abolition. The consequences of this would be hotly contested during the war and well beyond, but for many, like Dickerson, the motivation to keep fighting was no longer about restoring the Union as it was but rather to remake it into something it never had been—a land that lived up to the promises made in the Declaration of Independence.

This chapter examines the initial catalysts that spurred Illinois troops toward support for abolition. For many enlistees, their deployments doubled as their introduction to the realities of slavery. Measured against their own values of free labor and self-making, they found the institution wanting. Some were appalled by the economic and intellectual stagnation of the lands they marched through, while others took offense at the physical abuses and moral transgressions systemic in the ownership of human property.

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In various ways, Illinois soldiers bore witness to the falsehoods uttered by slavery’s apologists.

Of all the defenses of the institution, none proved more obviously false than the idea that slaves were content with their status. As slaves learned that the invading forces might provide them with protection and a path to freedom, Union lines were overrun with fugitives. Although this created a political dilemma for the Lincoln administration, the troops on the ground recognized the obvious strategic advantage in depriving the rebels of this pool of labor. They could reap additional benefits by employing these “contrabands” in the Union war effort. This brought Illinois soldiers into contact with blacks, often for the first time, and paved the way for multi-racial alliances and relationships to form. By the second year of the war many Illinois volunteers had grown weary of half-measures and were increasingly strident in their criticism of generals and politicians who shielded rebel property. Realizing how central slavery was to the conflict in which they were entangled, they came to accept and even advocate the immediate and complete abolition of slavery as necessary for national reunification.

Illinois Goes to War

The firing on Fort Sumter shattered the pall of uncertainty across the North. Two days after federal forces evacuated the fort, Lincoln called for 75,000 three-month militiamen to quash the rebellion. Illinoisans responded enthusiastically. Ten thousand offered their services within ten days, far exceeding the War Department’s request for six regiments.\(^3\) Scores of volunteers continued to organize throughout the state in hopes of

being mustered into the army while others, not wanting to miss the window for action on
the battlefield, enrolled in other states. Women stitched flannel shirts and bandages,
presented flags to newly formed companies, and procured food for training camps.
Governor Yates summoned a special session of the legislature in order to meet the
logistical demands of war. Convening on April 23, 1861, the legislators swiftly wrote
laws that reorganized the militia, created a war fund, and criminalized the giving of “aid,
advice or comfort” to the enemy.

The last provision was made with a wary eye to the southern reaches of the state.
With strong familial, cultural, and economic ties to the slave states, Egypt’s loyalty to the
Union was not assured. The same day that Lincoln issued the first call for volunteers, a
group of twelve men met at a saloon in Marion (the county seat of far southern
Williamson County) to discuss a course of action. This “Illinois Committee for Southern
Rights” (referred to as “Jeff Davis’ Twelve Apostles” by its detractors) resolved to “use
all means in our power” to secede southern Illinois from the rest of the state and join the
ranks of the Confederacy. Meetings held at Vienna and Carbondale advocated similar
schemes. The *Jonesboro Gazette*, which would be suppressed temporarily in 1863 for

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5 *Bloomington Pantagraph*, May 1, 22, 1861, in *It Is Begun!: The Pantagraph Reports the Civil War*, ed.
Don Munson (Bloomington: McLean County Historical Society, 2001), 14-15, 20-21; *Lincoln Herald*, May
30, 1861, in *Logan County, Illinois During the Civil War: The Early Years, As Reported in The Lincoln
7 *Cairo City Gazette*, April 25, 1861; Ed Gleeson, *Illinois Rebels: A Civil War Unit History of G Company,
Fifteenth Tennessee Regiment Volunteer Infantry: The Story of the Confederacy’s Southern Illinois
8 *Jonesboro Gazette*, March 16, 1861; *Carbondale Times*, April 27, 1861, reprinted in the *Chicago Tribune*,
April 30, 1861.
treasonous statements, urged the creation of an independent government in Egypt but counseled not joining the Confederacy unless the Border States did so first.9

These calls for separation or secession never gained mainstream popularity but they did reflect a real ambivalence many in southern Illinois felt at the outbreak of war. As the last quote suggests, many in Egypt identified with the upper South and found themselves similarly conflicted in their loyalties. They supported the constitutionality of owning slaves and believed the ascendency of Black Republicanism posed a threat to that right, but they did not necessarily believe secession was the appropriate response. Nor did most desire a permanent dissolution of their country. However, embracing the Union cause meant aligning with Republicans, a prospect that many in southern Illinois found disagreeable, to say the least. Many felt themselves caught between the two extremes of abolitionism and disunion.10

Undoubtedly the immediate and decisive support that Illinois’s leading Democrat, Stephen A. Douglas, gave to the Union cause helped sway some fence sitters. Douglas worked tirelessly to effect a peaceful reconciliation during the secession crisis, but after the attack on Fort Sumter he threw his full weight behind the administration. Shortly after Lincoln’s call for volunteers, Douglas left Washington, DC, and traveled to Springfield, where he gave a widely lauded address to the joint session of the legislature on April 25. It was the duty of all patriots to come to their country’s aid, Douglas implored, not to deprive the southern states of their rights or institutions but to protect “the priceless legacy” of republicanism and constitutional liberties. He bid everyone to forgo “party

9 *Jonesboro Gazette*, March 16, 1861. The *Jonesboro Gazette*, along with the *Chicago Times*, was suspended by an order of General A. E. Burnside on June 1, 1863. Cole, *Era of the Civil War*, 303-4.

10 A meeting of William County residents denounced secession, “placing it upon the same ground we have heretofore placed abolitionism.” *Illinois State Journal*, June 10, 1861.
creeds and party platforms” until the nation was restored and beseeched Democrats not to allow resentment over their recent electoral defeat to turn them into traitors. “The greater the unanimity,” Douglas counseled, “the less blood will be shed.”

The Union cause in Egypt was also bolstered by John A. Logan, a Murphysboro native who championed the 1853 black exclusion law. When war erupted, he was serving his second term in Congress as a Representative of the southernmost counties in Illinois. After Fort Sumter fell, Logan kept a low profile, leading to much speculation about where his loyalties lay. He broke his public silence in mid-June when he openly rebutted accusations of treason. Still, Logan’s support of the war remained tepid during the summer session of Congress as he clung to diminishing hopes for a negotiated peace. However, once he was given a commission to raise a regiment, he returned home in August to spread the pro-Union gospel. The Crawford Bulletin credited Logan for the “complete revolution among the people [in Egypt] on the war question…Many who a few days ago were of the compromise stamp, are now enthusiastic for the war.” Even the Cairo City Weekly Gazette, which had favored the creation of the state of “South Illinois” before the war began, threw its support to the Union cause in August. Although some southern Illinois men did serve in the Confederate Army, including a group of thirty-four from Williamson and Jackson counties who enlisted in the Fifteenth

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11 The full text of Douglas’s speech can be found in the Illinois State Journal, April 26, 1861.

12 Logan’s first public engagement after the war began was at Camp Yates (Springfield) on June 18, when he encouraged troops under Col. U.S. Grant to reenlist for a three-year term. Three days later, the Illinois State Register published a letter he penned repudiating accusations of treason.


Tennessee Infantry, the vast majority donned Union blue.\textsuperscript{16} In fact, by the fall of 1862, the fifteen southernmost counties boasted a 40.3 percent enlistment rate, which was significantly higher than the state average of 29.4 percent.\textsuperscript{17}

As Logan trekked across southern Illinois raising a regiment, he promised the recruits that he would stop fighting and return home with them if the war turned into an abolitionist crusade.\textsuperscript{18} Restoring the Union, not interfering with slavery, was the principal objective for most Illinoisans, regardless of geography. They believed the nation was worth fighting for because the success of their democratic experiment hinged on the outcome. Many white Northerners understood self-government as the foundation of liberty, an ideal that bound them to their revolutionary heritage and pointed the way forward for those groaning under tyranny around the world.\textsuperscript{19} A patriotic meeting of Boone County residents on April 20 adopted a resolution vowing never to yield to those forces that sought to unseat “this Republic, the great hope of Liberty throughout the world...from its lofty position.”\textsuperscript{20} Here, liberty was not used as the antithesis of slavery but rather concerned freedom for those who already participated in and enjoyed the


\textsuperscript{17} These figures were calculated using data from Schedule D of the 1863 \textit{Annual Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Illinois} (pp. 78-80) and include infantry, cavalry, and artillery troops. The enrollment list from Saline County was not received by the time of printing, and therefore is not included here among the fifteen southermost counties. The Adjutant General of Illinois, Allen Fuller, noted that active enrollment was still ongoing when Schedule D was compiled during the fall of 1862 (p. 40). Thus, Schedule D’s total number of Illinoisans in service (115,123) was lower than the figure provided by the muster rolls in Schedule A (135,440), which included enlistments through the end of 1862. Using the higher enlistment number given in Schedule A (pp. 54-58), the state enrollment rate increases to 34.6%. Because this table does not provide enlistments by county, it cannot be extrapolated what southern Illinois’ enlistment rate was compared to the rest of the state. But even if none of the 20,317 additional troops came from the fifteen southermostat counties (which is unlikely), that region still had a higher enrollment rate compared to the state as a whole by over 5%.

\textsuperscript{18} Jones, \textit{Black Jack}, 104.

\textsuperscript{19} McPherson, \textit{For Cause and Comrades}, 39-43.

\textsuperscript{20} Belvidere Standard, April 23, 1861.
privileges of American government, the rule of law, and economic opportunities.\textsuperscript{21} This was a battle, declared a letter-to-the-editor in the \textit{Lincoln Herald}, between “the last hope of mankind” and the “black hand of anarchy.” Many northerners also understood liberty to be a beacon for populations (mainly European) that lived under monarchial rule. The \textit{Herald} letter encouraged English, German, and Irish immigrants to take up arms against the “idol you were taught to worship in your early childhood…You have earned the right to enjoy all the advantages of American citizenship by your noble renunciation of the shamrock the hawthorne and the Rhine, is it not now as incumbent on you to defend, as much as if you were to the ‘manor born.’”\textsuperscript{22}

This link between citizenship and duty implicitly denied Illinois blacks any stake or role in the war. With the stated goal being the restoration of a fractured nation, this was a fight for and among whites. “The issue is one that concerns negro slavery not at all,” wrote the Democratic \textit{Chicago Post}. “But it does concern white men and the institutions of white men—of Americans, native and adopted—that compose this great people.”\textsuperscript{23} Birthplace mattered less than race. Native-born blacks were not Americans, according to the \textit{Post}, and therefore had no investment in the outcome of the war.

Despite official pronouncements to the contrary, many blacks, free and enslaved, understood that slavery was central to the conflict and that their own interests were at stake. At a mass meeting on April 23, black Chicagoans accused the slaveholding class of stigmatizing color and inducing northern states to pass racially oppressive legislation. They requested the legislature, then meeting in special session, to repeal the state’s black

\textsuperscript{21} Gallagher, \textit{Union War}, 33-74.
\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Lincoln Herald}, August 1, 1861, in Donath, \textit{Logan County}, 29-30.
\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Chicago Post}, reprinted in the \textit{Illinois State Register}, April 17, 1861.
laws. This went unheeded, as did their offer to provide their services to the country “whenever and wherever.” In the not too distant future they would be called upon to don Union blue, but, at the dawn of the war, most whites in Illinois could not fathom why that would ever be necessary.

**Illinois Soldiers Confront Slavery**

As the fourth largest state in 1860, Illinois contributed the fourth largest number of soldiers, sailors, and marines to the Union cause. The 239,092 troops officially credited to the state’s muster rolls served in 150 infantry regiments, seventeen cavalry regiments, two artillery regiments, and a handful of independent artillery and special units. They saw action in every major campaign of the war, from Louisiana and Texas to the eastern theater. However, the majority of Illinois troops initially served in Missouri and Kentucky, and most spent the remainder of the war in the western theater, taking part, for example, in the siege of Vicksburg and the Atlanta Campaign.

As Illinois troops were mustered into service and sent southward, often passing through the important staging area and naval base erected at Cairo, most did not view slavery as relevant to their mission. Yet, once in the field, they frequently found themselves confronting it in various ways. For some, such as John Vreeland, this was their first experience with the “peculiar institution.” Vreeland, a native New Yorker who worked as a printer in Chicago when he enlisted in the Nineteenth Illinois Infantry, wrote to his parents from Missouri, “for the first time in my life, I stand upon slave soil.”

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24 *Chicago Tribune*, April 25, 1861.


26 John Vreeland to parents, July 13, 1861, Vreeland-Warden Papers, United States Army Heritage Center.
Native-born Illinoisan Sidney Robinson noted in a letter to his brother from Fort Pickering, Tennessee, that until then he “never saw negroes before.”

For many Illinois soldiers who had grown up overseas or in free states, slavery was an abstraction. They may have cursed the institution when it threatened their own interests, such as with the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, and been averse to the concept of owning human property. But many tolerated slavery as long as it remained confined in the South, and they did not concern themselves with welfare of slaves. The economic, cultural, and political worlds constructed by slaves and their masters were distant both geographically and mentally from the day-to-day lives of most Illinoisans. But as Illinois soldiers marched hundreds of miles through land inscribed by the material realities of slavery, they encountered the institution in ways that both confirmed and destabilized their preconceptions.

Those who regarded slavery as an inferior economic system found abundant evidence to support their views, especially in the poorer regions of the Upper South. Soldiers were appalled by the poverty of the buildings, soil, and residents. A soldier from the 102nd Illinois Infantry recorded his thoughts after traveling from Bowling Green to Scottsville, Kentucky: “I am very much disappointed in the general appearance, and, in fact, everything belonging to this State. I certainly think it has been very much over-rated as to its fertility, general beauty, and improvements. We have passed through no country with as few improvements and as of poor a quality as this, having no barns or stables for storing anything, save the little crop of tobacco raised by the negroes.” The people of

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28 *Aledo Weekly Record*, December 9, 1862.
the South fared little better in the eyes of a member of the Fourth Illinois Cavalry, who wrote to his hometown newspaper about his “delightful dreams of Southern chivalry” being dashed at the sight of “gimblet eyes, sandy haired, bandy shanked, lantern jawed, wedge headed pigmies who wear butter nut colored clothes.”\(^{29}\) Corporal George G. Carmen, serving in “the McLean Regiment” (Ninety-Fourth Illinois Infantry), shared similar sentiments with the editor of the *Bloomington Pantagraph*. He mocked northerners who defended slavery but had never witnessed its effects. “Let any one traverse the South, as the army of the Frontier has, and mark the ignorance, bordering on barbarity, of the mass of the people—the coarse, uncouth cabins—the ragged, unclean appearance of men, women, and children—the evidences of general poverty, indolence and destitution, and if he persists in sympathizing with slavery he is little less than an armed traitor.”\(^{30}\)

For adherents of the free labor ideology, who equated success with hard work, witnessing the inversion of their values in practice was an appalling sight. Writing from Fulton, Missouri, 1\(^{st}\) Sergeant William Reid told his father, “I had a good chance to see the workings of slavery on our march; everywhere it was evident that the negro did the work, and the white man done the loafing.”\(^{31}\) Thomas Winston noted a similar pattern in Kentucky, writing his wife, “I have not seen a white man working in the fields during this days [sic] although we have marched sixteen miles through an agricultural region. The negro does the work and the white man pockets the proceeds.”\(^{32}\) Taking a shot at the

\(^{29}\) *Lincoln Herald*, April 10, 1862, in Donath, *Logan County*, 84.

\(^{30}\) *Bloomington Pantagraph*, February 11, 1863, in Munson, *It Is Begun!*, 95.

\(^{31}\) *Waukegan Weekly Gazette*, August 17, 1861.

\(^{32}\) Thomas Winston to Caroline Winston, October 30, 1862, Thomas Winston Papers, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.
claim that whites were physically incapable of laboring in a hot environment, one Illinois soldier proudly boasted after completing a march from Vicksburg to Jackson, Mississippi, in the scorching July heat, “the oft repeated assertion that white men cannot endure the southern sun is fairly exploded by this expedition.”

Illinois soldiers also noted how slavery stifled the intellectual potential of southern whites. A member of the Thirty-Seventh Illinois Infantry, then encamped near Rolla, Missouri, believed that if northern defenders of slavery could have “traveled with us for the last twenty months and not have seen a free school house (those true guardians of all free governments) and witnessed the stupidity and ignorance of the inhabitants, they would willingly witness the downfall of the cause of all this ignorance and degradation.” Another soldier stationed in Tennessee parlayed his anger over not being able to obtain certain reading materials into a condemnation of southern aristocracy. Joshua Bailey of the Seventy-Third Illinois Infantry wrote his former geography professor at Illinois State Normal University asking where he could acquire a copy of Arnold Guyot’s *Earth and Man*. He explained, “if I were in the Enlightened part of this Govt where any reading matter I wished could be procured without much difficulty I would not now trouble you. But here in the Chivalrous South, the land of the upper timbers (not the mud sill) of society where man is born to the position that he is to occupy in Society where the number of Negroes that he owns not his merit are his claims to respectability founded, Such things as Books cannot be procured.”

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34 *Waukegan Weekly Gazette*, May 2, 1863.
35 Joshua Bailey to Edwin Hewett, March 2, 1864, Edwin Crawford Hewett Correspondence, Illinois History and Lincoln Collections.
blame slavery for stymieing one’s desire for intellectual growth, he also recognized it as mocking the self-made man ideal.

The belief that slavery inhibited educational, economic, and character development was a central tenet of the free labor creed, and it is therefore unsurprising that Illinois soldiers filtered their interpretations of the South through this familiar lens. More striking is the frequency with which they wrote home about the oppressive conditions under which slaves lived. Apart from abolitionists, white Illinoisans did not often remonstrate against slave abuse. As was made clear during the 1860 election, Illinois Republicans strove to “protect the rights of the white race,” not “redress the wrongs inflicted upon the negro.” In Illinois, slavery existed largely as a political issue, but in the field soldiers came face-to-face with the human dimensions of it. The transformation that Joshua Dickerson underwent was not uncommon. Dickerson, a native Pennsylvanian who moved to Champaign County in 1851, served with the Thirty-Eighth Illinois Infantry. He wrote his parents, “I have always pr[o]fessed to be a conservative man on the slavery question and until this war broke out was always opposed to meddling [sic] with it where it already existed but I must confess that actual observation since I enlisted in the Army has entirely changed my opinions in regard to the institution.”

Dickerson did not specify what “actual observation” led to his change of opinion, but other soldiers were not as reticent in recounting the horrors they witnessed. Charles Wills of Canton, Illinois, recorded in his diary the punishment a slave received for

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36 Chicago Tribune, February 25, 1860.
37 Joshua Dickerson to parents, June 10, 1863, Joshua Dickerson Letters, Illinois History and Lincoln Collections.
helping him and his comrades: “A nice yellow girl came to our regiment about an hour after dark. She is the property of Milly Drake, who lived 30 miles back. The girl showed our men where Milly hid her horses and mules, in return for which, after the column passed, gentle Milly took half a rail and like to wore the wench out. Broke her arm and bruised her shamefully.” Subscribers of the Carroll County Mirror read an appalling account shared by William Frohock, adjutant of the Forty-Fifth Illinois Infantry. He told them of a “slave girl chained to a floor” not far from his camp. “For five years she has been a raving maniac from the effects of blows given by her master, now in rebel service.” Magnus Tait, a native of Scotland who served in the First Illinois Light Artillery, recalled in his memoirs seeing a slave whipped because she allegedly stole a turkey. Tait was then being held as a prisoner of war and watched the punishment unfold through cracks in a fence. “Her hands were tied to a limb of a tree, above her head. Her feet were also tied. An old man did the whipping. He gave her twenty lashes on the back…Before he got through her clothes fell from around her waist to the ground. She appeared to swoon and hung by the rope that held her hands, stark naked, before the crowd.” A week later it was revealed that someone else had taken the turkey. As a surgeon with the 117th Illinois Infantry, Humphrey Hood was not an eyewitness to any whippings but did observe their aftermath. He wrote his wife, “I have occasion to see the


backs of these men and any one disposed to read might there read corroborative evidence of all that Mrs. Stowe ever wrote of the cruelty of Slavery. At least one half these backs were scarred with the lash.  

Soldiers did not have to bear witness to violent beatings to begin to understand the enormity of cruelty engendered by slavery. Mary Smith of Marion County wrote her husband, a member of the Seventh Illinois Cavalry, asking him, “how does slavery look to the naked eye?” He responded,

It looks many times worse than I ever imagined! It is true that I have never saw the lash across the backs of old men and grey headed women, but I have seen men plow, hoe, chop and maul rails, with not enough clothing on them to hide their bodies. I have saw pregnant women…at the hardest work, with only an excuse for a skirt and short petticoat on, both ragged and torn in all possible ways, when it would seem that they was on the very eve of confinement. I have seen dozens of men and women and children at the different kinds of work under a white man that was almost as ignorant as the slaves he drove. I have seen one women [sic] that has tended eighteen acres of corn and suckled an infant that was born after she commenced to break the ground.

For farmer and teacher Thomas Odell, the denial of education was an especially ruthless aspect of slavery. In letters to his young children at home in Adams County, the private hoped to impress upon them how fortunate they were in comparison. In one letter sent to his daughter, Odell wrote about teaching his company cook, a runaway slave named George, how to spell. He explained to his daughter, “in the south they don’t teach the poor black folks how to read and write. George said he wanted to learn how so that he could write his mother a letter. Just think of how much more highly you are favored—while thousands and tens of thousands of the people can’t read, you can read, and write

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41 Humphrey H. Hood to Matilda Hood, April 16, 1863, Humphrey H. Hood Papers, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.

42 William A. Smith to Mary Smith, August 30, 1862, Civil War Miscellaneous Collection, United States Army Heritage Center.
letters to your Father.” In another letter, Odell reminded his own youngsters “how thankful white children should be, that they cannot be bought and sold like horses and mules.”

Henry Curtis Jr., a soldier from Rock Island serving in the Thirty-Seventh Illinois Infantry, fully grasped the cruelty of the domestic slave trade when a runaway slave and her child entered his camp begging for a pass. One of the woman’s children had been taken from her and she did not want to lose the other. Curtis wryly wrote his wife, “it is so every day. A delightful commentary on the ‘peculiar’ under which the blacks are so well off and becoming civilized!” Juxtaposing his family back home with the families being rent apart in the South, he soberly added, “You say you don’t know what may happen if I don’t come home right off. I don’t know what may happen if I do come home!”

Curtis was far from alone in commenting on the glaring contradictions between the claims made by proslavery advocates and the actual observations made by soldiers as they traversed the South. Although proslavery views existed in the colonial period, a comprehensive, ideological defense of slavery began to coalesce and intensify by the 1830s in response to the trenchant criticisms leveled by abolitionists. Whether based on economic, historical, religious, social, humanitarian, or pseudo-scientific rationales, the proslavery argument maintained that black chattel slavery was the optimal labor system. Not only did it ensure equality among whites, but also it was beneficial for the slaves.

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44 Henry Curtis Jr. to wife, November 1, 1863, Henry Curtis Jr. Papers, United States Army Heritage Center.
themselves. It lifted them out of the barbarism of Africa and provided them material and moral nourishment. Slaves would thrive under the guidance of a caring but stern master.\textsuperscript{45}

Nor were these beliefs limited to the South. A member of the 109\textsuperscript{th} Illinois Infantry wrote the editor of the \textit{Jonesboro Gazette} to share a story about coming upon a cabin in Tennessee occupied by slaves whose master had joined the Confederate Army. Three children had died since their owner left. The soldier interpreted such a loss as the result of an absent authority figure, explaining, “they expect some one to take care of them, and if it is not done, they are utterly powerless to help themselves. Slavery is their natural condition.”\textsuperscript{46} William Marsh of the Thirteenth Illinois Infantry divulged to his father how much he disliked the black population in Helena, Arkansas. “I would not have a Negro around me for 10 dollars a month; I almost hate them. If they only knew enough \textit{sic} to stay with their Masters it would be better for them.”\textsuperscript{47}

Yet it was much more common for Illinois soldiers to write home about the ways in which their observations ran counter to proslavery rhetoric. When they recounted to their families or local newspaper editors incidents of physical and psychological violence inflicted upon slaves, they challenged the claim that the slave’s welfare was at the core of the master-slave relationship. These accounts also implicitly refuted the assertion made by slavery’s apologists that slaves were content being slaves. Some soldiers did in fact comment directly on this, including Lewis Hanback, a native Illinoisan serving in the


\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Jonesboro Gazette}, January 15, 1862.

Twenty-Seventh Illinois Infantry. Writing to his girlfriend in March 1862 aboard a steamer during the Battle of Island Number Ten, Hanback shared what he had seen:

Our Boat lies 6 miles above the Island close By a Farm House in which live Two Brothers by the name of Philips they own 40 Slaves So you see we are surrounded or at least are in Close Proximity with the peculiar Institution as a general thing they (the Negroes) are miserably clothed and seem very much dissatisfied with their lot they are a grumbling set, go about their work moodily no light no joy illumes their countenance there is the Same settled expression of Servile obedience which every Slave wears, talk not to me of the Humanity of slavery there is no humane principle connected with it….How much more Confident am I now that Slavery is an enormity than I once was.48

Alexander Thain, a soldier with the Ninety-Sixth Illinois Infantry from Antioch, was also given to reflection when he met an elderly slave in Alabama. His master claimed the slave was 125 years old, but the slave only knew “he was old enough to die.” Thain entered the slave’s cabin, which was bereft of furniture. The boarded up windows gave the impression of “some dim cave deep in the bowels of the earth.” He noticed the slave’s “wrenched and twisted” feet protruding from the ashes of the hearth and watched the toothless man struggle to eat hard bread. Thain wrote how he was overcome with sickness “from the contemplation of such a cheerless existence…After the poor slave has drudged out his years of usefulness and is no longer a source of profit to his master he is begrudged the miserable remains of his existance [sic].” As for the masters who boasted of their humanitarianism for caring for their superannuated slaves, Thain wondered, “is it not a cruel mockery to offer one the dregs of life after all capacities for enjoyment are gone”?49

48 Lewis Hanback to Hester Cooper, March 26, 1862, Lewis Hanback Letters, Filson Historical Society.
49 Alexander Thain to Susannah Smith, March 11, 1865, Minto Family Civil War Correspondence, Lake County History Archives.
Another way Illinois soldiers implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) critiqued proslavery ideology was by remarking on the undeniable evidence of sexual abuse masters inflicted upon slaves. Slavery defender Rev. A. T. Holmes insisted that masters had an obligation to impart “kindness” and “wholesome discipline” upon their slaves. Yet it was obvious that some took the reverend’s exhortation for them to be “a father among his children” quite literally.  

Alphonso Barto of the Fifty-Second Illinois Infantry recorded unconcealed disgust at what he was learning during his deployment. “Why Father it is (or was) considered no disgrace for a man in the south to have recourse to the lash for the purpose of driving a poor negro from his bed at [sic] for the purpose of occupying it him self to satisfy his own wicked passions.” He added that he had known many instances of a “Father keeping his own Daughter or a Brother his own Sister for a Mistress.”

Illinois soldiers frequently commented on the spectrum of skin colors they encountered in the South. Particularly jarring were light-skinned slaves, who blurred the boundaries between slavery and freedom. John T. Cheney of the First Illinois Light Artillery wrote his wife at home in Dixon, Illinois, that he “saw a lady slave yesterday, the property of a Secesh colonel[,] who is as white as many of the ladies of Dixon.”  

A surgeon from the Ninety-Second Illinois Infantry was surprised to find out a woman he met was a slave until a week ago. “The moral of this story,” he explained to his wife, “is this…in Ky we have no way of distinguishing the slave from the free. I have frequently


51 Alphonso Barto to father, July 7, 1863, Alphonso Barto Letters, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.

heard of this difficulty before I came on slave soil, but am surprised to find it so frequently."53 After traveling through southern states, many Illinois soldiers would find unbelievable the claim made by noted South Carolinian politician James Henry Hammond that “the number of the mixed breed, in proportion to that of the black, is infinitely small, and out of the towns next to nothing.”54 Officially, twelve percent of southern blacks in 1860 were classified as “mulattoes” although, because census takers relied on their own observations of skin color for classification, the actual number of mixed race individuals was likely much higher.55

More than a curiosity, the existence of light-skinned slaves raised uncomfortable questions about how race functioned as an attribute of status. Some soldiers were greatly disturbed by encountering enslaved persons who physically resembled themselves. In a letter published in the *Amboy Times*, the colonel of the 104th Illinois Infantry told of seeing “slaves containing about one-eighth of negro blood.” He concluded, “I have made up my mind that it is not a very beautiful system that will hold seven-eights [sic] of a white man in bondage because one-eighth of him is of African descent. A man that will advocate such doctrine as this, is in the language of Artemas [sic] Ward ‘an ingrejius ass.’”56 A soldier with the Twenty-First Illinois Infantry met “5 or six mulattoes at least they were one half white” while encamped in southeast Missouri. He playfully warned his neighbor back home in Douglas County, “you need not be surprised [sic] if I return

56 *Amboy Times*, July 9, 1863. Artemus Ward (pen name of Charles Farrar Browne) was an American satirist.
to Ills a follower of Owen Lovejoy tho dont say any thing about this remark because it may injure my chances for presidency in 1864." Private Charles Cowell of the Ninth Illinois Infantry recorded in his diary that he was unable to tell who was whiter, a slave or her master. As he got closer to them, he believed them to be half sisters.

Such realizations drove home the depth of abuse that slaves endured. Slave owners kept their own children in bondage, and, as Cowell recognized, those children sometimes became the property of their siblings. For Illinois soldiers reared in reformist notions of middle-class respectability, the home should be the locus of the nuclear family, a refuge where children were inculcated with religious and bourgeois values. Slavery was the antithesis of this ideal, never more so than when families were torn apart. From the time of the Revolutionary War to the Civil War, the brisk business of the domestic slave trade had moved one million slaves from the upper to lower South. One-quarter of these sales separated spouses and one-half shattered nuclear families. While these sales occurred largely outside the gaze of northern troops, the tragic consequences could not be concealed. For example, a member of the 117th Illinois Infantry met a slave who told him how his children were seized from him like a “hawk upon little chickens.”

Illinois soldiers came to the inevitable and accurate realization that these transactions sometimes involved one family member selling another. In an essay titled “American Slavery,” most likely written late in the summer of 1862, Ransom Bedell

57 Benjamin Franklin Reed to Charles Welliver, April 8, 1862, Benjamin Franklin Reed Papers, Illinois History and Lincoln Collections.
58 Charles Cowell diary, May-June 1863, Charles Cowell Papers, United States Army Heritage Center.
60 Walter Johnson, Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 5-7, 19. Another million slaves were sold in intra-state transactions.
61 Belleville Advocate, December 5, 1862.
detailed his thoughts on the institution. Bedell was a blacksmith originally from New York who lived in Chicago when he joined the Thirty-Ninth Illinois Infantry in the summer of 1861. He disavowed being an abolitionist but nonetheless viewed the war as God’s righteousness punishment for the perpetuation of slavery. He wrote that he had seen slaves with light skin and Blue eyes….And you know there must be a brutalizing influence connected with southern society when a Slave deeler, can complacently sell his own children as chattel, property, and if his white sons, should inherit the Estate, they might find themselves in the awkward position of Master, over their own Brothers and sisters, having a legal right to Barter, Whip, buy, and sell, and hold in chains, people who were near akin and of Aristocratic Blood.62

Sergeant Joshua Dickerson shared similar sentiments with his wife Elmira. He explained that slaveholders could sell “a mulatto or half breed slave” for more money than a “full blooded Negro.” Therefore they “connect[ed] with their own Wenches” to increase their profits. It was the “universal practice of the country” for a master to “beget sons & daughters of his own slaves and still hold and even sell those sons & daughters.” Dickerson was appalled that his government had tolerated such an abysmal “state of virtue and morality.”63

From the disdain of hard labor to the perversion of the domestic sphere, Illinois soldiers found little to admire in slavery. Their first-hand impressions of it inspired or intensified anti-slavery sentiment. “The peculiar institution has not yet evinced anything of its divine origin,” quipped a member of the 117th Illinois Infantry to the editor of the

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63 Joshua Dickerson to wife, November 10, 1863, Joshua Dickerson Letters, Illinois History and Lincoln Collections.
Belleville Advocate. Witnessing the consequences of slavery—the physical disfigurement and sexual violations of slaves, the educational and material poverty among whites—gave lie to the various defenses of slavery. After less than a year in the service, Absalom Moore, colonel of the 104th Illinois Infantry, declared, “I am now an uncompromising enemy henceforward, hereafter and forever to the peculiar institution...I don’t want to hear any living man advocate the sum of all villaines [sic], it is too disgusting to listen to. I always get out of patience when I hear a man talking pro-slavery doctrine.” Yet for all that soldiers witnessed and shared with friends and family back home about slavery, the most significant denunciations of the institution came from the slaves themselves.

Policy and Politics on the Home Front

One of the fundamental pillars of the proslavery argument was the claim that slaves were content with their enslavement. Unable to care for themselves, they needed the guidance and protection of their masters. Rooted in the belief of innate racial inferiority, masters fashioned themselves as paternal figures. They safeguarded blacks from the responsibilities of freedom, for which whites were naturally suited but for blacks would be ruinous. “The slave is not only economically but morally unfit for freedom,” wrote Thomas Roderick Dew in an influential essay that gave momentum to the proslavery argument in the 1830s. Freeing slaves would not “alter their condition—they would still be virtually slaves; talent, habit, and wealth, would make the white the master still, and the emancipation would only have the tendency to deprive him of those

64 Belleville Advocate, December 5, 1862.
65 Amboy Times, July 9, 1863.
sympathies and kind feelings for the black which now characterize him.” Slaves corroborated this, argued South Carolinian William Harper, by blithely accepting their lot: “the slave with us is not tantalized with the name of freedom…The most remarkable [characteristic] is their indifference to personal liberty.” And why should they desire to be free? They had been rescued from their “native, dark, and barbarous” homeland and given the “blessings” of civilization. Under slavery, they were able to live up to their potential, as limited as it may be. It was an arrangement that mutually benefited master and slave, “a good” rather than “an evil,” according to John C. Calhoun in a speech given before the U.S. Senate in 1837. The slave population had not only increased numerically since arriving on the country’s shores but had also displayed moral, intellectual, and physical improvement. This, Calhoun reasoned, was “conclusive proof of the general happiness of the race, in spite of all the exaggerated tales to the contrary.” In another famous speech made on the Senate floor twenty-one years later, James Henry Hammond claimed that the South’s slaves were “happy, content, unaspiring, and utterly incapable, from intellectual weakness, ever to give us any trouble by their aspirations.”

Of course, many masters were in fact troubled by their slaves’ “aspirations.” Slaves continually undermined their masters’ authority by, for example, feigning illness, breaking tools, slowing down work, or running away. The scars slaves carried and the vast amount of time and resources southerners expended on controlling the slave population testified to the schism between the society envisioned by slavery’s apologists.

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and the one that actually existed. The fervor with which slavery’s most ardent defenders strove to quarantine the region against antislavery sentiment suggested that not all slaves and southern whites were united behind the institution. Nonetheless, despite the numerous contradictions inherent in the proslavery argument, many of its advocates did take it seriously and believed their slaves would remain loyal, even once the war began.\(^{70}\)

The arrival of a runaway slave who paddled by canoe to Fort Sumter a month before Confederate forces fired on it portended a different outcome. The young man hoped to find refuge from an abusive master but was instead transferred by the fort’s commander to Charleston to be returned to his owner. The following day, a similar scene played out at Florida’s Fort Pickens, where eight runaway slaves escaped only to be handed over to the Pensacola city marshal.\(^{71}\) Though thwarted in their pursuit of liberty, these slaves had good reason to expect to find refuge within federal lines. They had most likely paid close attention to the militarization of southern society during the secession crisis and heard their masters and other whites anxiously discuss the menace posed by Lincoln’s election to slavery.

Throughout the South, slaves guardedly followed the war as it unfolded. Some became active participants in it. Those selected as personal servants accompanied their masters to battle and gained first-hand knowledge of events on the frontline. Thousands of other slaves were impressed into performing labor essential to maintaining the war effort, such as fortifying defenses, transporting supplies, and caring for the sick. To

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safeguard their investments, some masters relocated their slaves to more secure areas in
the southern interior.\textsuperscript{72} All these dislocations afforded countless opportunities for slaves
to circulate information about the war’s progress. A soldier with the Thirty-Seventh
Illinois Infantry wrote his mother from Missouri, “the slaves know a great deal more than
their masters think they do. They don’t \textit{let on} however, being much too sharp.”\textsuperscript{73} This
knowledge that slaves safeguarded so carefully would help many decide if, how, and
when to strike out for freedom.

Like the slaves who fled to forts Sumter and Pickens before the war, three runaway
slaves arrived at federally-held Fort Monroe in Virginia on May 23, 1861, in search of
their freedom. They ran away from their homes just before being sent south to labor for
the Confederate war effort. Perhaps because of this, they, unlike their predecessors, were
not returned, even after their master demanded they be surrendered. Benjamin Butler, the
commander of the fort, reasoned that Virginia had removed itself from the Union and
therefore had no recourse to the federal laws governing fugitive slaves. By putting them
to work at the fort, these “contrabands of war,” as Butler called them, provided labor for
the Union cause while simultaneously depriving the Confederacy of it. It was a pragmatic
decision but one that would have far-reaching consequences. Word traveled, and by the
end of July more than 850 runaway slaves, including women and children, had found
sanctuary at Fort Monroe.\textsuperscript{74}

Their actions forced the administration and Congress to confront thorny questions
that had no simple answers. What constitutional protections did the federal government

\textsuperscript{72} Berlin and others, \textit{Slaves No More}, 11-15.

\textsuperscript{73} Henry Curtis Jr. to mother, December 1861, Henry Curtis Jr. Papers, United States Army Heritage Center.

\textsuperscript{74} Foner, \textit{Fiery Trial}, 169-171.
need to respect when dealing with enemy “property,” particularly the human kind? Did the slaves confiscated by Union forces become free? How could the contraband issue be dealt with in a way that would avoid turning the war into an assault on slavery and risk losing the loyal slave states? The administration approved Butler’s policy but made no pronouncements on whether the contrabands were free or not. Congress gave its endorsement to the plan in August with the Confiscation Act, which deprived masters of slaves who “had been employed in hostile service” against the Union. Illinois Senator Lyman Trumbull proposed an amendment that would free those slaves who fell within the purview of the act. It sailed through the Senate but was rejected in the House in favor of language that left the status of confiscated slaves ambiguous. Nonetheless, by interfering in the relationship between masters and slaves, the Confiscation Act was a significant reversal in the federal government’s approach to slavery. Predictably, most Border State representatives and Democrats voted against it. Lincoln, well aware of the political implications of the act, reluctantly signed it on August 6, 1861.75

Republicans back in Illinois shared little of Lincoln’s trepidation in delineating a forceful Union policy to deal with slavery. During the summer of 1861, Republican papers not only supported Butler’s approach to contrabands as a judicious war measure but also insisted that the government take more radical steps. The Confiscation Act applied only to slaves directly engaged in “hostile service” against the federal government service. The Chicago Tribune saw no difference between slaves who provided military aid and those who supplied Confederate soldiers with “food and clothing.” All forms of labor performed by these “coerced auxiliaries” strengthened the

75 Oakes, Freedom National, 118-144.
Confederate cause. “It is on the slaves that the insurrection rests, and without them it has no foundation.” The mid-state Canton Weekly Register criticized the Confiscation Act for not going “far enough” and suggested that officers be forbidden from returning fugitive slaves, all of whom should be declared free. The moderate Republican Illinois State Journal supported the policy of putting contrabands to work wherever they could be made “serviceable” and went so far as to suggest that at the war’s end they “should be set at liberty. We know that there are difficulties in the way of this course of action, but they can and must be surmounted.”

The Journal’s preference for these slaves to be free did not arise from a newfound desire to topple an immoral institution. Rather, it was a means to hasten the end of the war and bring about retribution to those who plunged the country into it. Slaveholders, the Illinois State Journal explained, were “the direct cause of all loss of life and treasure in this war and upon them should fall all the punishment that it is in the power of the Government to inflict.” The paper believed that “this is not a war for or against slavery…Our mighty armies are gathering for no purpose of abolition.” Yet after years of accommodating slave interests prior to the war, the editors, along with many other northerners, jettisoned a conciliatory posture once their fellow countrymen took up arms against them. Before the war, mainstream Republicans had vowed to safeguard slavery where it existed. But Southerners, they reasoned, relinquished that protection when they opted out of the federal compact. The Illinois State Journal had no grand designs for the overthrow of slavery in the summer of 1861, but it did come to accept that the institution

76 Chicago Tribune, September 2, 1861.
77 Canton Weekly Register, August 27, 1861.
78 Illinois State Journal, June 21, 1861.
deserved to take some blows in the form of freeing those slaves used in the Confederate war effort. Logic dictated that without “slavery in our country there would have been no rebellion…It is enough for our purpose to recognize the fact that Slavery and Treason now go hand in hand.”

The correlation between slavery and the war, which so many Illinoisans minimized in the initial outpouring of patriotic spirit, could not be discounted as slaves continued to find their way to Union lines. The majority of Republican papers in Illinois remained committed to belief that, in the words of the *Aledo Weekly Record*, “this war is for the preservation of the country.” But they also came to accept the contingency that “whatever may stand in the way of that end will go down like grass before the mower’s scythe.” This was a significant and rapid evolution in how Republicans understood the possible consequences of the war’s outcome. It also marked a momentous shift in their view of the inviolability of constitutionally protected property and the reach of the federal government. The liberal-leaning *Bureau County Republican* marveled at this in June 1861, writing, “emancipation was believed to be a practical impossibility before the commencement of the war, and but for the revolution forced upon the country, by the slave-power, it would not have been thought of.”

A good example of this metamorphosis can be found in the short-lived Republican *Aurora Chronicle*. In March 1861, the paper blasted abolitionists for feeding the fires of secessionism and disowned them from the Republican Party. The following

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80 *Aledo Weekly Record*, August 6, 1861.

81 *Bureau County Republican*, June 20, 1861.

82 *Aurora Chronicle*, March 22, 1861.
month, a week before Confederates besieged Fort Sumter, it gave its full support to the enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law. Yet only two months into the war, the *Chronicle* conceded, “it is both possible and probable that these slaves are destined to play a most important part in the struggle.” It saw in the slaves at Fort Monroe “a power that might be used with deadliest effect against the rebel army.” The article concluded, “the slave element therefore, cannot be left out of the account in estimating the relative forces of the combatants. It must be thrown entirely into the Northern scale, and reckoned as equivalent to the arraying of three millions more against the miserable minority of the rebel population.”

Granted, the growing acceptance among Illinois Republicans to accept slavery as a casualty of war was far different from the principle that motivated abolitionists. Nonetheless, it put them on a trajectory that would array them against Democrats and place slavery at the heart of Illinois politics. But first they would have to take up the fight against the leader of their own party.

Lincoln refused early in the war to push beyond the limits of the Confiscation Act. In order to quell a volatile and divided Missouri, he appointed General John C. Frémont as head of the Western Department in July 1861. Following a bloody Union defeat at Wilson’s Creek and loss of control over much of the southwestern portion of the state, Frémont issued a proclamation on August 30 to forestall further defections to the Confederate cause. He imposed martial law throughout the state, threatened to execute guerillas found within Union lines, and declared all slaves of Missouri rebels confiscated and henceforth free. This last provision went well beyond the Confiscation Act by including all rebel-owned slaves, not just those who were impressed into military labor,

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83 *Aurora Chronicle*, April 5, 1861.
84 *Aurora Chronicle*, June 15, 1861.
and by fixing their future status as explicitly free. Lincoln understood how perilous such a declaration of emancipation was to the allegiance of the Border States and wrote Frémont asking him to scale back his order so that it conformed to the Confiscation Act. Following Frémont’s refusal of this request, Lincoln rescinded his emancipation order and shortly thereafter removed him from command in Missouri.85

Frémont’s proclamation and the fallout from it galvanized the North. Lincoln received more letters about it than any other event during the war, most of it critical of his decision to scale back Frémont’s proclamation.86 From Lincoln’s vantage point, the Union’s prospects hung in the balance. Missouri was engulfed in its own civil war, Maryland was held in check only by the force of Union troops, and Confederate forces were poised to march on Kentucky. Lincoln believed losing these states would be fatal to the Union cause and nothing would precipitate their loss more quickly than interfering with slavery.87

But from the perspective of northerners, who were still aggrieved over the defeat at Bull Run, Frémont’s severe treatment of Confederate sympathizers was a much needed antidote to what one paper called “silk-glove manipulations.”88 Illinois Republicans of all stripes greeted Frémont’s proclamation with acclaim. It “meets unqualified approbation among all loyal Illinoisans as a matter of self-defense and stern necessity,” asserted the

87 Oakes, Freedom National, 161-62. Lincoln’s letter to Illinois Senator Orville H. Browning on September 22, 1861, clearly expresses these anxieties. Browning had written to Lincoln criticizing his modification of Frémont’s order. In response, Lincoln explained, “I think to lose Kentucky is nearly the same as to lose the whole game. Kentucky gone, we can not hold Missouri, nor, as I think, Maryland. These all against us, and the job on our hands is too large for us. We would as well consent to separation at once, including the surrender of this capitol.” Basler, Collected Works, 4:531-33.
88 Aledo Weekly Record, September 10, 1861.
Illinois State Journal. The upstate Belvidere Standard trumpeted it as “one of the most eminently righteous blows which has been struck at this rebellion.” The Chicago Tribune embraced it as “our platform henceforth to the end of the war.” Frémont “claimed no more than our simple right fully established by usage and by law,” reasoned the Peoria Transcript. Champaign’s Central Illinois Gazette called Frémont the “right man in the right place” and urged Lincoln to adopt his proclamation as universal policy. Rockford’s Rock River Democrat believed “the magnitude of the stake for which we are playing demands it, and we say God speed the day.” “Thank God!” exclaimed the Quincy Whig and Republican, “there is one man in high command at this time who seems to comprehend the nature of the crisis.” The Bureau County Republican praised Frémont for being “right in the principle and spirit of his Proclamation…Slaveholders have put their all up at the cannon’s mouth, if it blows it away, it is their fault for running the hazard.” Many Democratic papers criticized Frémont’s actions and Republican responses to it as a perverting a war “for the maintenance of the Union…to one for the abolition of slavery.” Yet there even were some Democratic newspapers, such as the

89 Illinois State Journal, September 3, 1861.
90 Belvidere Standard, September 17, 1861.
91 Chicago Tribune, September 7, 1861.
92 Peoria Transcript, reprinted in the Chicago Tribune, September 27, 1861.
93 Central Illinois Gazette, September 4, 1861.
94 Rockford Rock River Democrat, September 24, 1861.
95 Quincy Whig and Republican, September 7, 1861.
96 Bureau County Republican, October 3, 1861.
97 Illinois State Register, September 7, 1861.
Chicago Post and Rock Island Argus, that approved of the proclamation as a necessary measure for instilling terror in rebel supporters.98

In light of the outpouring of praise for Frémont’s emancipation edict, it is unsurprising that Lincoln’s rescission of it dealt a heavy blow to its supporters. Most Republican papers could not muster a lukewarm defense of Lincoln’s actions. They believed it was an indefensible misstep and openly criticized Lincoln for his irresolute leadership. The countermanding of Frémont’s proclamation enveloped Chicago with “blank astonishment and dismay,” according to the Tribune. “The news of the retreat of our army from Stone Bridge [at Manassas] never produced half the chagrin and despondency here occasioned by the retreat of the administration from the strong and righteous ground taken by the fearless Fremont.”99 The Aledo Weekly Record concurred, calling the President’s action a second Bull Run, one that would “cost the nation millions of treasure and thousands of lives.”100 “No act that Mr. Lincoln has done since his inauguration as President of the United States has caused such heartfelt regret to the people of the West as that extracting the pith from Gen. Fremont’s Proclamation,” lamented the Rock River Democrat.101 The Quincy Whig and Republican noted that Lincoln “seems no longer to share the impulses of the people” and even accused him of bolstering Confederate morale, “unintentionally of course.”102 The Rockford Republican was more forgiving, condemning Lincoln’s decision but extending him “charity and

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98 Chicago Post, reprinted in the Chicago Tribune, September 16, 1861; Rock Island Argus, reprinted in the Chicago Tribune, September 21, 1861.

99 Chicago Tribune, September 16, 1861.

100 Aledo Weekly Record, September 24, 1861.

101 Rockford Rock River Democrat, September 24, 1861.

102 Quincy Whig and Republican, September 21, 1861.
forbearance.” Doing so was likely made easier by the anticipation that the “force of circumstances” in the field would inevitably override the commands given from the nation’s capital.\footnote{Rockford Republican, September 19, 1861.}

The \textit{Illinois State Journal} was the lone voice in the Republican wilderness that supported Lincoln’s modification of Frémont’s order. Whereas earlier the paper noted the “unqualified approbation” given to the proclamation, it now stated that Lincoln’s modification “receives the cordial endorsement of the people” and justified it as a prudent adherence to the “law of Congress.”\footnote{Illinois State Journal, September 23, 1861.} In taking this tack, the \textit{Illinois State Journal} unwittingly aligned itself with staunch Democratic organs, such as the \textit{Joliet Signal}, which wholeheartedly endorsed the “President’s noble and patriotic stand,”\footnote{Joliet Signal, September 24, 1861.} and the \textit{Ottawa Free Trader}, which asserted that the “President did right.”\footnote{Ottawa Free Trader, September 21, 1861.} These were strange bedfellows indeed, and it would likely be the last time these papers found themselves on the same page.

The politicization of emancipation as a war measure was well underway by the fall of 1861 and would continue to be a polarizing issue in the coming years. Most Illinois Republicans showed themselves early in the war to be open to radical means to end it. Lincoln, they felt, was the one who needed to catch up to them. Still, as extreme as Frémont’s proclamation was, it was limited in geography as well as scope. By freeing only slaves owned by Confederates, it stopped short of constituting a full-scale assault on slavery. Most Illinois Republicans understood it as such; it was a punitive measure that
would free some slaves while keeping the institution intact. They had no great love for slavery but stopped short of believing its total destruction was necessary to end the war. But to the soldiers on the front lines, who traveled, worked, and lived alongside the so-called contrabands, the fundamental connection between slavery and the war was becoming increasingly evident.

“Freedom’s Come at Last”

Washington policy regarding slaves only had as much influence as Union troops in the field gave it. The Confiscation Act suggested in broad strokes what was permissible but it did not mandate compliance. Even if it had, the law raised more questions than it answered. How were federal troops to determine if slaves had actually labored for the Confederacy? What obligation did federal troops have to accommodate slave owners who came to Union camps demanding the return of runaway slaves, particularly in the loyal slave states where the fugitive slave law was presumably still in force? Union commanders made their own judgments on these issues, leading to irregular treatment of runaway slaves during the first year of the war. For example, the commander of Fort Pickens refused to turn away any fugitives while other general, such as William Sherman, upheld the right of owners to reclaim their property and advised avoiding the issue altogether by denying the admittance of slaves into Union camps.¹⁰⁷

Despite such inconsistency and the threat of being turned away or turned over, slaves persisted in viewing the Union cause as their own. A member of the Thirty-Sixth Illinois Infantry enjoyed the conspiratorial camaraderie he shared with slaves: “their

appearance continually indicates that our presence inspires them with hopes which they
dare not speak,” except, he noted, when alone with Union soldiers.  
Another member of
the Thirty-Sixth overheard a slave discussing “our army” and asked which army he
referred to, and the slave responded, “Oh, de Norf…we’s all for de Norf.” The soldier
commented that the slaves he encountered were “quite shrewd, and took care not to
commit themselves except where it was safe to do so—but none could doubt for a
moment their hearty sympathy.”

Illinois soldiers could not help but notice the different reception they received
from blacks and whites as they moved through the South. Writing to his sisters of his
travels through Mississippi, Timothy Blaisdell commented on how “we receive no
greetings from the white people of the towns in these parts.” But the black residents gave
a “noisy and demonstrative” welcome.  

Subscribers to the Rock Island Argus read the
correspondence of a member of the 102nd Illinois Infantry who described how the
“contrabands’ have indicated their regard for us and ‘de union’ wherever we have been.
All along the line of our march shining rows of ivory have welcomed our soldiers;
Sambo’s illuminated features often presenting a striking contrast to ‘massa’s’ gloomy
countenance.”

Readers of the Lincoln Herald received a nearly identical account from
Holly Springs, Mississippi, where local whites “hate the Union with a viperous hatred”

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108 Aurora Beacon, October 24, 1861.

109 L. G. Bennett and William M. Haigh, History of the Thirty-Sixth Regiment Illinois Volunteers, During
the War of the Rebellion (Aurora, IL: Knickerbocker and Hodder, 1876), 383.

110 Timothy M. Blaisdell to sisters, July 3, 1862, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, United States
Army Heritage Center.

111 Stephen Fleharty, letter to the editor, Rock Island Argus, October 18, 1862, in “Jottings from Dixie”:
The Civil War Dispatches of Sergeant Major Stephen F. Fleharty, U.S.A., ed. Philip J. Reyburn and Terry L.
Wilson (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), 53.
but blacks ran into the streets upon the arrival of federal troops “crying out, ‘Bress de Lor’, I have ben prayin’ for dis ere a long time, but never tot I’d live to see you.”¹¹²

When given the opportunity, some slaves took advantage of the protection afforded by the army’s presence by gathering on the outskirts of Union encampments or traveling in close proximity to marching columns. Others pressed for their freedom by entering Union camps and claiming to be free in order to sidestep the uncertain handling of contrabands.¹¹³ They offered themselves in service of the Union war effort through physical labor or more covert aid, such as indicating where their owners had hidden food and livestock. In doing so, slaves continued to keep emancipation a central issue of the war. Their interactions with the foot soldiers of the Union army formed a path to freedom that superseded the commands that came down from Washington and the top brass, turning the Union army and navy into forces of liberation as they circumscribed the South.¹¹⁴ Facing retaliation against themselves and their families if their allegiance was questioned, slaves relied on the “grapevine telegraph” to help them decide if, how, and when to strike out for freedom. Around 400,000 slaves had secured their liberty by escaping to Union lines by 1864.¹¹⁵

By taking action to change their circumstances, slaves gave lie to the proslavery argument that they were content in their servitude. Their actions also tapped into a long-standing republican ideology that linked freedom with virtue and slavery with dependence. This ideology was refined during the American Revolution to regard

¹¹² Lincoln Herald, July 3, 1862, in Donath, Logan County, 119-20.
¹¹⁴ Manning, What This Cruel War Was Over, 13.
¹¹⁵ Foner, Fiery Trial, 167.
freedom as something one earned through resistance to tyranny. The counterpoint of this was that those who were enslaved implicitly consented to it by the mere fact of their enslavement. The conception of personal choice that undergirded Samuel Adams’s assertion that people are as free as they deserve still resonated decades, as seen in Wendell Phillips’s claim that “the Slave who does not write his own merit in the catalogue of insurrections hardly deserves freedom.” Autonomy was a decision, and resistance that would lead to a certain death was more honorable than passively submitting, and thus assenting, to enslavement. This was not the only way whites conceptualized freedom in antebellum America, but, as will be discussed in a later chapter, it was influential in helping white northerners accept the arming of blacks to fight for the Union. It also may help explain why slaves’ desire for freedom became a recurring theme in Illinois soldiers’ diaries and letters home.

Throughout the war, Illinois soldiers bore witness to various ways that slaves defied their bondage and shared these experiences with family, friends, and newspaper editors. Sometimes this information was communicated unwittingly. For example, in a letter written in September 1862, Captain John C. Dinsmore of the Ninety-Ninth Illinois Infantry grumbled about the large number of slaves coming into his lines, unintentionally indicating how widespread their desire for freedom was: “i think we will soon have all the negroes freed iff wee keepe on a few months longer we avriage from 10 to 15 a day here[<e] they run off and come in here memphis is black with the damn things.”


117 John C. Dinsmore to brother, September 4, 1862, John C. Dinsmore Papers, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.
Cheney’s diary entry from December 1862 is notable for how seemingly routine the acts of individual emancipations had become: “Had a good dinner at a planter’s. Found one Negro who rode one of the mules into our lines—another man free. Ordered to move at 8 AM tomorrow.”

At other times, soldiers commented more deliberately on slaves’ desire for freedom. A member of the 117th Illinois Infantry, who was stationed near Memphis around the same time as Dinsmore, told the editor of the Belleville Advocate how the slaves he encountered were “filled with the wild hope that they will soon be free. It is the universal wish. No matter how well they have been treated, they want to be free men.”

In a letter penned to his wife, Private Thomas Odell of the Seventy-Eighth Illinois Infantry wrote, “since we came here [Kentucky] I have had a better chance to ascertain the spirit and disposition of the African slave than ever before. I find that they love liberty, and have a great hatred of oppression as the white man has.”

In a letter to the editor of Bloomington’s Pantagraph, Horatio Barrington, a bookkeeper who enlisted with the Fourteenth Illinois Infantry, witnessed a moving scene where a mother reunited with her children, commenting, “I have never seen anything equal the perfect heaven of delight that this old, black mother seemed to be in.” Barrington then asked the readers back home some pointed questions:

White mothers of the free North, can you tell me why these degraded, ignorant black women toiled along day after day, with their children bound on their backs making the same hard marches we did? Am I not right in supposing that they are endowed by the Creator with the same love of children and love of freedom that he has given to you? Perhaps you can understand better than I, why these slave

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118 John T. Cheney, diary, December 6, 1862, in Armstrong, Illinois Artillery Officer’s Civil War, 30.
119 Belleville Advocate, December 5, 1862.
120 Thomas Odell to wife, January 1, 1863, in Virdin, Civil War Correspondence, 32.
mothers endure everything, even death, to secure for their children and themselves freedom.  

This drive to be free whatever the cost was also noted by Joseph Ward Jr., who served with the “Preacher’s Company” of the Thirty-Ninth Illinois Infantry. He told his parents about forty contrabands who showed up at his camp in Suffolk, Virginia, reasoning that their escape from slavery “showed that those ignorant creatures prefer[r]ed the freedom of the North to the bondage to which they had been subject. They seemed perfectly happy, yet they knew not where they were going or whether they would make anything by the change.” Ward wrote his parents again the following month about the “hundred” contraband that “came in today and say more are expected tomorrow.” The newcomers told Ward about another group of fugitives that was ambushed by slave catchers as it made its way to the camp, resulting in three killed and two injured. In language that would resonate with those who viewed liberty as something that should be earned, Ward explained, “thus we see how these poor slaves are treated while trying to escape [to] freedom. The lot that came in today were armed with clubs, etc. all declared it to be his entintion [sic] to fight or die but would never go back to slavery.”

Illinois soldiers expressed particular interest in the readiness of slaves to sever ties with their owners. “I have yet to find one who so loves his master as to be unwilling to

121 Bloomington Pantagraph, December 18, 1864, in Munson, It Is Begun!, 189.
121 Waukegan Weekly Gazette, August 17, 1861.
123 Joseph R. Ward Jr. to parents, October 10, 1862, in Cummins and Hohweiler, Enlisted Soldier’s View of the Civil War, 40.
leave him for freedom,” wrote 114th Illinois Infantry member Alvin French to his aunt.124 Joseph Stockton of the Seventy-Second Illinois Infantry found a great deal of humor in an incident that occurred during dinner at a Louisiana plantation. The overseer was bragging about his slaves’ loyalty when one came in and whispered something in his ear. The overseer sprang from his chair, exclaiming, “Good God, you don’t say so, are they all going?” The slave responded, “All going, Massa, and so is I” and then ran out of the room. Stockton and his fellow officers had a good laugh while the overseer let forth a stream of curses.125

Daniel M. Nettleton of the Fourth Illinois Cavalry challenged any northern slavery sympathizers who doubted that slaves yearned to be free to come to Memphis now that the Union occupied it and observe the multitudes of slaves who daily arrived there. The proof would be compelling enough to “convince even the editor of the [Democratic] Chicago Times.”126 Another member of Nettleton’s cavalry regiment, William P. Callon, mocked the alleged “divine adoration” slaves held for their masters. That loyalty, he wrote to his hometown newspaper editor, found a “beautiful proof and illustration in the swarms of them that flock to our lines.” Callon scripted a dialogue between a contraband and soldier where the latter, seeking to understand why the slave would choose to run away, asks if his master has been kind. The contraband replies, “‘Well yes sah, he’s kind ‘nuff for all day, p’raps, but de fac is Master, I wants to be

124 Alvin French to aunt, November 25, 1862, Alvin S. French Papers, Illinois History and Lincoln Collections.
125 Joseph Stockton, diary, July 14, 1863, Gregory A. Coco Collection, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, United States Army Heritage Center.
126 Daniel M. Nettleton to brother, August 18, 1862, Daniel M. Nettleton Papers, Illinois History and Lincoln Collections.
Lieutenant Otis Moody witnessed such scenes unfold in real life, noting in his diary a slave would serve “his Master faithfully up to the very moment of his capture, but when the same act made his master a prisoner and himself a freedman, he seemed to rejoice about equally at both results. Many of this class are surprisingly quick in their perceptions.” Harriet Wiswall, the step-niece of Owen and Elijah Lovejoy, observed a similar reaction on an expedition to a Mississippi plantation while she was serving as a nurse in Vicksburg. She recalled how the slaves she encountered were initially “afraid, & said they were sorry that their masters were gone.” But Wiswall and her companions laughed, and the slaves quickly “acknowledged that they were glad, & willing to suffer anything to be free, & they have suffered in every way.”

Although a small percentage of slaves managed to escape long distances to Union lines, most were able to find freedom when Union forces were in close proximity, such as when they marched through or occupied nearby lands. In many of these instances, soldiers were conscious of their influence on the erosion of slavery. “Slavery withers wherever we go,” observed John Russell of the Twenty-First Illinois Infantry. The chaplain with the 118th Illinois Infantry answered the question, “do the slaves want liberty?” by describing a scene where “women with children in their arms waded through the mud keeping pace with cavalry. Men packed heavy bundles on their backs.—Creeks had to be forded and through them men and women waded…They had one desire which

127 Lincoln Herald, April 10, 1862, in Donath, Logan County, 84.
130 Oakes, Freedom National, 410.
131 John Russell to sister, December 8, 1862, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, United States Army Heritage Center.
they expressed in these words, ‘We’s gowan wid ye’all.’”

Referring to a four-day round-trip excursion from Murfreesboro to Nashville, Tennessee, Amos Hostetter wrote, “nothing of interest occurred on the route except that we picked up all the Negro’s [sic], Male & Female that wanted to go, and took them to Nashville…Every day we start some of them away from their masters. We will soon end slavery if you only leave us alone.”

Joseph Stockton, a native of Pennsylvania who worked as a railroad clerk in Chicago before the war, recorded a particularly descriptive account of the process of emancipation as an officer of the Seventy-Second Illinois Infantry. Shortly after the capture of Vicksburg, he led four companies in an expedition from Natchez, Mississippi, into Louisiana to gather livestock and munitions. He recorded in his journal details from “one of the most exciting days I have spent in the service”:

The country is a beautiful one, splendid plantations just blooming with cotton, the first I have ever seen in such an early stage. I mounted my men as fast as I could. The march was a perfect ovation from the darkies who [for the] first time in their lives saw Yankee soldiers and knew they were free; they rushed to the road, fell on their knees praying with all the fervor and feeling of the race. “Glory be to God, freedom’s come at last,” etc. etc. They brought us fruits of the finest kind, butter, milk, eggs, chickens, in fact all they could get—so happy to know they were now free…We marched about fifteen miles into the country and then, as ordered, started back on our march toward the river. Such a sight as met my gaze. All along the road were the negroes with their families, household goods, everything they could gather in the short time, piled up in their immense cotton wagons as high as they could get them. There must have been thousands, no end to the children; such a happy set of beings I never saw before. There were to use their own words, “Going to freedom.” They knew nothing else, cared for nothing else, they were now free, what they had looked forward for, for years, had come upon them in a moment, nothing could induce them to stay on their plantations. I told them our provisions were short; they cared not, they could find something to eat, they cared not if they died, they were now free; they sang and danced, kissed

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132 Hancock New Era, January 12, 1865, in Rugh, “Awful Calamities Now upon Us,” 27.

133 Amos Hostetter to Owen P. and Hannah Miles, January 29, 1863, Amos W. Hostetter Letters, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.
each other and all the extravagant demonstrations of joy you can imagine were carried on.  

As discussed in chapter 5, supporting and facilitating emancipation did not automatically eliminate the anti-black prejudice Illinois soldiers harbored, but it did provide undeniable testimony of slaves’ aspirations for freedom. Beyond forging a fundamental human connection, this was a necessary reality that Northern whites had to acknowledge if they were to accept the expansion of black rights. As accomplices in black liberation, Illinois soldiers became invested in the plight of slaves to a degree unthinkable before enlisting. This process assumed a personal dimension as they interacted with slaves as individuals and in many instances came to depend upon them.

**Unlikely Allies**

Army life provided few comforts, but perhaps most demoralizing was the food. Many soldiers probably would not have imagined they would ever miss salted pork and “worm castles” (hardtack) until they had to endure days or even weeks of half- or quarter-rations. Fresh food was a delicacy, especially during the first year of the war when regulations against foraging were often strictly enforced. Of all the ways slaves aided in the Union war effort, helping to procure food was one of the most immediately appreciated by soldiers of all political stripes. Seemingly small gestures could leave deep impressions, as demonstrated by the soldier in the Thirty-Sixth Illinois Infantry who wrote home about being flagged down and invited to “fill our pockets” with the apples a slave was bringing to market. Larger bounties could be had when slaves alerted

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134 Joseph Stockton, diary, July 14, 1863, Gregory A. Coco Collection, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, United States Army Heritage Center.

135 *Aurora Beacon*, October 24, 1861.
passing troops to where their owners had stashed stockpiles of food. While participating in the Yazoo Pass Expedition in early 1863, Joseph Stockton had the good fortune of stopping at a plantation where slaves led him to “where there was a lot of meat and sugar about two miles from the river, hid in the woods.” He and his men took their fill of hams and destroyed the rest. They also brought the slaves back with them to their boat, fearful their owner would kill them for their betrayal. Another group of slaves gained their freedom when they rowed up at Fort Henry on the Tennessee River with a “boat load of Secesh corn.” The members of the First Illinois Light Artillery “liked their looks pretty well and took them along” as servants.

In addition to providing the army with physical nourishment, slaves regularly offered military intelligence as well. They were well positioned to do so, being familiar with the lay of the land and the movement of people on it. Just before the first shots were fired in the Battle of Fredericktown, Missouri, on October 21, 1861, an “old negro” warned Illinois soldiers that “old Jeff. [Brig. Gen. Meriwether Jeff Thompson] is up dah on de hill, wid a hole lot ob men.” The troops paid the man little heed, but a reconnoiter confirmed that the enemy was “concealed in the corn fields and woods.” Most soldiers were not so cavalier about the knowledge disclosed by slaves and came to put great stock in it. Just over a year into the war, an Illinois soldier stationed at LaGrange, Tennessee, remarked how “nearly all the information we receive with regard to the movements of the enemy comes from the Negroes,” despite the regiment’s policy of not allowing slaves to

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136 Joseph Stockton, diary, March 19, 1863, Gregory A. Coco Collection, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, United States Army Heritage Center.

137 John T. Cheney to Mary Cheney, April 12, 1862, in Armstrong, Illinois Artillery Officer’s Civil War, 30.

138 Amboy Times, November 7, 1861.
enter or follow their camp. In July 1862, Albert Marshall of the Thirty-Third Illinois Infantry found himself in an Arkansas forest. He knew a large enemy force was nearby but did not know its precise location. Fortunately, he stumbled upon two slaves who pointed to where the Confederate forces lay in wait. Marshall “did not for a moment doubt” the slaves’ reliability, as “we can always depend upon the colored folks to tell us the truth about the rebels.”

Slaves provided tactical support by volunteering to lead troops through unfamiliar terrain, such as the individual who helped William A. Smith and his fellow Seventh Illinois Cavalry members during a skirmish near Holly Springs, Mississippi. “There was a negro [sic] said he could show our force how to get around them [Confederate troops],” Smith recounted to his wife. They “followed the negro and he took them around the enemy, so that our attack was a complete surprise, and we killed two, wounded several and took about 60 prisoners.” Another offered to guide an Illinois mounted infantry unit to the location of a much sought-after ferryboat that rebels in northern Tennessee had been using to cross the Cumberland River. Writing a year after the end of the war, a member of the Eighty-Sixth Illinois Infantry recalled the “sable cloud…bound for Elysium” that followed the rear of his column. He editorialized, “let those who choose to curse the negro curse him; but one thing is true, despite the unworthiness they bear on many minds, that they were the only friends on whom we

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139 Lincoln Herald, July 3, 1862, in Donath, Logan County, 119-20.
141 William A. Smith to wife, November 11, 1862, William A. Smith Letters, Civil War Miscellaneous Collection, United States Army Heritage Center.
142 Bloomington Pantagraph, March 25, 1863, in Munson, It Is Begun!, 104.
could rely for the sacred truth in the sunny land of Dixie...they knew more and could tell more than most of the poor white population."  

Even in Confederate prison camps slaves were able to disseminate valuable information to the inmates. Edmund Newsome was a captain in the Eighty-First Illinois Infantry who spent ten months as a prisoner of war. He recorded in his journal an incident that occurred at Camp Sorghum, a prison for Union troops in Columbia, South Carolina. Slaves brought wood to the inmates but were forbidden to talk with them. One day in mid-February 1865, the slave who was assigned this task jumped off his wagon to fix something on it, and “while doing so, and without raising his head, he kept muttering, ‘Sherman is within thirty miles. He’ll be here in a few days.’” Word spread throughout the camp and the inmates resolved to speedily finish their escape tunnels before they were removed to a more secure area.  

Newsome was not able to escape before being transported out of Sherman’s orbit, at least for the time being, but the Union soldiers who did manage to break out of prisons found themselves with few resources in an unknown land populated by hostile whites. Under these circumstances, the guidance given by slaves was indispensible. Newsome knew this from discussions with fellow inmates who had escaped and avoided recapture for upwards of five to six weeks. He recalled how they described their time on the lam: “they all told of good fare, plenty to eat supplied by the negroes, who were mostly friendly to them, and would do all they could to help them through. The darkies would


feed them, and hide them during the day, then pilot them on their way during the
night.”\footnote{145} Captured in Acworth, Georgia, Lucius Barber of the Fifteenth Illinois Infantry
spent time as an inmate of the infamous Andersonville prison. Like Newsome, he also
learned from recaptured prisoners that “the negroes, with rare exception, always befriend
these fugitives. They have been known in hundreds of cases to secret and feed them for
months.”\footnote{146} William McAdams of the Fifty-Ninth Illinois Infantry was encamped near
Cleveland, Tennessee, on the eve of the Atlanta campaign when he was surprised by the
appearance of an acquaintance from another regiment. The man had been a prisoner at
Danville, Virginia, and slipped away while on detail cutting wood. He spent twenty-six
days traversing more than one hundred miles to make his way back to Union lines at
Fayetteville, West Virginia. The man regaled McAdams with stories of his journey,
telling him that “\textit{Colored Men} were their friends, and guided them by night, and secreted,
and shared their food with them, by day” until they reached the base of the Alleghany
Mountains, where loyal whites did the same.\footnote{147}

Stories like these were so well known among enlisted men that after Magnus Tait
of the First Illinois Light Artillery dug under the fence of his prison stockade at
Savannah, Georgia, and was making a mad dash for freedom through town, he hoped to
“meet some darky, (for I knew he would direct me O.K.).”\footnote{148} William Cammire of the
Seventy-Third Illinois Infantry also attempted a daring escape. Taken prisoner in the
Battle of Chickamauga and put on a train to Richmond, Cammire leapt from his moving

\footnote{145} Edmund Newsome, diary, October 7, 1864, in \textit{Experience in the War of the Great Rebellion}, 200.
\footnote{146} Lucius W. Barber, \textit{Army Memoirs of Lucius W. Barber, Company “D,” 15\textsuperscript{th} Illinois Volunteer Infantry}
(Chicago: J.M.W. Jones Stationery and Printing, 1894), 172.
\footnote{147} William McAdams to Harriet, April 26, 1864, Lewis Leigh Collection, United States Army Heritage Center.
car in the dark of night. Alone, hungry, and unsure where to go, he hoped to “see some negroes—for I thought they would befriend me—and get some assistance from them, in order to continue my journey.” Instead, Cammire ran into an “old gray-headed” white man who turned him over to Confederate authorities. He was subsequently imprisoned in Castle Thunder in Richmond but bored with the monotony of prison life, he again took flight by tying together blankets and sliding down the prison wall. After a few days on the lam, hunger pains were about to force him to surrender when he passed by a plantation. Furtively, he was able to gain the attention of a slave, who procured for him “the sweetest and best meal I ever ate” in addition to clothing and charcoal to darken his skin. Following the directions given by the slave, Cammire reached the safety of Union lines a few days later.149

Slaves also took the initiative to act as spies, keeping tabs on the activities of local whites and informing on Confederate sympathizers to nearby Union troops. Under the cover of night, a Kentucky slave approached soldiers of the Seventy-Eighth Illinois Infantry who were on picket duty to tell them about a rebel who had visited his master’s home that evening. A squad went to investigate and the slave owner was discovered to have had a history of providing aid to the Confederate cause. “He is now under heavy bonds, for his behavior” wrote Thomas Odell to his wife. “He can’t imagine how we got the information. The darkey is all right.”150 The support slaves provided to Union troops also extended to the dead. Lyman Widney, a private in the Thirty-Fourth Illinois Infantry, shared with his family how slaves who were tasked with burying the fallen at

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150 Thomas Odell to wife, December 27, 1862, in Virdin, Civil War Correspondence, 24-25.
Murfreesboro helped his company locate the body of their lieutenant. He continued, “these poor negroes, the property of Rebels, had been very careful to place the Yankees above the Rebels in burying. They allways [sic] took the best care of our boys they said and facts prove it to be the truth.”151

Notwithstanding Washington’s ambiguous contraband policy in the early part of the war, the Union army needed workers. This became increasingly vital as federal forces pushed further into the South and into coastal areas, expanding the area where they had to maintain an occupying force. Putting contrabands to work was an obvious solution, one that would also have the benefit of depriving Confederates of a major labor source. Benjamin Butler’s successor at Fort Monroe continued making use of contrabands to fortify the garrison and paid them ten dollars a month. This practice spread to every theater of war as the Union army and navy employed fugitive slaves as free laborers in a wide variety of roles, including foragers, teamsters, carpenters, cooks, coal heavers, blacksmiths, wagon masters, lumberjacks, and masons.152

Not all Union troops were pleased with the employment of black workers. Robert A. Galbraith of the Eighty-Sixth Illinois Infantry seethed at what he perceived to be preferential treatment of contrabands, writing his parents, “I dont think that ever there was much abolition about me but what there was is all gone if you could see the damd nigers riding on horses and us poor Devils have to walk and carry our Nap sacks.”153

Some soldiers questioned the work ethic of contrabands, such as John Cheney, who wrote

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153 Robert A. Galbraith to parents, November 16, 1862, Robert A. Galbraith Letter, Filson Historical Society.
his wife, “the Negroes are very communicative, and in many instances utterly refuse to work, evidently supposing that we have come to liberate them from bondage.”

Oscar Easley also grumbled to his wife that the contrabands charged with digging near the riverbank worked too slowly and believed “one white man will do more than three of them.”

By and large, however, Illinois troops welcomed the support given by contraband workers. Any qualms they may have had about the ability of slaves to transition to free labor conditions were eventually quashed. At Jackson, Tennessee, Allen Morgan Geer of the Twentieth Illinois Infantry supervised a group of fifty contrabands tasked with organizing ammunition in public buildings. He noted in his diary that evening that he was “driven to the conclusion that the negroes were the working class of this country.”

Humphrey Hood, surgeon with the 117th Illinois Infantry, confided to his wife, “I think it may be said truthfully, that if any class of men earn all they get from the [U.S.] Government, it is the Negroes.” Contrary to Cheney’s perception that fugitive slaves did not want to labor, a member of the Thirty-Seventh Illinois Infantry noted how the slaves who joined his regiment as it marched through the Yazoo Valley were “ever ready to do any labor assigned to them and are jubilant at the prospect of being free.”

An Illinois soldier stationed in Corinth informed the editor of the Bureau County Republican, “the black boys are doing a great deal of work in and about this place. In fact there is

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154 John Cheney to Mary Cheney, June 7, 1862, in Armstrong, Illinois Artillery Officer’s Civil War, 59.
155 Oscar Easley to Amy Easley, March 4, 1863, Oscar Easley Letters, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.
158 Waukegan Weekly Gazette, August 8, 1863.
little useless furniture here in the shape of ‘cullud gemmen.’”

Another soldier stationed at Corinth shared with readers of his hometown paper, the *Aledo Weekly Record*, how satisfied he was with the labor performed by contrabands: “as many as are needed here work willingly, building fortifications, driving teams for some regiments, and doing all kinds of fatigue duty, and as well as a white man. Besides, as a general thing, they are anxious to labor, even if for no other remuneration than their board and clothing.”

If politicians in Washington viewed the handling of contrabands as a political issue, for many soldiers it was also a matter of practical necessity and self-interest. They expressed relief at the lightening of their workloads thanks to contraband labor. This calculation could be made on a personal level, as Charles Wills did with Charley, his body servant. Charley was a Missouri slave when he informed Wills’s Eighth Illinois Infantry company where his master had hidden kegs of powder. As punishment for his betrayal, Charley spent four weeks in irons but managed to escape, reunite with the Eighth, and was working as Wills’s servant in Mississippi by mid-1862. Wills wrote of Charley, “he comes very handy to me when I’m lazy, which, though, is only 30 to 40 times a day. He has my boots blacked and clothes brushed when I get up in the morning, is a splendid hand to take care of a horse.” Charley expressed interest in going back home to Illinois with Wills, who thought enough of him to ask his sister if she would like to hire him.

Soldiers also recognized the larger contribution contrabands made to the war effort, especially when it relieved enlisted men of the more unpleasant tasks of army life.

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159 *Bureau County Republican*, December 25, 1862.

160 *Aledo Weekly Record*, December 23, 1862.

Daniel M. Nettleton wrote of the “thousands of Negroes” in Union-occupied Memphis who were erecting breastworks and “doing all kinds of government work thus saving soldiers from the sunstroke and sickness.” Nettleton estimated that “nine-tenths of the drudgery of Sherman’s division is now done by negroes.”

Major James Connolly recorded in his diary how contrabands alleviated the army’s burdens while on the move through Georgia:

> Our stock of negroes is increasing rapidly; many of them travel on horseback now; they furnish their own, i.e., their masters, [sic] horses, saddles and bridles, so they are no expense to Uncle Sam; a great many of our privates are getting negro servants for themselves; the negro walks along beside the soldier, with his knapsack and cooking utensils strapped upon his back, thus relieving the soldier of his load, and helping him along. What soldier wouldn’t be an abolitionist under such circumstances.

Of course not all soldiers became abolitionists, but the aid provided by contrabands helped curb the aversion some soldiers initially felt toward their presence. Sidney Robinson, who described the first blacks he saw as “ugly devils,” admitted that “those black fellows relieve us entirely from all fatigue. Labor under those considerations we can stand them well.” Edmund Newsome summed up this change in opinion in the fall of 1862, noting in his diary, “many men, who were at first opposed to employing them, are now convinced of the propriety of the measure.” To the *Chicago Tribune* Major William Wallis of the Ninth Illinois Cavalry conveyed the change of sentiment he observed among his troops. Contrabands had provided his men with

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162 Daniel M. Nettleton to brother, August 18, 1862, Daniel M. Nettleton Papers, Illinois History and Lincoln Collections.


165 Edmund Newsome, diary, October 16, 1862, in *Experience in the War of the Great Rebellion*, 11.
invaluable assistance as scouts, hunters, and laborers. “Our Western boys were very thankful for their aid, and to it they attribute no inconsiderable share of the success which attended their march.” Wallis wrote that opposition to the employment of black workers had “entirely disappeared…soldiers who were the most rantankerous Democrats when they started from home have become practical Abolitionists, to whom the work of liberation is now a positive delight.”

Some Illinois soldiers found themselves in the heretofore improbable and remarkable position of being advocates and defenders of runaway slaves. Charles Wills, to his own chagrin, was among this group. He openly declared his dislike of blacks, telling a family member, “I don’t care a damn for these darkies” and believed fugitive slaves were “better off with their masters 50 times over than with us.” Yet even he found himself inexplicably unable to “send a runaway nigger back. I’m blamed if I could.”

There were numerous instances of soldiers intervening in slave owners’ attempts to retrieve their human property, such as men from the Eighty-Ninth Illinois Infantry who threatened to shoot seven slave hunters who came into their lines looking for a runaway slave and those of the Eleventh Illinois Infantry who stole a slave owner’s horse when he attempted to recapture a slave in their camp. Members of Company E of the Tenth Illinois Infantry rolled up a fugitive slave in a tent and placed him in a supply wagon to avoid recapture by his owner.

166 Chicago Tribune, July 22, 1862.

167 Charles W. Wills to Mary E. Kellogg, April 16 13, 1862, in Kellogg, Army Life of an Illinois Soldier, 83.


Illinois Infantry were about to land their skiff on the Arkansas shore of the Mississippi River when four slaves ran out of the woods. A white man on horseback and a pack of dogs followed in hot pursuit. The soldiers steered toward the slaves and fired on the dogs, forcing the pursuer to make a hasty retreat.\textsuperscript{170}

Sometimes soldiers even acted to protect fugitive slaves from their fellow comrades in arms. Passing through Winchester, Kentucky, in November of 1862, Colonel Smith D. Atkins and his men of the Ninety-Second Illinois Infantry successfully faced down Kentucky Union soldiers who threatened to take by force the contrabands employed in their service.\textsuperscript{171} During the Atlanta campaign, Major General Jefferson C. Davis ordered the pontoon bridge across Ebenzer Creek to be dismantled after the Union troops had finished crossing. This left the contrabands who followed behind the choice of risking drowning if they attempted to cross or being captured by the pursuing Confederate cavalry. Major James Connolly of the 123\textsuperscript{rd} Illinois Infantry was outraged at this and penned an eight-page letter to a recently elected Illinois congressman, imploring him to open an investigation on Davis for his malicious actions against those who have “assisted rather than retarded us in our march.”\textsuperscript{172}

In addition to relieving much of the labor burdens from Union troops, the employment of contrabands also facilitated relationships between Illinois soldiers and slaves that would have been unimaginable before the war. The intimacy of camp life

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\item[170] \textit{Waukegan Weekly Gazette}, September 9, 1862.
\end{footnotes}
afforded countless opportunities for members of each group to interact with the other. At the very least, these exchanges humanized slavery for those who primarily thought of it as an economic system or political concern. Illinois soldiers did not suddenly and completely shed their prejudice, but they did have their racial views confronted and challenged.

Some were able to relate to slaves as individuals, not as “institutions.” Humphrey Hood wrote his wife about Cornelious, a contraband who recently arrived in his camp. Hood had a long conversation with him and was “surprised at the knowledge he possessed…This man seems very willing to work and does his work well but until I stirred him up a little tonight I thought him very stupid, but I found him possessed of some ideas in regard to his rights and responsibilities.”

Thomas Winston of the Ninety-Second Illinois Infantry was heartened by the interchanges he observed in camp, telling his wife, “our boys generally treat them [contrabands] well. While I am writing this I can hear from one end of our encampment, a few negroes entertaining our boys with dancing and Singing. Plenty of fun is the result to both parties, and as I heard one of the boys express his surprise at what he called the Smartness of the blacks, I have no doubt mutual respect follows.”

In the presence of a common enemy, faced with incontrovertible proof of slaves’ desire to be free, soldiers discovered a shared humanity with slaves, one that could foster empathy. For example, a Fifteenth Illinois Regiment volunteer related to the sacrifice made by his company’s cook: “he came to us at LaGrange, and would be perfectly happy


had he not been obliged to leave his family behind, to see whom he says he would risk the chance of recapture. Thus this war not only severs the families of free men, but also of slaves.” A surgeon with the Thirty-Sixth Illinois Infantry recalled a similar incident that profoundly affected him. A slave in his mid-twenties helped navigate Union troops through Confederate-held land. He accepted the soldiers’ invitation to remain with them, but as they left the area the slave’s wife and children caught up with the rear column and begged him to stay. He tried to persuade them to come with him but his wife would not leave the plantation. As they continued down the road, the surgeon watched the slave look back frequently, and “could see his broad black chest heave, and hear him sigh. I pitied him, and thought he felt and acted as I did when I left my home, wife and baby, and followed. In a word, he acted as a man—a human being.”

Towards Abolition

Aware of the value contrabands contributed to the Union war effort and their loyalty to that cause, emancipation sentiment grew among Illinois troops. They were becoming frustrated at what they perceived to be a dilatory and ineffectual handling of the war by top generals and Washington. The Confiscation Act and subsequent approach that Union troops would be “neither negro catchers, nor negro thieves” were not orders so much as recommendations that could be interpreted any number of ways.

By the beginning of the second year of the war, Illinois soldiers were becoming weary of treading lightly around slave owners’ rights and their criticisms of how the war

175 Waukegan Weekly Gazette, September 9, 1862.
176 Bennett and Haigh, History of the Thirty-Sixth Regiment Illinois Volunteers, 311.
177 Oakes, Freedom National, 177.
was being prosecuted became more vocal. A frustrated Illinois volunteer in Alabama wrote, there is “such dissatisfaction arising among our troops as will yet cause trouble if there is not soon a different policy pursued.” In a private letter published in the *Aledo Weekly Record*, another soldier divulged, “there is a general change in the views of many of our soldiers. You may call it Abolitionism or whatever you please, but the truth is, we are about tired of guarding secesh property and paying the prices we do for any little luxury we may chance to need.” Private Allen Patton, a native of Palestine, Illinois, was one of those whose views had changed in a short span of time. He opposed General Frémont’s edict when it was issued, believing it would spur rebels to fight more fiercely. But eleven months later Patton admitted he was wrong. “I was one who clung to the old policy and have always expressed myself in favor of it, but they [Confederates] have treated it with so much contempt and at the same time gathered so much strength from it that I’m now in for a more vigorous policy.” He reassured his family, “I am not yet an abolitionist…but I’m in favor of almost any means to bring about a speedy termination of this accursed war.”

Republican in Washington were coming to the same conclusion. In March 1862, Congress passed an article of war that prohibited Union troops from returning fugitive slaves to their owners and punished violators with court-martial. On paper, this was a decisive strike against slavery. It did not exempt runaways from the Border States or differentiate between slaves who were owned by Union or Confederate masters. Here at


179 *Aledo Weekly Record*, July 29, 1862.

last was a uniform policy dictating to troops in the field what not to do with contrabands. Yet, as with the Confiscation Act, commanders persisted in issuing their own orders in regard to fugitive slaves, ignoring orders from higher up the chain of command if they disagreed with them. Some continued to turn away contrabands, expel those in the ranks, or cooperate with local authorities for their return. “Too much protection has been given to rebel property…The milk and water policy is about played out,” complained George Hull of the Twentieth Illinois Infantry, who named generals Halleck and McClellan as the prime offenders.

Don Carlos Buell, Commander of the Army of the Ohio, also gained a notorious reputation for appeasing slave owners as his troops moved through Tennessee, northern Alabama, and Kentucky in the summer and fall months of 1862. Illinois troops serving under him did not conceal their antipathy for his leadership. “Gen. Buell is fast losing caste in this department, on account of his pro-slavery proclivities,” wrote John Vreeland of the Nineteenth Illinois Infantry to his parents in August 1862. He told them how his company impressed twenty-five slaves into service to help them build stockades near Huntsville, Alabama. Their owners complained to Buell, who ordered the slaves be sent back; one received three hundred lashes for his involvement. Another soldier serving under Buell, Major James Connolly, wrote his fiancée shortly after the Battle of Perryville, which ended up being Buell’s last engagement before he was relieved of


184 John Vreeland to parents, August 4, 1862, Vreeland-Warden Papers, United States Army Heritage Center.
command. Connolly expressed his desire for “an active earnest leader from the free states! One who sees nothing sacred in negro slavery—one who can say to neutral Kentuckians ‘Get thee behind me, Satan.’” He added, “I am heartily tired of his kind of work, and if I had no hopes of a speedy change of policy I wouldn’t hold a commission another day in such service of protecting rebels and their property.”185

Connolly had good reason to be optimistic for the implementation of a more aggressive slavery policy by the fall of 1862. Lincoln and congressional Republicans had taken an increasingly aggressive stance toward slavery over the course of the year. During the spring, Lincoln pushed for and Congress adopted a resolution for gradual, compensated emancipation in the Border States. Although rejected by the loyal slave states, it was nonetheless a public declaration that the abolition of slavery, and not just individual emancipations, was becoming a strategy for ending the war. It also marked the end of Lincoln’s arduous attempts to appease conservatives.186 In April Congress took the unprecedented step of using federal power to abolish slavery in the nation’s capital. Two months later it passed a bill, introduced by Illinois Congressman Isaac Arnold, banning slavery from the territories. The main issue that caused the Republican Party to come into being was laid to rest when Lincoln signed the bill into law on June 19.187

Military policy regarding slavery was also targeted for reform during the summer of 1862. A Second Confiscation Act, this one also proposed by Illinois Congressman Lyman Trumbull, became law on July 17, the final day of the congressional session. Unlike the first, the Second Confiscation Act stated that slaves of rebels who either made

185 James Connolly to Mary Dunn, October 24, 1862, in Angle, Three Years in the Army of the Cumberland, 27.
186 McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom, 503.
187 Foner, Fiery Trial, 195-205.
their way to Union lines or lived in seceded areas subsequently occupied by Federal forces were “deemed captive of war” and “forever free of their servitude, and not again held as slaves.” On the same day Lincoln also signed the Militia Act, which authorized the enlistment of “persons of African descent” for any military service “for which they may be found competent,” thus laying the groundwork for black combatants. Under this act, enlisted males as well as their nuclear families were freed if owned by Confederate masters. These pieces of legislation were significant advancements from earlier government fugitive slave policies. No longer would the status of certain classes of slaves be left purposefully ambiguous or classified with other forms of rebel property, which could only be forfeited through court proceedings. Hereafter the war purpose would be officially and unequivocally linked with emancipation.  

Illinois soldiers generally greeted the new policy with relief. For some it legitimized the actions they had already been taking while for others it inspired the hope, in the words of one soldier, that they too would soon be allowed to use contrabands “as an effectual means against our enemies.”  

David Givler, a musician with the Seventh Illinois Infantry, wrote of the Second Confiscation Act, “it puts new zeal into the soldiers for they think they have protected rebel property about long enough now.” Another soldier told the editor of the Lincoln Herald, “many who were at first obstinate on this subject, are becoming better acquainted with the designs and are beginning to see the

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188 Foner, Fiery Trial, 214-16; Oakes, Freedom National, 235-45.
189 Watson Goodrich to Alvin French, August 14, 1862, Alvin S. French Papers, Illinois History and Lincoln Collections.
necessity of such an action.”\textsuperscript{191} John Vreeland gave the new legislation his hearty endorsement, for no longer would he “be obliged to protect the property of Rebels by day, and be set up as a mark for the same person by night.” Moreover, it “makes us feel that as Citizens soldiers, we have a right to be respected,” as opposed to having to respect the feelings of traitors.\textsuperscript{192} James Jessee of the Eighth Illinois Infantry hoped the new policy would “soon end the war.”\textsuperscript{193}

Not all shared Jessee’s optimism. Throughout 1862 a growing number of Illinois soldiers were coming to believe that nothing short of the complete destruction of slavery would end the bloodshed. Many of those who came to this viewpoint were among the earliest volunteers. They had spent months deployed in slave states and grew to view slavery as the ultimate cause of the war. Until the North committed to fully excising it from the nation, casualties would continue to mount on both sides and a lasting peace would never be secured. A Schuyler County volunteer in the Sixteenth Illinois Infantry acknowledged his own views on emancipation had changed since the start of the war: “You know how I stood on the nigger question when at home. My opinion is changed of late. I now say, free every slave in the South…As long as the slave is left they [the Confederate States] are alright.”\textsuperscript{194} “We will never be free from trouble until slavery is annihilated,” concluded 20\textsuperscript{th} Illinois Infantry volunteer George Hull.\textsuperscript{195} In a September letter to his parents that was printed in the Belvidere Standard, Joseph Devlin of the

\textsuperscript{191} Lincoln Herald, August 14, 1862, in Donath, Logan County, 136.
\textsuperscript{192} John Vreeland to parents, August 4, 1862, Vreeland-Warden Papers, United States Army Heritage Center.
\textsuperscript{193} James Jessee, diary, August 16, 1862, in Civil War Diaries of James W. Jessee, 1861-1865, ed. William P. LaBounty (Normal, IL: McLean County Genealogical Society, 1997), section 1:22.
\textsuperscript{194} Schuyler Citizen, reprinted in the Illinois State Journal, September 26, 1862.
\textsuperscript{195} Clinton Public, July 31, 1862, in Hubbard, Illinois’s War, 91.
Fifteenth Illinois Infantry disclosed his evolving views: “You may think my ideas are changed considerably since my enlistment, and I assure you it [sic] has. I am now in the true sense of the word an Abolitionist (don’t start and look pale).” He explained, “in order to crush this war, you must commence and destroy the root of it, and that is Slavery. You at home can not realize it as we who are in the field.”

John Russell of the Twenty-First Illinois Infantry reached the same conclusion. “To destroy slavery is a necessity of the war,” he wrote to his sister. “You can no more prosecute the war and steer clear of slavery than you could of rebellion its self.” He interpreted General George McClellan’s failed Peninsula Campaign as an important lesson illustrating “how very impotent is all our power[,] all our vast resources, even against this most wicked rebellion, so long as we keep this wedge of silver (Slavery) hid and refuse to give it up.”

Even if the Union were able to defeat Confederate forces in 1862, some Illinois troops believed it would amount to little more than a temporary armistice and they would be fighting again in short order as long as slavery endured. If slavery were the cause of the war, then extirpating it now was the only chance for achieving a concrete and permanent reunification. Joseph Ward had two years of service remaining in October 1862, but he already planned on reenlisting if need be in order to guarantee that “this once happy land shall be what it never was before free and there shall be no more slaves, no never. Since we are envolved [sic] in the war we wish to accomplish the end and never

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196 Belvidere Standard, October 14, 1862.
197 John Russell to sister, December 8, 1862, July 16, 1862, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, United States Army Heritage Center.
leave a cause for another war.” John Russell agreed. He was committed to achieving a “full and thorough settlement, no matter what the cost in blood and treasure so that we may never have a recurrence of the present deplorable state of affairs.” John Johnston Jones, a soldier who regularly corresponded with the *Aledo Weekly Record*, lashed out at the “dolts” in the North who were anxious about launching a full-scale assault on slavery. He wondered, “will they smother down and cover up this seething volcano of rebellion, to have it break out again in a few years, in a fresh flood of fire and blood, and treasure?”

In Jones’s estimation, the sacrifices made by northern troops demanded that the war have a purposeful outcome. The more he and his comrades suffered, the greater his resolve became. Shortly after the Union capture of Fort Donelson in February 1862, Jones penned a letter to the *Aledo Weekly Record*’s editor expressing his frustration with those at home who remained averse to meddling with slavery. He wished that they could have been at the battle to experience the “storm of iron hail” that rained down upon his head, and to see “their dearest friends fall dead at their side, or torn limb from limb, bespatter the ground with a mangled mass of flesh and blood, and brains.” Then he would have them go to the “desolated” homes of the fallen to “study the price they have been willing to pay for Slavery.” If they were still reluctant to agitate against slavery, he would have them “convicted of insanity and sent to some bedlam.” Ransom Bedell, a private in the Thirty-Ninth Illinois Infantry, similarly believed that great losses required great

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199 John Russell to sister, December 8, 1862, *Civil War Times Illustrated* Collection, United States Army Heritage Center.

200 *Aledo Weekly Record*, March 11, 1862.

201 *Aledo Weekly Record*, March 11, 1862.
consequences. By the summer of 1862, he was committed to the “utter extinction of the vile thing which has caused the untimely death of so many of the Brave sons of the north.”

In July 1862, John Russell anticipated Lincoln’s announcement of emancipation using similar logic: “I believe we are near the consummation of an event that is well worth all the expenditure of treasure and blood.” Russell understood that the road to abolition could not be traveled “faster than Public opinion can be carried along,” but he was confident that there was a “mighty revolution a going on in the minds of men on the niger [sic] question.”

By the end of 1862, the war that the earliest Illinois volunteers eagerly signed up for had turned out far different than they could have imagined. For one, they were still fighting. For another, many were beginning to recognize that an eventual Union victory would entail more than simply bringing the errant states back into the national fold. The centrality of slavery to the conflict and the unquestionable role that slaves claimed for themselves in it had altered the meaning of the war in ways most whites never imagined in the patriotic frenzy following the fall of Fort Sumter. With the Emancipation Proclamation and enlistment of black troops on the horizon, Illinois soldiers would be forced to confront their own racial attitudes even more directly and reassess what they were fighting for.

While the troops were beginning to embrace the need for the complete abolition of slavery, back at home a different sort of war was brewing. Stephen Douglas’s admonition to forego party politics was quickly flouted, as the politicization of the

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202 Ransom Bedell essay, [Summer of 1862?], Ransom Bedell Letters, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.

203 John Russell to sister, July 16, 1862, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, United States Army Heritage Center.
conflict created deep rifts among the populace and party affiliation became a barometer of one’s allegiance to the federal government. The war spilled over into Illinois in the form of migrating fugitive slaves, and whites scrambled to prevent the war from altering the legal, social, and economic edifices of white supremacy that they had constructed over the previous half-century. While Illinois troops were beginning to embrace the complete abolition of slavery as a necessary measure to successfully win the war, back at home many of their friends, family members, and neighbors fought their own battle to inoculate themselves against such an outcome.
Chapter 4:

“There Can Be No Neutrals”:
Dissension and Division on the Home Front, 1862

Henry Clay was born a slave in Kentucky and buried with military honors in Illinois many decades later. His journey to freedom began shortly after the start of the war, when he escaped to the lines of the Tenth Illinois Infantry. He was soon recaptured by rebel forces and put to work building Confederate breastworks until he again fled, this time finding his way to the Seventy-First Illinois Infantry. Clay remained with that regiment, working as a personal servant, until its term of service expired in October 1862. He then accompanied the troops back to Chicago where they were mustered out. A lieutenant of the Seventy-First, Thomas Collins, offered Clay a job on his farm and the two traveled together on the final leg of the journey to Collins’s home near the town of Virginia in mid-state Cass County.

Word of Clay’s arrival quickly spread among local residents, who were none too pleased to have a fugitive slave as a neighbor. In December Clay was arrested and found guilty by a jury of twelve of violating the state’s black exclusion law. His lawyer appealed the verdict and Collins’ brother-in-law offered bond, allowing Clay to be released pending the reconvening of the circuit court in the spring. He returned to the Collins farm and resumed his labors, but local whites had no intention of abiding by the court’s timetable. After two armed mobs descended upon the farm, Clay once again found himself on the run. Under the cover of darkness he trekked to Springfield where the Collins family had arranged for friends to look after him. There he remained until early in 1864, when he enlisted in Twenty-Ninth United States Colored Infantry, then
being recruited in the state. After he was mustered out in November 1865, he returned to Illinois as a Union veteran and spent the remainder of his life there.¹

Clay was among the more than 80,000 southern blacks who migrated to free states during the 1860s and one of 20,000 who settled in Illinois, quadrupling the state’s black population.² Wartime disturbances afforded opportunities for slaves to take flight in search of their freedom. Some, like Clay, accompanied northern soldiers back to their homes. Others were transported to the Midwest by federal forces whose lines were overwhelmed with contrabands. Still others struck out for free soil on their own or with family members.³ Whichever the path traveled to freedom, the northward migration of black people demonstrated that emancipation was a national affair.

In Illinois, black freedom translated into white anxiety over the potential disruptions to the decades-long effort to secure the state for whites and whites alone. Clay was one of perhaps only a dozen blacks in Cass County during his residency there in 1862-63, but to those who sought to forcibly expel him, his presence threatened white domination over labor and social relations.⁴ Illinois Republicans may have cheered on General Frémont and encouraged Washington to adopt more vigorous measures against slavery, but they were unprepared to confront the consequences of those radical policies

¹ The legal and extralegal measures taken against Henry Clay during his time in Cass County are detailed in J. N. Gridley, “A Case Under an Illinois Black Law,” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 4, no. 4 (Jan. 1912): 401-25. This article includes early twentieth-century recollections of those events by the arresting officer, Thomas Collins’s sister, the sergeant major of the Seventy-First Illinois Infantry, and Clay himself. Clay died in 1910 at the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers at Danville and is buried in the adjoining national cemetery.


⁴ According to census data, there were twelve black individuals in Cass County in 1860 and only four ten years later. Ninth Census (1870), 24.
once they spilled over onto their soil. Democrats, on the other hand, were happy to welcome into their ranks those who did not want to see the war turn into a social revolution.

This chapter explores the partisan dimensions of the war on the home front in 1862. Despite Stephen Douglas’s admonition to dispense with this aspect of party politics for the duration of the war, the issues and subsequent antagonisms that divided the two major political parties before the war could not be easily suppressed. The year began with a major political showdown in the form of a constitutional convention. Although ostensibly unrelated to the fighting, the convention could not escape the war’s orbit. The bipartisan unity that reigned after the fall of Fort Sumter dissipated as Republican and Democratic delegates redrew battle lines. The proceedings of the constitutional convention spurred intense partisan wrangling as each side jockeyed to define loyalty and treason. This war of words became increasingly bitter and polarizing, especially during the second half of the war when Republicans desired to pursue more radical measures in waging the war. The convention was also important as an early barometer of how soldiers would react to perceived and real opposition to the war at home. Their near universal opposition to the Democratic-inspired constitution foreshadowed the impending rift between the fighting forces and the Democratic Party’s refusal to support federal war policy.

Though by a smaller margin, voters at home also rejected adopting the proposed constitution. Republicans could count this as a win in their column, but their celebration would be short-lived. Causality lists grew longer as the war entered its second year with no end in sight. The federal government had to resort to a draft to augment its armies.
Illinois avoided conscription this time, but the threat of one chilled those who resented Washington’s enlarging sphere of power. The suspension of the writ of habeas corpus and the arrest of political dissenters only added fuel to the fire. However, it was the migration of blacks to Illinois that turned dissent into rage. That summer, voters had confirmed their desire for Illinois to remain closed to blacks. The establishment of a contraband camp at Cairo in the fall and the northward dispersal of its inhabitants set off popular protests throughout the state. In the midst of this turmoil, Lincoln issued the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. Illinois voters made their disapproval of the changing character of the war felt in the November midterm election by sweeping Republicans from office and replacing them with a hardline faction of Democrats who wanted peace restored at almost any cost.

The “Egyptian Swindle”

At the general election in 1860, Illinois voters approved a call for a state constitutional convention. Though it had been only twelve years since the last revision, the current constitution’s limitations were becoming apparent. The fixed salaries for state officers were grossly inadequate, private bills (such as corporate charters and town incorporations) continued to congest proceedings in both houses, the panic of 1857 renewed hostility toward banks, and high railroad freight rates produced popular resentment. During the decade of the 1850s, Illinois’ population more than doubled to 1.7 million, and many believed the existing constitution was inadequate to meet the
economic demands of a rapidly developing state. At its regular session early in 1861, the general assembly duly designated a date in the coming November for the election of delegates to the constitutional convention.

Of course, during those intervening months the war began and attention shifted to national affairs. In mid-October, the Chicago Times commented, “the rebellion absorbs all attention even now, when we are only a few days from the election of delegates there is literally no discussion of the great questions which will rise before the Convention.” This was not entirely true. Some papers primed themselves for an intense partisan showdown in Springfield. The Urbana Weekly Democrat prodded its readers to “wake up to the importance of selecting delegates” lest the “spur of extreme abolition sentiment” stifle Democratic values. Elsewhere, residents sought to influence the substance of the convention. Impelled by Frémont’s “lawless” proclamation, the Democratic nominating convention in west-central McDonough County adopted a resolution in favor of the “perpetual exclusion of free negroes from Illinois” and vowed that those already in the state would never vote, bear arms, testify against whites, serve as jurors, or attend common schools. Yet overall the contest was attended to with little fanfare and brought out only half of those who voted in the 1860 general election.

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6 Chicago Times, October 16, 1862, quoted in Dickerson, Illinois Constitutional Convention of 1862, 7.

7 Urbana Weekly Democrat, August 24, 1861, quoted in Dickerson, Illinois Constitutional Convention of 1862, 6.

8 Joliet Signal, October 22, 1861.

9 Dickerson, Illinois Constitutional Convention of 1862, 7. Deployed Illinois soldiers were not allowed to vote.
The results of the election, however, did cause a stir. Democrats scored a commanding majority of delegates. Depending on how unknown and fusionist candidates are counted, Democrats captured forty-five to fifty-five of the seventy-five seats. This was a striking outcome for the Democrats, who had been conquered at the polls a year earlier. Republicans cried foul, claiming they had been “magnanimous” and “suspend[ed] party ties” due to the war while their opponents had obviously schemed to gain advantage. Gustav Koerner, former lieutenant governor of the state, blamed the Republican loss on the “apparent fact that where one democrat has gone in the army, three Republicans have.” While Republicans were licking their wounds, Democrats hailed the election as a popular referendum on “the powers that be, state and national.” “If anything has been revealed by the election,” wrote the Joliet Signal, “it is the fact that the people are begin[n]ing to discover that the Democrat party is the only true Union party.” It was evident that battle lines were being drawn even before delegates left for Springfield. Anticipation was high that the convention “will end in a row.”

These apprehensions were only heightened once the convention set to work on January 7, 1862. William Hacker, from the southernmost legislative district in the state,

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10 The Illinois State Journal (January 3, 1862) counted forty-seven Democrats, twenty Republicans, and eight Democratic-nominated fusionists. The Chicago Tribune (January 7, 1862) tallied forty-five Democrats, twenty Republicans, and ten Union Democrats. By historian John Moses’s accounting, there were forty-five Democrats, twenty-one Republicans, seven fusionists, and two designated as “doubtful.” John Moses, Historical and Statistical (Chicago: Fergus Printing Company, 1892), 2:655.

11 Sterling Gazette, reprinted in the Belleville Advocate, November 29, 1861. For other examples of Republican claims that they placed patriotism over partisanship in the election of delegates, see Aledo Weekly Record, December 3, 1861; Rockford Republican, November 14, 1861; and Chicago Tribune, November 13, 1861.


13 Illinois State Register, November 11, 1861.

14 Joliet Signal, November 12, 1861.

15 Chicago Tribune, November 13, 1861.
was elected president. All other officers, down to the assistant sergeant-at-arms, were Democrats from southern or central Illinois. One of the first orders of business was the swearing in of the delegates. A debate arose over whether or not the members had to take an oath to support the state constitution.¹⁶ Those opposed to doing so argued that there was an inherent conflict in pledging to uphold the very instrument that they were called upon to revise. A majority of delegates agreed to swear allegiance to the constitution of the United States but not to Illinois’s.¹⁷ In one sense this affair was an interesting yet innocuous foray into political theory. But in another, it broached more serious matters by calling into question the source of the convention’s authority, as well as the extent—and limits—of its power.

These concerns came into play later that same day over appointing a printer. Some delegates inquired if they had to use the one designated by the Secretary of State or if they could select their own. The majority report on this two days later took an expansive view of the convention’s power, claiming the right to effect a “peaceable revolution” of state government. It understood the convention to be a “virtual assemblage of the people of the State” and “sovereign within its boundaries,” limited only by the federal constitution. One delegate suggested the body could even appoint a new governor if exigencies necessitated it. Those who were opposed to the perspective that the convention was supreme in its powers waged an impassioned, but ultimately futile, rebuttal. The majority report was adopted 55-14.¹⁸ Charles H. Lanphier, a prominent

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¹⁶ The state constitution required those “chosen or appointed to any office of trust or profit” to take an oath supporting both the U.S. and state constitutions. Illinois Constitution (1848), art. 3, sec. 30.

¹⁷ Illinois State Journal, January 8, 1862.

Springfield Democrat and publisher of the *Illinois State Register*, was elected printer.\(^{19}\) This was an inauspicious beginning for Republicans. The Republican *Illinois State Journal* was quickly disabused of its initial praise of the delegates as being “leading citizens of the State, of well known ability and conservative tendencies, (albeit a majority of them are Democrats)” who would not attempt any “radical movement.”\(^{20}\) It now counseled its readers to act as watchdogs of the “revolutionary Convention,” fearing the delegates were poised to “take all power of the State into their own hands, to make the Convention a mere machine for resuscitating and re-organizing the Democratic party.”\(^{21}\)

From the matter of selecting a printer, the scope of the convention’s authority expanded to more consequential issues. Backed by a report of the judiciary committee that conceived of the convention as a legislature, and accordingly empowered to “change, amend, annul, or establish the existing laws of the State,” the convention assumed powers of the general assembly.\(^{22}\) Cheered on by Democratic papers that supported the convention’s prerogative to do “anything and everything,” it appropriated money from the state treasury, ordered the issuing of bonds, and redrew congressional districts.\(^{23}\)

In February the convention ratified the Corwin Amendment, the proposed thirteenth amendment to the Constitution adopted by Congress the previous March. An eleventh-hour attempt to peacefully end the secession crisis, the Corwin Amendment would have protected slavery from congressional interference in the states. With the

\(^{19}\) *Journal of the Constitutional Convention* (1862), 27.


\(^{21}\) *Illinois State Journal*, January 14, 1862.


outbreak of war, the amendment was effectively sidelined. Illinois was the third and final state to ratify it, although the convention had dubious authority to sanction a federal constitutional amendment. Motivated by an abiding suspicion that Republicans would use the war to end slavery, delegates who supported the amendment maintained that the assembled body was indeed a legislature and therefore had the authority to ratify it. Over Republican protestations that adopting the amendment would be a form of conciliation to secessionists, it was ratified largely along party lines 39-23.

The convention also fixed its sights on the state’s executive branch. The governor, treasurer, auditor of public accounts, superintendent of public instruction, board of army auditors, and the state quartermaster general were asked to furnish detailed reports to the convention, not all of which were germane to the business of framing a state constitution. In particular, the convention launched an investigation of Governor Richard Yates in regards to his war-related conduct, inquiring about his use of war funds, deals struck with clothing contractors, and the names and salaries of all appointees to office made since the start of the war. The committee on military affairs sent a circular to regimental officers in the field asking if they were properly outfitted and supplied, and if not, “whether the neglect is justly chargeable to any person or persons holding office under this State.”

The surveys returned from the field revealed no systemic negligence, but the committee

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25 *Illinois State Register*, February 22, 24, 1862. The ordinance of ratification was sent to the Secretary of State. However, because the amendment never received the requisite approval from the states for adoption, the legitimacy of Illinois’s ratification was never tested. For more on this, see Philip L. Martin, “Illinois’ Ratification of the Corwin Amendment,” *Journal of Public Law* 15 (1966): 187-91.


28 *Journal of the Constitutional Convention* (1862), 834.
on finance did determine that the governor had overstepped his authority to make war expenditures.\(^{29}\) This was a venial sin to commit while many were still imbued with rage militaire, and the questionable charges against Yates came to nothing. Nonetheless, the convention’s posturing was a clear attempt to discredit Republican leadership. To drive home that message, the delegates decided to reduce the terms of all state officers from four to two years. If the constitution were approved, Yates and the other Republican executive officers would see their tenures in office expire that November, halfway through their four-year terms.

The state officers complied with the convention’s requests and duly filed their reports, but Governor Yates made known his opinion of the convention’s assumed powers in a communication he sent to the state house: “I desire to say, with the utmost respect, that I do not acknowledge the right of your honorable body to instruct me in the performance of my duty, and I shall feel myself bound to regard your instructions in the light of suggestions.”\(^{30}\) Behind the scenes his agitation was manifest as he bitterly protested against the “unrighteous war” and “deliberate conspiracy” aimed against him.\(^ {31}\) The liberal Republican Chicago Tribune went on the offensive, reporting that a large number of delegates—“within a few votes of the majority”—were rumored to be members of the Knights of the Golden Circle, a clandestine, paramilitary organization


\(^{30}\) Journal of the Constitutional Convention (1862), 421.

sympathetic to the Confederacy. The convention immediately formed a committee to investigate these charges and found them to be baseless.

All this partisan wrangling was hardly new to Illinois politics. But in the midst of civil war it assumed greater magnitude. Republicans regarded the work of the convention as unpatriotic, if not treasonous. The Aledo Daily Record complained that the delegates were acting as both a “party caucus” and “secession convention” because they appeared to elevate party above country. Rockford’s Rock River Democrat marveled, with no little melodrama, “in times like these, when issues are at stake that are trying men’s souls, and drenching the soil of the country with its best blood, that men so utterly devoid of principle could have been found who dare, in the capacity in which they are called to act[,] utter one sentiment other than of true loyalty.” The convention reporter for the far northern Waukegan Weekly Gazette placed southern Illinois outside of the rest of the state by writing, “between Egypt and Illinois there is no hearty sympathy. They hate us at the North as cordially as a secessh hates a Union man.”

In reality there was little if anything done by the convention that was overtly hostile to the Union war effort. But Republicans were distrustful of Democrats’ motivations, making every slight seem like a slander. When word arrived of the victory at Fort Henry, a Republican delegate offered a celebratory resolution filled with patriotic flourishes. Objections were made to the “fourth of July hifalutin part of it” and instead of being adopted outright, a committee of three was appointed to draft a new resolution.

33 Journal of the Constitutional Convention (1862), 941-44.
34 Aledo Daily Record, February 11, 1862.
35 Rockford Rock River Democrat, March 18, 1862.
36 Waukegan Weekly Gazette, February 1, 1862.
“The idea of reservations at a time like this!” scolded the Illinois State Journal. The committee’s resolution ended up being more subdued in its language yet it was still undisputedly laudatory and nationalistic. Yet even when Democrats made pro-war overtures, Republicans viewed it through a skeptical lens. Following news of Grant’s capture of Fort Donelson, the convention passed an ordinance to appropriate money for the care of wounded Illinois soldiers. To the Chicago Tribune, this was mere “buncombe” calculated by Democrats to “amend their records.” By potentially damaging the credit of the state, the ordinance was “almost an act of aid and comfort to the enemy.” The Illinois State Journal echoed these sentiments, dismissing the move as “‘eleventh hour’ patriotism” motivated by “personal dread of popular vengeance” for the delegates’ questionable loyalty. For many Republicans, patriotism had crystalized around party affiliation.

Republicans may have felt that they had a monopoly on loyalty, but they had a much thornier time coming together on issues of race. Undoubtedly many would have preferred to have “the ‘nigger’ left out” of the convention proceedings altogether. But Democrats forced an encore of the 1847 convention’s debate on the place of blacks in Illinois society. Two delegates offered resolutions to make the black laws even more oppressive, one by prohibiting blacks from owning real estate and the other by forcibly expelling blacks who lived in the state. These proposals made their way to committees but never resurfaced.

38 Chicago Tribune, February 22, 1862.
39 Illinois State Journal, February 24, 1862.
40 Belleville Advocate, December 7, 1860.
Instead, the majority of delegates favored incorporating the existing black laws into the constitution, specifically the bans on black immigration and suffrage. Although the 1853 black exclusion bill was still on the books and the franchise was already constitutionally limited to whites, elevating these prohibitions to constitutional law would give them greater permanency. As one delegate explained, future legislatures would not be able to amend them or use them as “a subject of barter and exchange.”42 The war also provided additional impetus to reinforce the ban on black migration. A Democratic delegate representing three east central counties feared that “millions of slaves” will “seek a retreat in the free states.”43 Another Democrat representing two west central counties vowed that the slaves being freed by “the power of arms” should not come to Illinois “as free or slaves.”44 Additionally, despite protestations to the contrary, Democrats knew the subject of black rights was divisive among Republicans. The Democratic delegate from Montgomery and Christian counties admitted that he believed agitating the issue would reveal to his (supposedly conservative) Republican constituents back home the true, racially egalitarian face of Illinois Republicanism.45

Though shorter in duration, the arguments over black exclusion echoed those that occurred in the previous constitutional convention of 1847. Democrats argued in favor of keeping blacks out of the state based on the natural inequality between the races. Living together only served to drag both down. As one delegate asserted, whites were the “owners of the soil, the superior race, and the superior race in power.”46 For their part, a

42 Illinois State Journal, March 5, 1862.
43 Illinois State Journal, March 6, 1862.
44 Illinois State Journal, March 5, 1862.
45 Illinois State Journal, March 5, 1862.
46 Illinois State Journal, March 6, 1862.
handful of Republicans from northern Illinois mounted an earnest condemnation of black exclusion based on the universality of natural rights, which included the ability to move about freely. A Chicago delegate mockingly suggested that the bill of rights in the state constitution should be modified to read, “all men of pure Caucasian blood, that is men of white complexion, straight hair, small heal bones and blunt shins, are born equally, free and independent.” He wondered why blacks deserved so much scorn when they were not the ones “in arms against our government” or “plotting treason.” Another Republican delegate who represented northern Kane and DeKalb counties told the story of a Missouri slave who alerted Illinois troops of an ambush they were about to walk into. If that slave’s family decided to move to Illinois, the delegate hypothesized, the men whose lives were saved would make it “utterly impossible to enforce a law against their coming into this State.” There were “great laws” in force, he assured the convention, that transcended state constitutions and statutes. These delegates were among the first Republican politicians to openly link the war to the rights of northern blacks. However, most of their colleagues preferred to sidestep the issue altogether.

Republican William Orme of central McLean County tried to steer the convention onto another tack by offering a substitute resolution declaring that no person brought to Illinois could be held as a slave. This would countermand the allowance in the 1853 exclusion act that permitted masters to travel through the state with their slaves. Moreover, it was an attempt to shift the convention’s focus from black rights, which was a thorny issue for Illinois Republicans, to slavery, which was an increasingly toxic issue

47 Illinois State Journal, March 5, 1862.
48 Illinois State Journal, March 6, 1862.
49 Journal of the Constitutional Convention (1862), 690.
for northern Democrats. A couple of delegates unflinchingly put themselves on record in favor of comity with southern states, but most preferred to evade the subject and voted to table Orme’s amendment.

Ultimately the convention settled on three clauses on this subject, each to be voted on separately from the constitution and from each other. The first clause stated, “no negro or mulatto shall migrate to or settle in this state.” This was adopted 39-25, with the dissenters coming from both parties in the northern and west central areas of the state. The second clause denied blacks suffrage and the right to hold office and was unsurprisingly passed by a much larger margin of 57-7. The final clause, adopted 42-20, instructed the general assembly to pass the necessary legislation to enact the other two provisions.50

The convention was so polarized when it wrapped up its labors at the end of March that only forty-two out of seventy-five members voted for submitting the new constitution to the populace.51 The election date was set for June 17, giving newspapers twelve weeks to wage a war of words for or against its adoption. There were some discussions of its substantive merits, especially relating to economic reform, but partisan bickering colored most coverage Republican papers continued to smear the constitution as a disloyal document produced by traitors, mocking it as the “Egyptian swindle” and “secession ordinance.”52 In the Belvidere Standard’s final assessment, “the fact is the Egyptian Secessionists, who are the authors of the abortion, were too full of treason and

50 Journal of the Constitutional Convention (1862), 691-93.
51 Journal of the Constitutional Convention (1862), 1114.
52 Dickerson, Illinois Constitutional Convention of 1862, 23.
party trickery to frame a decent Constitution.”

It was a “scheme for securing the State of Illinois to the opponents of war,” claimed the central Illinois Republican *Carlinville Free Democrat*. Some Republican editors tried to turn the vote on the constitution into a test of one’s loyalty to the Union. The *Illinois State Journal* not so subtly predicted, “every secessionist, every Knight of the Golden Circle will vote for its adoption.” On the other side of the political spectrum, the staunch Democratic *Jonesboro Gazette* confidently concluded that the “best evidence of the superiority of the new Constitution over the old one, is the unceasing hostility of the Black Republicans to it.” The cause of this hostility, the Democratic *Illinois State Register* adduced, was the constitution’s provisions that denied equality to “sambo in Illinois.”

The Register’s interpretation was far from the mark. No Republican organs came out in favor of blacks voting or holding office. But there was discernible opposition in the Republican press to the anti-immigration clause, ranging from outright condemnation to mild censure. That radical papers such as the *Waukegan Weekly Gazette*, which supported repeal of the black laws before the war, would condemn that clause was to be expected. Same with the *Chicago Tribune*, which criticized the 1853 black law when it was enacted but came down on it now with an even stronger moral denunciation, finding nothing in the proposed constitution that was “more repugnant to humanity, or thoroughly infamous than that which relates to the degradation and exclusion of the black race.” But other

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53 *Belvidere Standard*, June 3, 1862.
54 *Carlinville Free Democrat*, reprinted in the *Illinois State Journal*, June 14, 1862.
55 *Illinois State Journal*, June 14, 1862.
56 *Jonesboro Gazette*, April 19, 1862.
57 *Illinois State Register*, April 3, 1862.
58 *Chicago Tribune*, April 29, 1862.
papers joined in the chorus. Some approached it as a political issue, such as the moderate
*Bloomington Pantagraph*, which advised its readers to vote down the constitution in
order to “kill those obnoxious clauses” that were merely a ploy of the “democratic
convention to force the ‘nigger question.’”

The failure of the resolution to prevent slaves from being brought into Illinois
provided fodder for Republican papers to call out Democratic hypocrisy. Northern
Illinois’ Oregon *Ogle County Reporter* commented, “the Democracy are very strenuous
that free negroes be excluded from the State, the instant that they become slaves their
dread of them ceases. The black laws of our State are disgraceful enough already, without
incorporating more unjust one [sic] in the Constitution. In a few years it will appear
strange that such a proposition could be proposed in a respectable body of men, in our
State, while these slaveholders are endeavoring to overthrow the government.”

The *Belvidere Standard* accused Democrats of wanting “their feet planted on the negro’s neck,
with the power to shape legislation so that they may be kept there for all time,” adding
that the constitution was “better suited for Arkansas or some State where Slavery reigns
supreme, than for the free, liberal, progressive people of Illinois.” Even the moderate
*Illinois State Journal*, which was reticent to express anything approaching support for
black rights, distanced itself from Democratic racial ideology. “The truth is, the nigger is
an unpopular institution in the free States…Now we confess that we have, in common
with nineteen-twentieths of our people, a prejudice against the nigger.” Yet the paper
found that it differed “from modern Democracy” in that it did not “spend three or four

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59 *Bloomington Pantagraph*, June 11, 1862.


61 *Belvidere Standard*, May 20, 1862.
hours of each day of our life in devising schemes to rob the black man of all the rights of human nature.”

These responses illustrate how Republican papers vilified their opponents by linking extreme anti-black prejudice to support of slavery, hostility to the Union war effort, and outmoded racial attitudes. But in dissociating themselves from Democrats, Republicans did not enthusiastically embrace the banner of black freedom. Going too far in the other extreme would alienate their base. Both the Chicago Tribune and Illinois State Journal revealed the precariousness of this position in guides they printed instructing their readership how to vote: “no” on the constitution, “no” on the banking clause, and “no” on congressional reapportionment. But on the black clauses they balked. Rather than specifying a position, they instead printed blank lines next to these clauses for the voters to fill in themselves. Still, Republicans were beginning to articulate a position on black rights that was consciously distinct from Democratic racial ideology.

Far away, Illinois soldiers in the field kept abreast of and contributed to the political debate through the circulation of newspapers and letters from home. “Not a paper we do receive from Illinois, but is teeming with arguments for and against the Constitution,” wrote a volunteer from Corinth. Some soldiers became participants in the convention’s affairs through the aforementioned questionnaires circulated to officers by the committee on military affairs to gauge the quality of troop supplies. Not all recipients were pleased with becoming pawns in what they saw as extra-legal political machinations. Colonel Gilbert Cumming of the Fifty-First Illinois Infantry returned a scathing reply to

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63 Chicago Tribune, June 10, 1862; Illinois State Journal, June 14, 1862.
64 Illinois State Journal, June 12, 1862.
the convention, rebuking them for overreaching their authority. The only purpose for the survey, he reasoned, was to meddle with “matters that are really none of its business, and that, too, with the evident intention of creating prejudice against the present State officers, and making political capital for members of the Convention.”

A major of the Second Illinois Cavalry minced no words in his response: “Should I give you information the resolution calls for, I should make as great an ass of myself as the Convention has of you by asking you to attend to what is none of your business…If I am rightly informed, you were elected to make a Constitution for the State of Illinois Why in h—Ill don’t you do it?” The major criticized the delegates for the ignoble motive underlying the request, which should make them all “blush for shame.”

The state constitution permitted citizens to physically cast ballots only in the district or county in which they resided, thus barring enlisted volunteers from the polls. The delegates made a special provision to allow soldiers to vote on the proposed constitution by assigning three commissioners to visit the troops and poll them. With tens of thousands of Illinoisans serving from Virginia to Arkansas, this plan was woefully inadequate. Undeterred, the commissioners set out in April, occasionally arriving at camps before a draft of the new constitution did. The Chicago Tribune carried the story of “a friend who witnessed” the commissioners’ procedures and characterized it as follows:

Present—Buckmaster with his poll-book, and a squad of soldiers. 

Buckmaster—Well, what’s you name?

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65 James Grant Wilson, Biographical Sketches of Illinois Officers Engaged in the War Against the Rebellion of 1861 (Chicago: James Barnet, 1862), 65.

66 Aledo Weekly Record, March 4, 1862.

67 Journal of the Constitutional Convention (1862), 1021.

68 Chicago Tribune, April 24, 1862.
Soldier—John Smith.
Buckmaster—How do you vote on the constitution?
Soldier—Well I have not had a chance to read it, and know little about it.
Buckmaster—Well, sir, you want good laws and low taxes don’t you, when you get home?
Soldier—Yes, of course I do.
Buckmaster—Well I put you down for the adoption. 69

Republican papers accused the commissioners of fraud and negligence, claiming they targeted downstate regiments while bypassing upstate ones. 70 Charges of chicanery also came from enlisted troops. James Putmire, a surgeon in the Sixth Illinois Cavalry, informed the Chicago Tribune that the commissioners had visited his regiment stationed at Paducah, Kentucky, but neglected to poll four hundred of his comrades. They had also failed to visit the hospital, where there were up to 125 additional Illinois troops. Putmire speculated that the commissioners’ swift exit was due to their disappointment with the initial canvassing results. His fellow “Egyptian soldiers” had given only two out of three hundred votes in favor of the new constitution. 71

Other vote tallies that trickled in from the commissioners’ peregrinations reportedly were also unfavorable to the proposed constitution. Party loyalties alone apparently do not account for soldiers’ opposition to the new state constitution. A correspondent to the Chicago Tribune from the Sixty-Sixth Illinois Infantry claimed that “party prejudices and preferences seemed to have but little weight” in soldiers’ estimation of the constitution. He explained, “many of the strongest Democrats in the regiment” were its “most earnest opponents,” viewing it as the product of “corrupt and ambitious men” who were trying to capitalize on the nation’s misfortunes to advance their own self-

69 Chicago Tribune, June 16, 1862.
70 Chicago Tribune, May 31, June 28, 1862; Rockford Republican, June 5, 1862; Illinois State Journal, July 17, 1862.
71 Chicago Tribune, May 23, 1862.
interests.\textsuperscript{72} Similarly, Joseph Ward of the Thirty-Ninth Illinois Infantry dismissed the entire document as an “offspring of corruption.”\textsuperscript{73}

The convention’s apparent goal of disgracing Governor Yates was particularly galling to some troops. Yates had no military background, but when the war began he showed himself to be an untiring advocate for the soldiers. In response to large number of volunteers offering their services, he petitioned the War Department to accept more regiments than it originally requested.\textsuperscript{74} To supplement the inadequate stock of weapons at the state arsenal, he appealed for help to arsenals across the North and Canada, authorized a raid on the armory at St. Louis, and traveled to Washington to lobby for arms.\textsuperscript{75} In the aftermath of Fort Donelson and the bloody battle at Shiloh, Yates assembled medics and hospital supplies and traveled with them to the battle sites, helping to earn him the moniker, “the Soldier’s Friend.”\textsuperscript{76}

Colonel Gilbert Cumming’s reply to the circular sent out by the committee on military affairs captures the anger felt by those who believed the convention impugned the governor’s good name. Cumming decried the slander implicit in the survey and credited Yates with raising and arming thousands of troops in spite of fiscal handicaps. He assured the delegates that his praise of the governor was not “induced by political friendship,” for he belonged to “another school; but during the war I have no politics but

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{72} \textit{Chicago Tribune}, May 17, 1862.
\item \textsuperscript{73} Joseph R. Ward Jr. to parents, September 18, 1862, in Cummins and Hohweiler, \textit{Enlisted Soldier’s View of the Civil War}, 39.
\item \textsuperscript{74} Aretas A. Dayton, “The Raising of Union Forces in Illinois During the Civil War,” \textit{Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society} 34, no. 4 (December 1941): 405.
\end{itemize}
the Laws and Constitution of the United States. And I cannot, in justice to the Governor
and the State he has honored by his unceasing labors for the common weal, withhold this
truthful tribute to his patriotism and successful efforts under such trying difficulties.”

Another soldier, furious with the “secessionists and peace men” who drew up the
constitution, penned a letter to the *Illinois State Journal* in support of Yates. Illinois
troops, he claimed, had been “cared for better than those of other states…We know now,
that if sick or wounded, we shall be cared for, and knowing this, we feel proud that we
have a such a State and such an Executive.” Attacking Yates only earned the delegates
the enmity of his supporters.

The early reports of soldiers’ hostility to the proposed constitution were borne out
in the official returns. All told, the commissioners polled 6,348 soldiers from twenty-four
regiments. A staggering 79 percent of them voted against it. In addition to the official
returns submitted by the commissioners, some regiments and companies conducted their
own canvassing and sent the results to the secretary of state. Of the 5,490 soldier votes
submitted this way (which Governor Yates directed to be made part of the official record),
93 percent opposed the new constitution. The higher opposition to the constitution
among troops who sent in their own returns compared to the troops polled by the
commissioners may give validity to the speculation that the commissioners targeted
regiments they believed would be supportive of the constitution. Alternatively, it may be

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78 *Illinois State Journal*, June 12, 1862.
79 *Chicago Tribune*, August 15, 1862. Of the regiments visited by the commissioners, not all were fully
canvassed. No list of the specific regiments polled by the commissioners could be located in the Illinois
State Archives.
80 Secretary of State, “Executive Section, Governors’ Subject Files,” August 1862 folder, Record Series
103.228, Illinois State Archives. Unlike the official returns, these votes were broken down by regiment or
location (e.g., Mound City hospital).
that those who took the time and trouble to do their own canvassing were motivated by a strong opposition to the constitution (although the same might be said for those in favor of it). Combining the official and unofficial returns, the nearly 12,000 Illinois troops who cast votes rejected the constitution by 86 percent.

This figure is all the more striking when compared to the civilian vote. Illinoisans at home also rejected the proposed constitution but by a much narrower margin. Of the 266,155 votes cast, 53 percent opposed it.\(^\text{81}\) Geographically the voting patterns matched the partisan divide in Illinois, with the southern third of the state giving it the highest support and the northern third the lowest. The counties in east central Illinois rejected it but usually by not more than 60 percent, while the counties of west central Illinois approved it by a similar percentage.\(^\text{82}\) In contrast, the soldiers’ votes across the board were overwhelmingly against the constitution, even when accounting for regimental origin. For example, 99 percent of votes cast by members of the Twenty-Eighth Illinois Infantry were against the new constitution.\(^\text{83}\) This regiment was raised in the west central counties of Fulton, Logan, Mason, McDonough, Menard, Pike, Schuyler, and Scott, where the civilian population collectively favored the constitution by 55 percent. The same was true for the Fifty-Sixth Illinois Infantry, whose members also voted down the constitution by 99 percent.\(^\text{84}\) It was principally recruited from the far southern counties of

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\(^\text{81}\) Secretary of State, “Executive Section, Governors’ Subject Files,” August 1862 folder, Record Series 103.228, Illinois State Archives.

\(^\text{82}\) The west central counties also supported the banking clause, which prohibited the creation of banks in the state, suggesting their support of the constitution may have been influenced by economic concerns. Jones, “Agrarian Radicalism,” 281.

\(^\text{83}\) Members of the Twenty-Eighth Illinois Infantry voted 396-6 against the constitution.

\(^\text{84}\) Members of the Fifty-Sixth Illinois Infantry voted 457-5 against the constitution.
Franklin, Gallatin, Hamilton, Massac, Pope, Saline, Wabash, White, and Williamson, where at home in these same counties two-thirds of the total electorate supported it. It would be a reach to attribute the soldiers’ rejection of the constitution to a massive conversion to Republicanism among the ranks. Rather, it was more likely fallout from the partisan bickering that colored the convention’s work. As the majority party, Democrats took the hit. The troops were sacrificing themselves for a larger cause and desired their leaders at home to do the same. At the very least, they expected to be supported by those remaining at home. The convention’s harassment of Governor Yates—and its attempt to make soldiers complicit in it through the leading questionnaires they circulated—poisoned the well before the constitution had been fully drafted. Demeaning “the Soldier’s Friend” was akin to demeaning the troops themselves. The soldiers’ vote on the constitution was an early portent of the rift that would develop between volunteers on the front and Democrats back home.

While the soldier and civilian votes on the constitution were at variance with one another, both groups agreed on the black clauses. All three passed by strong majorities and were the only articles approved by voters. At home, 171,896 out of 243,202 (71 percent) voted for the first clause, which sanctioned the ban on black immigration. The second clause, prohibiting black voting and office holding, received even larger margins: 211,920 people out of 247,560 (86 percent) voted in favor of it. The final clause, directing the general assembly to enact laws to enforce the other two clauses, passed with 198,938 out of 243,352 votes (82 percent).

85 A list of the unofficial soldier votes by regiment can be found in Secretary of State, “Executive Section, Governors’ Subject Files,” August 1862 folder, Record Series 103.228, Illinois State Archives. Regimental counties of origin based on the table provided in the *Annual Report of the Adjutant General* (1863), 64-77.

86 Secretary of State, “Record of Election Returns,” Record Series 103.033, Illinois State Archives.
Comparing the 1862 vote on black exclusion to the 1848 vote on it highlights some interesting trends.\textsuperscript{87} In 1848, 70 percent of voters approved of black exclusion, a slightly smaller parentage than in 1862. Broken down by region, the largest increase in support for black exclusion came from the southernmost counties. In 1848, 85 percent of southern Illinoisans voted for black exclusion; in 1862, that number shot to 94 percent.\textsuperscript{88} Central Illinois also saw a modest growth of pro-exclusion sentiment, from 81 percent in 1848 to 85 percent in 1862.\textsuperscript{89} Surprisingly, northern Illinois experienced a slightly larger increase than central Illinois, from 38 percent approval in 1848 to 43 percent in 1862.\textsuperscript{90} However, if Cook County is excluded for both years, the increase is only 1 percent, revealing that Chicago accounted for most of the growth in favor of black exclusion in the northern part of the state.\textsuperscript{91}

The soldiers’ votes on the black articles are more difficult to parse due to a smaller sample size, uncertainty over where the soldiers originated, and discrepancies between the commissioners’ returns and those submitted by the troops themselves. For example, regarding the first article on black exclusion, a striking 92 percent of soldiers polled by the commissioners voted for it. But of the unofficial returns, only 35 percent did. While the regimental counties of origin of the returns given by the commissioners

\textsuperscript{87} These percentages in this paragraph were calculated using the returns found in Secretary of State, “Record of Election Returns,” Record Series 103.033, Illinois State Archives.

\textsuperscript{88} Here, southern Illinois is defined as the thirty-two counties south of, and including, (from west to east) Calhoun, Jersey, Madison, Bond, Marion, Clay, Richland, and Lawrence.

\textsuperscript{89} Here, central Illinois is defined as the forty-seven counties between and including (from west to east) Pike, Greene, Macoupin, Montgomery, Fayette, Effingham, Jasper, and Crawford to the south and Henderson, Warren, Knox, Stark, Marshall, Livingston, and Iroquois to the north.

\textsuperscript{90} Here, northern Illinois is defined as the twenty-three counties north of, and including, (from west to east) Mercer, Henry, Bureau, Putnam, La Salle, Grundy, and Kankakee.

\textsuperscript{91} This may have been due to fears over job competition among the large foreign-born (mainly German and Irish) population in Chicago (50 percent in 1860). Dominic A. Pacyga, \textit{Chicago: A Biography} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 71.
are unknown, records show that the soldiers who submitted their own votes on this article hailed mainly from regiments organized in northern counties. Their rejection of black exclusion by 65 percent was greater than northern Illinois as a whole, which opposed it by 57 percent. However, it is impossible to determine if the soldiers’ greater opposition to black exclusion was due to a propensity for those in favor of black rights to enlist or if they became more supportive of black rights while in the service.

The voting results among soldiers on the other two clauses reveal more anomalies. The vote to prohibit black suffrage was nearly identical to each group’s vote on the exclusion clause: 94 percent in favor of those polled by the commissioners and 63 percent by those who self-reported. These numbers were nearly identical to each group’s votes on the third clause. This uniformity across the clauses contrasted with the vote at home, which saw a fifteen point increase between the first and second clauses. At first glance this suggests a radicalization (on both ends of the spectrum) of racial attitudes among soldiers. However, these results could be due to a small sample size as well as sampling bias (commissioners favoring southern Illinois regiments and self-reporting troops disproportionately representing the most liberal northern Illinois communities).

What can be stated definitely is that the majority of Illinois civilians were averse to living alongside blacks, and this antipathy was more widespread than it had been fourteen years earlier. A greater number opposed black suffrage than black exclusion, demonstrating a differentiation between the denial of natural rights and political rights.

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92 These percentages were calculated using the returns from soldiers found in Chicago Tribune, August 20, 1862.

93 Of those polled by the commissioners on the adoption of the new constitution, 94 percent also voted on the first black clause (6,348 troops). Of the unofficial returns, only 43 percent who voted on the new constitution also voted on the first black clause (a total of 2,349 soldiers).
This was true for northern Illinois, where voters opposed black suffrage but also opposed laws preventing blacks from moving to the state.94 But in this it stood alone. Central Illinois looked much more like southern than northern Illinois; both regions rejected black suffrage and black migration by large margins. The Democratic Cairo City Gazette was dejected over the defeat of the constitution but was able to find solace in the success of the black clauses. Their passage, the paper declared, affirmed that the “people of Illinois are looking solely to the crushing of the rebellion and the restoration of the Union, and not to the freedom of the negro. It amounts to a plain declaration that we will not permit the immigration of multitudes of freed blacks into the State, and consequently to an unmistakable intimation that we desire them to remain exactly where they are.”95

Meanwhile, the Chicago Tribune lamented the reaffirmation of black exclusion, fretful it would “chill and stay in their formation the free principles and the better manhood this rebellion had loosed from old time trammels.” The people of Illinois had “learned so little from the great rebellion” and experienced “so little enlightenment on the great questions of the age.” Nonetheless, the Tribune clung to the hope that the present “was a time when human rights can sustain such defeats and still continue fighting.” The war would ultimately “put to confusion and utter rout” the “broad dykes of prejudice of caste and color, and the pride of race which have so long and well served the monster evil of human bondage.”96 Before the year was out, the Tribune would be forced to tone down


95 Cairo City Gazette, July 10, 1862.

96 Chicago Tribune, June 18, 1862.
its racial rhetoric as the connection between the war, slavery, and black rights became increasingly volatile.

**Casualties, Civil Liberties, and Cairo’s Contraband Camp**

While the endorsement of black exclusion was a blow to some Republicans, the fate of the proposed constitution was the paramount concern. They interpreted its defeat as a mandate for the Union war effort and a denunciation of Democratic dissent. “Republican leaders…never felt better in their lives,” crowed the *Illinois State Journal*. The *Chicago Tribune* predicted that the failure of the “secession constitution” foretold the defeat of the “secession party” in the upcoming November election. Democrats offered flimsy pretexts for the failure of the constitution, ranging from corrupt Republican postmasters not circulating material to apathy among Democrats caused by widespread confidence that the constitution would be easily adopted. But behind these justifications, Democrats must have felt the precariousness of their position in the spring and early summer months of 1862. The Republicans’ relentless crusade to conflate criticism of the war with treason boxed them in. They had one of their own to thank for helping to construct this narrative. In what would be Stephen Douglas’ final speech, he told his Chicago audience on May 1, 1861, “there can be no neutrals in this war, only patriots—or traitors.” Now, Douglas was a year in the grave and two of the top Democratic luminaries in Illinois (John A. McClernand and John A. Logan) were away fighting with

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98 *Chicago Tribune*, June 21, 1862.
the Federal army, creating a leadership vacuum. Yet the tide was about to turn swiftly as events on the front, in Washington, and at home combined to reverse Democrats’ fortunes.

As the war entered its second year, northern enthusiasm for it plummeted as bodies piled up and hopes for a speedy resolution proved chimerical. Stonewall Jackson’s swift movements in the Shenandoah Valley in May and June outwitted combined Union forces twice as large. Jackson’s men joined General Robert E. Lee’s forces to oust the Army of the Potomac from the outskirts of Richmond by early July. Although Confederates suffered higher numbers of casualties than their opponents in the Seven Days Battles, the failure of McClellan’s Peninsula Campaign ensured a continuation of hostilities. The western theater offered glimmers of hope, as the Navy scored decisive victories with the capture of New Orleans in April followed by Baton Rouge the next month.  

The Union army also saw success at Shiloh in April, but paid for it dearly. Illinois troops accounted for more than a third of the 13,000 Union troops killed, wounded, or missing. Combined with nearly 11,000 Confederate casualties, it was the bloodiest battle in American history to-date, a grim record soon to be superseded by even costlier clashes. With no end in sight, these heavy losses cast a pall across the North.

On July 2, as McClellan retreated from Richmond, Lincoln called for 300,000 three-year volunteers. Unlike the previous summer, when governors had to turn away volunteers, northern states now struggled to meet their quotas. No amount of bunting or patriotic melodies could camouflage the unprecedented levels of carnage wrought by the war. Moreover, a labor shortage caused by those who had already enlisted triggered wage

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102 Hicken, *Illinois in the Civil War*, 70.
increases at home, further disincentivizing additional enlistments. Governor Yates received discouraging news from Chicago that six recruiting agents “will not average one [man] per week.”

Desperate to bolster Union ranks, Congress took a cursory step toward conscription with the Militia Act that July. In addition to authorizing the enlistment of blacks into military service, the act also empowered the president to “make all necessary rules and regulations” for enrolling state militias. This was put to the test in early August when Lincoln called for an additional 300,000 volunteers to serve as nine-month militiamen. Any state not able to meet its quota of three-year enlees would be subject to a draft from its militia. Hoping to avoid this eventuality, the Militia Act allowed recruits to be paid $25 of their $100 bounty upon enlistment (as opposed to withholding the entire amount until discharged). Additionally, states, counties, townships, cities, corporations, and private citizens sometimes offered additional bounties to avoid the disgrace of having their community subjected to the draft. “So soon as the county shall offer the expected inducements, in the way of additional bounty, we doubt not an increased impetus will be given to the recruiting and enlisting business,” anticipated the Illinois State Journal. The threat of the draft and lure of bounties worked for the time

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106 Illinois State Journal, July 31, 1862.
being in Illinois. It met its quotas and put 58,416 men in the field by the year’s end, 6,000 above the required amount.\textsuperscript{107}

Still, the prospect of conscription had riled people, especially conservative Democrats who had long viewed the exercise of federal authority as a threat to their personal liberty.\textsuperscript{108} Perhaps more than ever before, they now had legitimate grounds for doing so. In 1862 the government, lacking the bureaucratic machinery needed to effectively and efficiently carry out a massive conscription program, scrambled to establish methods of assuring compliance. On August 8, Secretary of War Stanton issued orders to arrest persons who attempted to evade the draft by leaving the country or their state (although how intent was to be determined was not specified). He also suspended the writ of habeas corpus for those interfering with voluntary enlistments—the first time the writ was suspended nationwide—and ordered civilian offenders to be tried in military courts.\textsuperscript{109} Decisions on what constituted “disloyal practice” were left in the hands of provost marshals and federal, state, and local deputies, constables, and sheriffs.\textsuperscript{110} The result was predictably disastrous: multi-jurisdictional police authorities were imbued with unchecked and arbitrary power to determine what constituted seditious language and behavior.

\textsuperscript{107} Dayton, “The Raising of Union Forces,” 411-12. The draft was enacted in parts of Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Ohio, and Indiana.


\textsuperscript{109} Both of these orders were reissued by Lincoln the following month.

The period following Stanton’s August 8 orders was, in the words of one historian, “the lowest point for civil liberties in the North during the Civil War.”\footnote{Mark E. Neely, Jr., The Fate of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln and Civil Liberties (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 53.} Over the next five months, close to forty individuals were arrested in Illinois alone, including William J. Allen, a sitting Democratic member of Congress.\footnote{Weber, Copperheads, 53.} In Illinois and across the North, those making the arrests were often Republican authorities, and the detainees were mostly Democrats.\footnote{Neely, The Fate of Liberty, 61.} A growing number of Democrats shared the 	extit{Illinois State Register}’s perspective that the arrests were “founded in partisan malice” and aimed to “inaugurate a reign of terror” in the loyal states.\footnote{\textit{Illinois State Register}, September 22, 9, 1862.} Historian James McPherson points out that this was not a Republican conspiracy to silence their rivals but instead reflected the reality that most outspoken critics of the administration were in fact Democrats.\footnote{McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom, 493.}

But to many Democrats, there was no discernible difference. They responded bitterly to what they saw as the perversion of the very ideals that the war was being fought to safeguard. Earlier that year, the federal government had created a national currency and income tax, rankling Democrats who criticized Washington’s overreach into their lives.\footnote{Jonathan W. Sebastian, “A Divided State: The 1862 Election and the Illinois Response to Expanding Federal Authority,” 	extit{Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society} 106, no. 3-4 (Fall-Winter 2013): 387.} Anger over the suppression of white civil liberties further incited them and bolstered the ranks of the Peace Democrats “The Constitution as it is; the Union as it was” became the Democratic rallying cry. The Republican strategy of conflating Democrats with southern sympathizers had gained traction when the populace was
galvanized by war fever. But with morale flagging and individual liberties threatened, criticism of the administration began to look less like disloyalty and more like a defense of republican values.

Events on the battlefield and decisions from Washington sapped enthusiasm for the war, but the most lethal blow emanated from a small town at the southernmost tip of the state. Cairo played a vital military role during the Civil War due to its strategic location at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. Its geographic advantage was also its greatest detriment. Low-lying and therefore prone to flooding, Cairo struggled with disease, economic stagnation, and population decline, although the arrival of the Illinois Central Railroad in the 1850s provided some commercial stability. With just over 2,000 residents in 1860, a budding middle-class was emerging alongside brick and mortar buildings. Still, the town retained its rough-and-tumble image as a muddy basin riddled with transients, crime, and drunken brawls. When the Civil War began, Cairo’s geography once again shaped its fate. Securing “the key to the West,” as Ulysses S. Grant called the town, was a crucial element in controlling the Mississippi River.

Shortly after Fort Sumter fell, the Secretary of War directed Governor Yates to station four regiments at Cairo posthaste. On April 22 volunteer soldiers from Chicago, armed with a motley assortment of borrowed and begged weapons, arrived by train in Cairo and began the work of hastily transforming the city into a military camp, supply depot, and eventually the base for the Western Flotilla.\footnote{T. K. Kionka, \textit{Key Command: Ulysses S. Grant’s District of Cairo} (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 10-28. For an account of the initial fortification of Cairo, see William A. Pitkin “When Cairo Was Saved for the Union,” \textit{Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society} 51, no. 3 (Spring 1958): 284-305.}

In the fall of 1862 Cairo also became the location of a contraband camp, one of a number of such facilities that grew alongside Union outposts to provide relief and
employment for fugitive slaves. The number of slaves coming into Union lines in the Mississippi Valley overwhelmed federal resources during the summer and fall months of 1862. General Grant named Chaplain John Eaton General Superintendent of Freedmen, charging him with supervising the establishment of contraband camps in the Department of the Tennessee. Hundreds of contrabands were sent north to the camp at Cairo, many arriving with little or no personal property and “hardly enough to cover their nakedness,” according to the local superintendent. Relief societies solicited much needed supplies and helped establish religious and educational facilities at Cairo.

Still, conditions were far from sanguine. Fugitive slaves were housed in abandoned army barracks where unsanitary conditions bred sickness, particularly smallpox. An agent of the American Missionary Association wrote in December of 1862, “the colored people are diseased almost without exception…More than 50 percent, taken to the hospitals, expire in less than a week.” Whites representing themselves as slave owners attempted, sometimes successfully, to seize contrabands and return them to slavery. An employee of the quartermaster’s department was sentenced to five years imprisonment for kidnapping a fugitive slave who sought shelter at the camp and selling him to a Kentucky slave owner. Despite the adversities faced by fugitive slaves at

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120 “Answers to Interrogatories,” James B. Rogers to John Eaton, Jr., February-March 1863, in Berlin and others, Free At Last, 186.


122 Quoted in Ricke, “Illinois Blacks Through the Civil War,” 216.

123 Ricke, 220-21; Chicago Tribune, July 9, 1862; Senate Executive Document No. 51, 38th Cong., 1st Sess. (1864).
Cairo, the local superintendent reported that the idea of going back to slavery repulsed them and they would not return to their homes unless they were assured of their freedom.\textsuperscript{124}

According to the count of a hospital chaplain, the camp housed 1,200 contrabands by the end of September.\textsuperscript{125} Other sources put the number as high as 3,000.\textsuperscript{126} In mid-September the Chicago Tribune’s Cairo correspondent recorded the arrival of 300 people, mainly women and children, in one evening. He was informed that General Grant “will send a consignment of 300 to 500 every day for the present.”\textsuperscript{127} The Democratic Cairo City Gazette complained about the large influx of contrabands, snidely remarking that “the levees yesterday were so dark with negroes that pedestrians found it difficult to peregrinate without lanterns.” The paper went on to wonder what “this eternal raft of negroes will find to do here…The Government may find employment for a small percent of them, but the greater portion must either starve or become government paupers.”\textsuperscript{128}

Camp authorities were struggling with this very issue. Contrabands were put to work in the Quartermaster’s Department, military hospitals, and various government works.\textsuperscript{129} The pay for their labor ($7 in cash and $3 for clothing) was cheaper than a soldier’s salary, thereby reducing the operating costs of the military post and freeing the

\textsuperscript{124}“Answers to Interrogatories,” James B. Rogers to John Eaton, Jr., February-March 1863, in Berlin and others, \textit{Free At Last}, 193.
\textsuperscript{125}Cleveland (OH) Morning Leader, October 3, 1862.
\textsuperscript{126}Bloomington Pantagraph, October 1, 1862; Illinois State Register, September 30, 1862.
\textsuperscript{127}Chicago Tribune, September 19, 1862.
\textsuperscript{128}Cairo City Gazette, August 19, 1862.
\textsuperscript{129}“Answers to Interrogatories,” James B. Rogers to John Eaton, Jr., February-March 1863, in Berlin and others, \textit{Free At Last}, 191.
However, the number of refugees quickly outstripped labor needs. On September 18, the Commanding Officer at Cairo, Brigadier General J. M. Tuttle, turned to Secretary of War Stanton for help. “Major-General Grant is sending here large lots of negro women and children,” Tuttle wrote. “Parties in Chicago and other cities wish them for servants. Will I be allowed to turn them over to a responsible committee, to be so employed? If so, can I transport at Government expense?” Stanton wired back his response the same day: “You are authorized to turn over to responsible committees negro women and children, who will take in charge to provide them with employment and support in the Northern States, and you may furnish transportation at Government expense.”

By the end of September, up to 700 refugees at Cairo were transported on the Illinois Central Railroad to Chicago as well as to locations in Iowa, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. By the end of the following month, the camp’s superintendent reported that fewer than 700 remained there, the rest having been “rapidly taken up by the demand for labor.” Two carloads of contrabands arriving in Chicago in early October found waiting for them farmers who “took most of them away immediately to work on farms and help save the crops.” Black Chicagoans formed a Contraband Aid Committee to oversee the welfare of confiscated slaves brought to the city. A meeting among

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130 Chicago Tribune, November 1, 1862.
132 Schwalm, Emancipation’s Diaspora, 76.
133 Chicago Tribune, November 1, 1862.
134 Chicago Tribune, October 7, 1862.
135 Chicago Tribune, October 9, 1862.
Belvidere residents to gauge interest in bringing confiscated slaves to the area drew positive feedback; one participant’s suggestion that employers needed to provide a written guarantee that their workers would not become county charges was voted down as unnecessary.\(^{136}\) The *Quincy Whig and Republican* welcomed the help contrabands would provide in the home and on the farm while the *Rockford Register* praised the plan for giving farmers “much-needed help to fill the places of their friends and neighbors who are in our armies fighting for our country.”\(^{137}\) “The necessity is so great,” judged the *Chicago Tribune*, “that people don’t stop to cavil about color.”\(^{138}\)

Whether written with optimism or ignorance, the *Tribune*’s statement could not have been more wrong. Democratic papers howled against Stanton’s order and spilled a great deal of ink fretting over the “hordes of these black vagabonds…being thrust upon us daily.”\(^{139}\) These “lazy, squalid paupers” were destined to “overflow our jails and poor-houses” while somehow simultaneously taking “the bread out of the mouths of toiling white men and women.”\(^{140}\) The *Salem Advocate* worried that the “inundation of this black element” would disturb “all our social relations” while the *Champaign County Democrat* warned that the cheap wages paid to black laborers would depress the salaries of white workers.\(^{141}\) A headline in the *Carthage Republican* announced, “FREE NEGROES IN

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136 *Belvidere Standard*, September 30, 1862.
137 *Quincy Whig and Republican*, October 18, 1862; *Rockford Register*, October 11, 1862.
138 *Chicago Tribune*, October 7, 1862.
139 *Jonesboro Gazette*, October 18, 1862.
140 *Illinois State Register*, September 30, 1862.
141 *Salem Advocate*, October 2, 1862, in Hubbard, *Illinois’s War*, 96; *Champaign County Democrat*, October 9, 1862.
ILLINOIS. They Are Brought Here to Compete with White Men.” Whites would become the “mudsills” of society, predicted the Chicago Post. Even more, once employers tasted the fruits of “servile labor,” Illinois’ transformation to a slave state would be a fait accompli.143

Democratic papers throughout the state recalled the vote that occurred just months earlier when Illinoisans resoundingly endorsed the principle of racial exclusion. Bringing confiscated slaves into Illinois was not only against the will of the people but it was illegal as well. Cairo was under martial law but the 1853 anti-immigration law was still in force throughout the rest of the state.144 The Democratic mayor of Chicago sent a sharp letter to Brigadier General Tuttle, denouncing the importation of confiscated slaves to his city as a “violation of the laws of this State, and a great imposition to the laboring population. I cannot give it my sanction.”145 The city’s aldermen approved of the mayor’s position by a vote of 11-6. Coming on the heels of the draft and nationwide suspension of the writ of habeas corpus, the flagrant violation of Illinois’s statutes by the Republican administration was less shocking than it was galling.146

Democratic editors and politicians did not hold a monopoly on opposition to the dispersal northward of Cairo’s contrabands. Some soldiers expressed their outrage to friends and family back home. David Ash, a farmer from Stark County serving with the Thirty-Seventh Illinois Infantry, wrote from Missouri, “I understand that our Abolition

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143 Chicago Post, reprinted in the Illinois State Register, October 8, 1862.

144 Cole, Era of the Civil War, 334.

145 Chicago Tribune, September 23, 1862.

146 Chicago Times, reprinted in the Jonesboro Gazette, October 18, 1862.
friends of Ils are trying to fill up the State with contraband negroes now. I never come here to free niggers for any set of Blamed Abolition Disunionists…what a Desirable place Ils will [be] when it gets full of free niggers.”

Edward Marion Harriss, a farmer in southern Perry County, answered Lincoln’s July call for three-year volunteers and joined the Eighty-First Illinois Infantry, which was mustered into service at the end of August. His regiment was sent to Cairo and was awaiting further orders when Harriss wrote his brother and sister at the beginning of October. He did not mention the contrabands encamped there, but he had plenty to write about their migration to the north:

I am opposed to them going up there and I wish the first man that carried them up there would have got fifty lashes I tell you all that I dont want them there to fill up our places while we are out fighting for our country if our regiment could come up there we would run them all out on a double quick shore I wrote to some of you about that you could get them but I dont want them there I would like if you all would run all off that is up there and tell them that brought them to scedaddle [sic] expect you wont do that but I hope you all will have nothing to do with the darkies.

Popular protests against the plan erupted across the state. Meetings denouncing the importation of confiscated slaves were held in numerous counties, including Adams, Bureau, Coles, Ford, Fulton, Hamilton, Hancock, Jasper, Knox, Livingston, Logan, Marion, McDonough, McLean, Pike, Rock Island, Sangamon, Shelby, St. Clair, Union, Vermillion, and Whiteside. A vigilante group formed in far northern Ogle County to arrest blacks coming to the area. Rumors (which proved unfounded) that a steamer was

147 David L. Ash to Eliza, November 12, 1862, David L. Ash Collection, United States Army Heritage Center.
148 Edward Marion Harriss to siblings, October 3, 1862, Edward Marion Harriss Letters, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.
bringing a group of black workers to Quincy spurred an angry crowd to gather at the levee to turn them away. The arrival of ten contrabands there two weeks later prompted a large public meeting “among the workingmen of the city,” wherein participants vowed to redress the issue first with lawful means but, failing that, by such measures “as seem to us most expedient and most practicable.” Meat packers in the community of South Chicago formed a Benevolent Protective Association, pledging not to work for any packinghouse that employed black workers. As reported by the *Pike County Democrat*, a meeting held in western central Pittsfield in October resolved that “the people of this country will not tolerate a worthless negro population in our midst.” Resolutions passed at far southern Jonesboro cautioned white workers that competing with black labor would “reduce thousands of white families to beggary, want and starvation.” Mid-state Shelby County residents threatened to drive contrabands out of the state “at the point of bayonet” if legal measures did not suffice.

Such threats were not leveled only against blacks. Whites who employed black laborers also wore targets on their backs, as whites policed fellow whites in order to prevent breaches in the racial border. A farmer in Vandalia wrote the governor that he wished to employ contrabands from Cairo but that his neighbors threatened that “the Negroes and myself will be hung up from the neck” if he attempted to do so. A number of residents of Olney in southeastern Illinois notified their neighbors that anyone who

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151 *Quincy Herald*, October 8, 1862; *Chicago Tribune*, October 14, 1862.
152 *Quincy Herald*, October 23, 24, 25, 1862.
153 *Chicago Post*, reprinted in the *Quincy Herald*, October 8, 1862.
155 *Jonesboro Gazette*, October 18, 1862.
made use of contraband labor would “suffer the penalty of law.” They sent a committee
to meet the train carrying contrabands and returned them on the next train back to
Cairo. A resolution adopted at the Quincy meeting served as a reminder to local police
officers that it was their duty to “inflict the punishment provided by law” on anyone
harboring or employing contrabands.

“The Great Revolution”: Democratic Resurgence and the Election of 1862

Throughout this turmoil, the upcoming November election cast its shadow. Yet
the campaign season opened inauspiciously for Democrats, who held their state
convention in Springfield on September 10—eight days before Stanton’s order to
distribute Cairo’s contrabands throughout the state. Almost forty counties were
unrepresented at the convention and only 381 out of the 529 delegates who were solicited
actually attended. This lack of fanfare did not bode well for the party’s fortunes. The
*Quincy Herald* attempted to put a positive spin on this, claiming the number of attendees
actually surpassed expectations given the “comparative unimportance of the nominations
to be made and the condition of the country.” The delegates themselves alienated
potential supporters by adopting a platform that was more focused on criticizing the
Lincoln administration than on supporting the Union war effort. The nomination for the
at-large congressional seat went to Peace Democrat James C. Allen over T. Lyle Dickey,
colonel of the Fourth Illinois Cavalry. Walter B. Scates, former chief justice of the

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158 *Salem Advocate*, reprinted in the *Quincy Herald*, October 28, 1862.
159 *Quincy Herald*, October 25, 1862.
161 *Quincy Herald*, September 12, 1862.
Illinois Supreme Court who was currently serving as a staff member of General John A. McClernand, represented Cook County at the convention. He offered pro-war resolutions that were laid on the table without a reading. Afterwards, he fired off a public letter censuring the “old fossilized party political hacks” who would not sustain the president or pledge themselves to an unconditional prosecution of the war, even if it necessitated ending slavery. He called for “true” Democrats to hold a convention on the same date that happened to coincide with the upcoming Republican State Convention.

Scates was not alone in loosening his moorings to the Democratic Party. Others drifted away from the hardline peace faction that was gaining ascendancy. The Democratic *Carbondale Times* blasted the convention for not representing the will of most Illinois Democrats and for passing resolutions inadequate in their expressions of loyalty. Andrew Kuykendall, a prominent Egyptian Democrat who served a stint as a major in the 31st Illinois Infantry under John A. Logan, opposed the calling of any Democratic convention because it would excite “partisan purposes” and stated in a public letter his willingness to act with Democrats as well as old-line Whigs and Republicans in putting down the rebellion. Nor would he even refuse to accept the aid of “Sambo and Abolitionists.” John Detrich, a Democrat who had represented southern Randolph County multiple times as a state legislator, informed the *Chester Democrat* that he was “no party man just now” and was “ready to join hands with all men who are really and

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162 His first resolution vowed to support the Union war effort unconditionally. The second invoked Stephen Douglas in proclaiming that there were no neutrals, only patriots or traitors. The final resolution praised Lincoln’s summer call for 600,000 volunteers.


truly for the Union.” A Petersburg pastor who described himself as an “uncompromising Democrat” washed his hands of the party after the state convention. Due to the “traitorous designs” of those who sought to “effect a fatal division of the North,” he now threw his support behind any party pledged to crushing the rebellion.\footnote{Chester Democrat, reprinted in the Illinois State Journal, August 22, 1862.}

Even John A. Logan, the Democratic firebrand from Murphysboro who penned the 1853 black exclusion act, implored a Carbondale crowd to “swallow up” their party feelings while their brothers’ bones were “bleaching beneath a summer sun.”\footnote{Illinois State Journal, September 24, 1862.}

Illinois Republicans capitalized on these anti-party entreaties by backing a fusion party of Republicans and War Democrats calling itself the Union Party. This strategy was used in numerous northern states during the fall election of 1861 to rally pro-war members of both parties against an increasingly recalcitrant faction of the Democratic Party. These coalitions worked especially well in conservative areas where the strength of both parties was closely matched and the radical wing of the Republican Party did not hold much sway.\footnote{Carbondale Times, reprinted in the Illinois State Journal, September 11, 1862.} This Unionist strategy was widely adopted throughout the loyal states for the 1862 election. Without mentioning the Republican Party by name, the Illinois Republican State Central Committee issued a call for a state convention, inviting all “who indorse the present Administration in all its efforts to crush the existing rebellion.”\footnote{Smith, No Party Now, 40-44.} The Union State Convention convened in Springfield on September 24 and demonstrated its fusion character by nominating a Democrat, Eben C. Ingersoll, for the at-large congressional seat.

\footnote{Illinois State Journal, September 10, 1862.}
While Republicans felt confident about their chances after the anemic Democratic state convention, events quickly transpired to pull the rug out from under them. On September 18, Stanton authorized the dispersal of Cairo’s contraband population. Four days later, Lincoln issued the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. Slaves held in regions still in rebellion would be “then, thenceforward, and forever free” on the first of January. Though applying only to those areas not under Union control, it was the most radical step yet taken against slavery by the federal government. Unlike previous orders and congressional acts, there was no differentiation made between slaves owned by loyal and rebel owners. To both its supporters and opponents, the proclamation signaled that slavery was as much the enemy as the Confederacy; destroying one necessitated destroying the other. It was also a clear message to both slaves and Union troops that federal forces would no longer be complicit in protecting an owner’s property. Then, on September 24, Lincoln issued another proclamation, this one suspending the writ of habeas corpus for rebels and those aiding them. Within the span of a week, Democrats gained a stockpile of ammunition with which to besiege their opponents.

Democrats in Illinois and throughout the North responded bitterly to the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. An editorial in the Joliet Signal summarized their main arguments against it. First, it was a violation of states’ rights and an unconstitutional overreach of power by a “despotic” leader. Second, the proclamation would backfire as a war measure because it would galvanize the South to fight even more fiercely. Finally, it would trigger wave after wave of “vagabond negroes” to migrate to
the North. The situation at Cairo was “but the beginning of the results we may expect from the emancipation proclamation inaugurated by the Republicans.”

This final contention struck a common nerve. The concurrence of the distribution of Cairo’s contrabands with the announcement of the Emancipation Proclamation was a political boon for Democrats. At their state convention, Democrats had addressed the growing population of contrabands at Cairo and asked public authorities to enforce the exclusion law. They warned that “disturbances on our border” may bring an influx of blacks to Illinois and vowed that the “soil of Illinois should belong to the white race, and that he alone was suited to her free institutions.” They also passed a resolution warning that radical Republicans were scheming to “pervert” the war into an abolitionist crusade. Now, following Stanton’s order and Lincoln’s proclamation, Democrats looked less like alarmists than prophets. These two events tapped into the mounting anxiety of white Illinoisans to the numerically small but symbolically significant increase in the state’s black population. These “first fruits of emancipation” were just the beginning. With mass emancipation on the horizon, the impending “Africanization” of Illinois would turn the state into a “lazar-house” (leper colony) where “white labor [will be] ground to the earth.” The revolutionary consequences of the war threatened to spill over into Illinois, aided by Republicans who transgressed the state’s laws and will of the people. Democrats prepared for a showdown at the ballot box.

In the weeks leading up to the November 4 election, Democrats relentlessly kept the peril of black immigration before the voters. “Every vote cast for a Republican

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171 Joliet Signal, September 30, 1862.
172 Chicago Times, quoted in Voegeli, Free But Not Equal, 60.
173 Illinois State Register, September 29, 1862.
candidate is a vote in favor of supplanting white labor with negro labor,” warned the *Quincy Herald*. “If, therefore, you would keep these Negroes out of the State your only hope is to vote the Democratic ticket.” The *Jonesboro Gazette* offered the same guidance. “Under Republican rule the State is being overrun with free niggers, who will reduce the wages of white men to free nigger price.” The only deliverance from this “utter ruin” was to “vote the Democratic ticket.” The *Cairo City Gazette* urged its readers, “go, every man to the polls in November and vote the straight out Democratic ticket—the white man’s ticket—and put men in office who will preserve our beautiful prairie State as a blessed heritage for white men and their posterity forever and ever.”

In a widely circulated letter, James Allen, the at-large Democratic congressional candidate, expressed apprehension over Illinois “being overrun with negroes set free by our army or by the president’s proclamation.” The *Illinois State Register* printed a pamphlet titled, “Shall the Constitution be Maintained—Shall Illinois be Africanized.”

In Democratic newspapers and campaign speeches throughout the state, the message was the same: “The only way for the people of Illinois to effectually put a stop to the negro invasion is for them to vote the Democratic ticket.”

This onslaught put Illinois Republicans in a tenuous position. With six weeks between the announcement of the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation and election day, Republicans scrambled to regain their footing. Their reactions to the proclamation

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174 *Quincy Herald*, October 11, 1862.
175 *Jonesboro Gazette*, November 1, 1862.
176 *Cairo City Gazette*, October 30, 1862.
177 *Illinois State Register*, October 10, 1862.
179 *Joliet Signal*, October 21, 1862.
ran the gamut from the disapproval of Senator Orville H. Browning, who felt “nothing should have been said on the subject of slavery,” to the *Rock River Democrat’s* hailing of it as a “great step...in a moral view one of the most important the world has ever witnessed.” However, the prevailing consensus among Republicans was to back the Emancipation Proclamation but only as a necessary means of prosecuting the war. The resolution passed by the Union State Convention best exemplified this approach, endorsing the proclamation as a “great and imperative war measure, essential to the salvation of the Union.”

Elsewhere, the radical potential of the proclamation was downplayed and the connection to black freedom was elided. The *Illinois State Journal* endorsed it in an article that mentioned “emancipation” only once, focusing instead on the duty of patriots to sustain the president in this step he has “taken reluctantly.” In another attempt to portray the Emancipation Proclamation as non-revolutionary, the *Journal* printed William Lloyd Garrison’s critique of it and editorialized, “perhaps it is just as well, that the ultras should be displeased.” Lincoln did not act to appease abolitionists, stressed the *Aledo Weekly Record*. “The President’s first and last thought is to save the Union; that is his ultimatum.”

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185 *Aledo Weekly Record*, September 30, 1862.
congressional candidate, told the audience, “I care not what you name the measure, if it becomes necessary; that is the only question.”

The *Chicago Tribune* broke out of this mold, at least initially. The day after the proclamation was announced, the paper acclaimed its moral significance:

> His proclamation aims at nothing less than complete emancipation, and the establishment of a Free Republic from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from the Lakes to the Gulf. So splendid a vision has hardly shone upon the world since the day of the Messiah. From the date of this proclamation begins the history of the republic as our fathers designed to have it—the home of freedom, the asylum of the oppressed, the seat of justice, the land of equal rights under the law, where each man however humble, shall be entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Let no one think to stay the glorious reformation. Every day’s events are hastening its triumph, and whosoever shall place himself in its way will grind him to powder.

Here was passionate praise for the transformation of the war into a crusade for the recognition of universal natural rights. Yet the *Tribune*’s tone was sharply different the day before the election. “The humanitarian view of the matter may engage the attention of the country in times of peace; but now we are at war, and the object is, and must continue to be, to hurt the rebels.” The paper continued, “if, then, we can convince the country of what is undeniably true, that the desire to put down the rebels and to secure, for white men, the republican institutions which our fathers founded, were the impelling motives of Abraham Lincoln in putting his hand to that great paper, we shall have no difficulty in bringing all reasonable and all loyal men to his support.” Determined not to again cross the perilous boundary dividing politics and morality, the *Tribune* waded to safer shores, calling emancipation “only an incident” and not the “chief end” of the war.

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186 *Chicago Tribune*, September 29, 1862.

187 *Chicago Tribune*, September 23, 1862.
“It proceeds from an overpowering military necessity, not from the demands of generous philanthropy.”

The Tribune’s article downplaying the significance of the Emancipation Proclamation for blacks in exchange for highlighting its benefits for whites bristles with reluctance and resentment for having to do so, but the paper recognized that pragmatism and pandering to white supremacy were necessary to sway an uncertain electorate. The proclamation was a tough enough sell on its own, but Stanton’s order to disperse Cairo’s contrabands added fuel to the fire. Republicans tried a number of strategies to deflect the contraband issue away from themselves. One was to argue that Democrats disproportionately hired black laborers and were therefore hypocritical opportunists. Another was to accuse Democrats of having “nigger on the brain,” a disease resulting in “political idiocy” and apocalyptical warnings about the “coming black scourge.”

But the approach that gained the most currency among Republicans was not to sidestep the contraband issue but to tie it directly to the Emancipation Proclamation. Just as the Democrats associated the two in order to argue that Illinois would be overrun with free blacks, Republicans argued that emancipation would actually free Illinois of fugitive slaves. Slavery drove them from the South; freedom would entice them back. “The desire for freedom actuates most of them,” assured the Chicago Tribune, “but in every instance they regard the condition as one of exile, and declare their intention to return South as

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188 Chicago Tribune, November 3, 1862.
189 For example, see the Quincy Whig and Republican, October 18, 1862; Ottawa Republican, October 25, 1862; Chicago Tribune, October 8, 9, 1862; and Carbondale Times, reprinted in the Belleville Weekly Advocate, October 24, 1862.
190 Joliet Republican, reprinted in the Chicago Tribune, November 1, 1862.
soon as they dare to do so.”191 They will “skedaddle to the sunny clime of Dixie” once their freedom is assured, and “our brave boys will come home to resume their former places in society…this is the natural solution of the whole matter.”192 “Nobody expects the negro to remain North as a permanent resident,” assured the *Quincy Whig and Republican*. “A tropical climate is his home,” and as soon as black freedom is secured in the South, “our negro population will move that way.”193 Harvey Sester, a Republican candidate for state representative, assured his constituency that Illinois would not be “overrun with negroes” because they “prefer a warm Southern climate” where they would remain if free.194 The *Bloomington Pantagraph* encouraged its readers to offer employment to Cairo’s contrabands, who were “more white than black,” with the assurance that they would eventually be colonized in Central America. “It is just as easy for them to be departed from the free States, as from the slave States and easier while the war lasts.”195 The way to safeguard Illinois for whites, Republicans maintained, was by assuring freedom for slaves.

However, behind the scenes, Republicans acknowledged the weakness of their position and recognized that the contraband issue dealt them a heavy blow. In private correspondence, they fretted over the potential consequences of it. Laura Swett, wife of Unionist congressional candidate Leonard Swett, wrote to her husband’s law partner about the mood in Central Illinois: “the political aspect of things in this District seems changing rapidly. The importation of Negroes into the State, and, within a few days, into

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191 *Chicago Tribune*, November 1, 1862.
192 *Chicago Tribune*, October 8, 1862.
193 *Quincy Whig and Republican*, October 18, 1862.
194 *Aledo Weekly Record*, October 28, 1862.
195 *Bloomington Pantagraph*, October 1, 1862, in Munson, *It Is Begun!,* 82-83.
this very District, is working powerfully against him [Swett], and yesterday he was sure it was of no avail to labor.”

Robert Smith, the Unionist congressional candidate in the southwestern Twelfth District, wrote to Governor Yates about his distress over Democrats using the contraband issue to arouse fears over labor competition among his German and Irish constituents. He beseeched Yates to have Lincoln or Stanton “publish that there is no intention to send free negroes into free states to remain, that it is merely a military necessity.” Yates dispatched Smith’s letter to Lincoln, adding a note to John Nicolay, Lincoln’s secretary, that it was “important” for the President to see it.

Lincoln’s campaign manager, David Davis, wrote a similar message to Lincoln on October 14. He predicted that the “spreading of negroes from Cairo…will work great harm in the coming election” and asked that they be confined in Cairo until then.

Davis was apparently unaware that the previous day the Secretary of War had done just that. Offering no explanation, Stanton directed the Commanding Officer at Cairo to “send no more contrabands or colored persons to Illinois until further order.”

It appeared Washington grasped how toxic the contraband issue was politically. Stanton’s instructions came on the eve of statewide elections in Ohio, Indiana, Pennsylvania, and Iowa. How much that played into the timing of Stanton’s instructions can only be conjectured, but white aversion to the northern migration of southern blacks was

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196 Laura Swett to William W. Orme, October 15, 1862, William W. Orme Papers, Illinois History and Lincoln Collections.
198 David Davis to Abraham Lincoln, October 14, 1862, in Hubbard, Illinois’s War, 96.
widespread not only in Illinois but across the Midwest.\textsuperscript{200} Even the radical governor of Massachusetts balked at the government’s request that fall to give asylum to 2,000 contrabands gathered at Fort Monroe.\textsuperscript{201}

Illinois Republicans desperately hoped that Stanton’s order would put the contraband issue to rest. With a great deal of either naïveté or wishful thinking, the \textit{Illinois State Journal} called it a “damaging blow to the Vallandigham Democracy, taking away their only excuse for an issue in the present contest.”\textsuperscript{202} Similarly, the \textit{Chicago Tribune} credited Stanton’s actions for “knocking the political capital of the fire-in-the-rear Democracy into the middle of next year…The cry of ‘poor nigger inundation’ was about all the stock in trade that the poor fellows had left.”\textsuperscript{203} The Democrats, of course, were only emboldened by such a bald-faced political gambit. They interpreted Stanton’s orders to halt the distribution of the contrabands “until further orders” to mean “until after the election.”\textsuperscript{204} At which time, warned the \textit{Chicago Times}, “the floodgates will again be opened and the black stream will again flow in greater volume than before.”\textsuperscript{205}

Although Stanton’s order relieved the federal government of officially overseeing the distribution of contrabands, fugitive slaves continued to come into Illinois on their own and alongside returning Illinois soldiers for whom they had worked in the field.\textsuperscript{206}

\textsuperscript{200} For example, the Unionist-Democratic \textit{Daily Missouri Republican} (October 16, 1862) noted “serious difficulties” arising from the presence of black refugees in Toledo, Cincinnati, Brooklyn, and St. Louis. See also Schwalm, \textit{Emancipation’s Diaspora}, 81-106.


\textsuperscript{202} \textit{Illinois State Journal}, October 15, 1862.

\textsuperscript{203} \textit{Chicago Tribune}, October 16, 1862.

\textsuperscript{204} \textit{Illinois State Register}, October 21, 1862.

\textsuperscript{205} \textit{Chicago Times}, reprinted in the \textit{Quincy Daily Herald}, October 17, 1862.

\textsuperscript{206} For a first-person account of a slave who escaped to the camp of an Illinois infantry and later accompanied one of the soldiers back to Illinois, see Andrew Smith, “Adventures of a Colored Boy in War,”
Nor did Stanton’s order end the popular protests against the immigration of blacks in the weeks leading up to the election. Illinois Republicans must have seen the writing on the wall after polling results came in from states with mid-October elections. Democrats gained congressional majorities in Ohio and Indiana, wrested control of the Pennsylvania state house of representatives, and regained both branches of the Indiana state legislature. Little wonder that Leonard Swett solicited his law partner, who was then serving in Missouri as colonel of the Ninety-Fourth Illinois Infantry, to “send some men home on furlough who could vote if this is possible do it.”

The jockeying around of a handful of Illinois troops to allow them to vote in their home districts could not prevent a Democratic resurgence that November. Nationally, the Democrats had much to cheer. The governorships of New York and New Jersey went to Democrats, as well as the latter’s state legislature. Republicans retained control of the House of Representatives but Democrats gained thirty-five congressional seats, giving the Republicans an embarrassing twenty-five-seat majority at a time when most southern states had left the Union. Still, the election was not a total catastrophe for Republicans. In the Senate they actually gained five seats. Missouri sent its first Republican representatives to Washington. Furthermore, not all of the Republican losses were routs; in Pennsylvania and Ohio only 4,000 and 6,000 votes respectively tipped the balance in favor of Democratic congressional candidates.

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In Illinois, however, the Democrats did score a landslide. They grabbed nine out of fourteen congressional seats with a staggering 27,000 margin.\textsuperscript{211} James Allen easily bested Ebon Ingersoll for the at-large seat by over 16,000 votes. A direct comparison to the 1860 congressional race is not possible due to redistricting in 1861, which increased the number of representatives from nine to thirteen and added the at-large seat. But a look at the percentage of votes captured by Democratic congressional candidates in those years reveals the strength of their victory. In 1860, although Democrats won five out of nine congressional races, they garnered only 48.1 percent of the total vote. In 1862, their congressional candidates received 55.4 percent of votes. Democrats also won the two state offices that were up for election—treasurer and superintendent—by margins of 16,000.\textsuperscript{212}

The polling numbers for state legislators were equally dismal for Republicans. Their 13-12 majority in the state senate flipped to a Democratic majority of 13-12. The state representative races provide a more meaningful illustration of the Democratic takeover because all the seats were in play. The Republicans had enjoyed a 41-34 advantage in the previous house but the Democrats retook it with a commanding 55-30 majority.\textsuperscript{213} Again, because of redistricting, comparing the 1860 election results at the district level becomes problematic. Therefore, a regional comparison between the two years best highlights where the Democrats gained ground. Republicans maintained their two house seats in southwestern St. Clair County by a mere 637 votes but lost all their

\textsuperscript{211} This figure does not include the at-large congressional seat. Calculations in this paragraph come from the election returns in Allen and Lacey, \textit{Illinois Elections}, 11-13.

\textsuperscript{212} \textit{Illinois State Journal}, December 30, 1862.

\textsuperscript{213} The redistricting of 1861 added three districts and ten additional seats.
other southern representatives.\textsuperscript{214} West central Illinois became nearly solidly Democratic, including the counties along the Iowa border north to Rock Island. Central Illinois saw tremendous gains with Sangamon, Logan, Tazewell, Peoria, and Stark counties falling into the Democratic camp.\textsuperscript{215} Democrats even penetrated into the northern section of the state by capturing all three seats in the LaSalle and Livingston district, two out of three seats in the district comprising Woodford, Marshall, Putnam, and Bureau counties, one of two seats in the Grundy and Will district, and both seats of Cook County’s Sixtieth District.\textsuperscript{216} With a joint ballot of twenty-six in the next general assembly, the Democrats would easily be able to appoint one of their own to complete Stephen Douglas’s term as senator.

Wilbur Storey’s \textit{Chicago Times} hailed the “Great Revolution” that had swept the state.\textsuperscript{217} “Illinois Redeemed!,” proclaimed the \textit{Ottawa Free Trader}.\textsuperscript{218} “The result of these elections will be gratifying to white men and the friends of constitutional freedom everywhere,” declared the \textit{Joliet Signal}. It should “open the eyes of the President” that the war was about “the suppression of the rebellion and not for the freedom and enfranchisement of four millions of negroes.”\textsuperscript{219} A headline in the \textit{Illinois State Register} trumpeted, “The Home of Lincoln Condemns the Proclamation.”\textsuperscript{220} The \textit{Cairo City Gazette} read the Republican Party’s eulogy. It had once been a “tolerable although

\textsuperscript{214} This includes the two seats of Madison County and the one seat that comprised Wayne and Edwards counties.

\textsuperscript{215} Sangamon County’s two seats had previously been shared by a Republican and a Democrat.

\textsuperscript{216} Secretary of State, “Record of Election Returns,” Record Series 103.033, Illinois State Archives.

\textsuperscript{217} \textit{Chicago Times}, November 6, 1862.

\textsuperscript{218} \textit{Ottawa Free Trader}, November 8, 1862.

\textsuperscript{219} \textit{Joliet Signal}, November 11, 1862.

\textsuperscript{220} \textit{Illinois State Register}, November 5, 1862.
impracticable” party, until it “merged itself into abolitionism, and in that hideous shape died by the hands of the people. We glory in its death, we celebrate it [sic] burial, and a nation celebrates and rejoices with us.”

Republicans resisted interpreting the election results as a referendum on emancipation or black migration, at least publicly. Instead, their blame landed elsewhere. Conservatives blamed the radical wing for distorting emancipation into an abolitionist crusade. The Chicago Evening Journal castigated the Quincy Whig and Peoria Transcript for having “disgusted even a majority of Republicans by [their] extreme nonsense.”

Senator Orville H. Browning, who was now a lame duck, wrote that the Democratic triumph was “just what was to be expected from the insane ravings of the Chicago Tribune, Quincy Whig, ed id omne genus [and all of that kind].”

Taking the opposite tack, the Bureau County Republican believed that the Republican Party suffered by collapsing itself into the Union Party and watering down the principles that got Lincoln elected in the first place. Still others, such as the Belvidere Standard, attributed the Republican loss to the “shilly shally, dilatory policy of the Government in waging the war,” singling out McClellan for “ruining the nation” and causing scores of Republicans to “rebuke the Administration for retaining such a general.” Similarly, the Quincy Whig and Republican lashed out at Lincoln for squandering his momentum by sustaining

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221 Cairo City Gazette, November 13, 1862.


223 Orville Hickman Browning, diary, November 4, 1862, in Pease and Randall, Diary, 1:582.

224 Bureau County Republican, November 13, 1862, quoted in Allardice, “Illinois is Rotten with Traitors!,” 108.

225 Belvidere Standard, November 11, 1862.
“the miserable clique of army officers who are ruining its grand army by inaction, swamps, and indecisive battles.”

By far the most common excuse given by Republicans for their defeat at the polls was the absence of thousands of enlistees, who were not allowed to cast ballots outside of their home districts. The consequence of this, they believed, was straightforward, if circular: persons who were loyal volunteered to serve, and therefore if given the chance they would have voted to sustain the loyal (Union) party. Conversely, Illinois “lost scarcely a disloyal man in the consequences of war.” Newspapers offered various estimates of how many Republican votes were lost due to the disfranchisement of soldiers—52,086 by the Chicago Tribune’s calculations, 80,000 to 100,000 by the Rockford Register’s. There was likely some truth in these claims. Historian David Wallace Adams estimates that 70,000 voting-age soldiers from Illinois were deployed at the time of the election. By examining vote totals from Illinois between 1858-68, Bruce Allardice calculates that 42,900 votes were “missing” from the 1862 election, probably due to absentee soldiers. If 70 percent of that figure broke Republican, the 9-5 Democratic congressional majority would have turned into an 8-6 Republican one.

How the soldiers would have voted and their overall impact on the election results is a speculative exercise. Illinois Republicans could console themselves with hypothetical scenarios to lessen the sting of defeat and to avoid critically analyzing the reasons for it, but behind this lay a deeply rattled party. They surely remembered that their 1860

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226 Quincy Whig and Republican, November 6, 1862.
227 Illinois State Journal, November 6, 1862.
228 Chicago Tribune, November 22, 1862; Rockford Register, November 8, 1862.
victories often came with razor thin margins, so that future success was anything but secure. Nor could they fail to recognize that Illinois’s massive Democratic congressional majority of 27,000 far surpassed the 4,000 and 6,000 Democratic majorities in Pennsylvania and Ohio, both of which fielded more soldiers than did Illinois.

Regardless of how the soldiers’ votes may have panned out, Republicans in Illinois were left with the reality that the Democrats’ anti-administration message resonated with voters on the home front. Due to the timing of Stanton’s order to disperse Cairo’s contrabands, Illinois experienced the “first fruits of emancipation” in a way no other northern state did. No opinion polls were conducted to elucidate voters’ primary motivations, but the popular (not just partisan) opposition to black immigration—demonstrated in the June vote over the constitutional black clauses and protests over the migration of contrabands—suggests that the prospect of emancipation dealt a heavy blow to Republicans. So concluded Leonard Swett, who lost a fierce congressional fight for Central Illinois’s Eighth District despite publically denouncing the introduction of contrabands into the State.231 “The Proclamation hurt rather than helped us,” Swett wrote to his law partner. “Negroes from the south were taken into our state Fifty or more went to Livingston This did great harm.”232

At the close of 1862 Illinois Republicans hardly seemed poised to be the force behind repealing Illinois’s black exclusion law in two years’ time. But instead of retreating to conservative grounds after their defeat at the polls, they soon staked out more radical territory. The chasm between the two parties—and between who was

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231 Illinois State Journal, October 22, 1862.
deemed a patriot or traitor—widened during 1863. As the shock of emancipation wore off, Illinois soldiers and civilians began to embrace abolition not just as a war measure or form of retribution but as a purposeful outcome to all the carnage. Nothing facilitated this transformation quicker than the actions of black troops, whose performance on southern battlefields facilitated the dismantling of legal inequalities to the north.
Chapter 5:

“What Was Commenced as Rebellion Will End in Revolution”:
Emancipation and Black Military Service

Days after turning twenty-one years old, Charles W. Wills left his hometown of Canton, Illinois, to enlist with the Eighth Illinois Infantry. He was among the first volunteers to respond after the bombardment of Fort Sumter and found himself stationed in Cairo before the month was out. Just over four years later, he marched into the nation’s capital for the Grand Review of the Armies. During his years of service, Wills traveled throughout the South, beating a path from Missouri to the eastern seaboard. An ideological journey accompanied the physical one, as his ideas about race evolved with the changing nature of the war.

Like many of his fellow soldiers from Illinois, Wills scoffed at the idea of arming blacks when the issue was first being seriously discussed in the summer of 1862. He joined his comrades in “rejoicing that ‘Abe’ refuses to accept the negroes as soldiers,” predicting that had the president approved such a plan, “immense disaffection” and widespread resignation would have resulted.¹ Wills was unaware that the first federally authorized black regiment was then being formed, followed by many more after the Emancipation Proclamation took effect. By the following March, he was slowly warming to the idea of black troops. Although he still believed blacks were best off under slavery since they were less capable than “eight-year-old white children in taking care of

¹ Charles W. Wills to Mary E. Kellogg, August 14, 1862, in Kellogg, Army Life of an Illinois Soldier, 125-26.
themselves,” he saw those blacks in the service as an “exception” and believed they would “be fit for freedom after a few years as soldiers.”

Two months later, after having spent time around black troops while on fatigue duty, Wills expressed even greater acceptance of the idea of enlisting blacks. He fretted that the army was commissioning poor quality men to lead black regiments and desired that black recruits “should be allowed a fair chance” by having top ranking officers. Although Wills was not yet “an enthusiast over the negro soldiers” and still preferred to “fight the war out without arming them,” he nonetheless realized that “a year ago I sincerely thought that if the negro was called into this war as a fighting character, I would get out of it as quickly as I could, honorably.” Now he would “cheerfully go down the Mississippi and forage for mules, horses, and negroes and put muskets in the hand’s [sic] of the latter. I have no trouble in believing that all these Rebels should lose everything they possess; and I experience some pleasure in taking them when ordered to.”

Wills’s views continued to develop in short order. In June 1863, after spending time at the “negro camps,” he wrote his sister:

An honest confession is good for the soul. I never thought I would, but I am getting strongly in favor of arming them, and am becoming so blind that I can’t see why they will not make soldiers. How queer. A year ago last January I didn’t like to hear anything of emancipation. Last fall accepted confiscation of Rebel’s negroes quietly. In January took to emancipation readily, and now believe in arming the negroes. The only objection I have to it is a matter of pride. I almost begin to think of applying for a position in a regiment myself.

The following month Wills commented that the members of two colored regiments he had seen looked “right well in their uniforms.” For someone who a year earlier had been

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repulsed at the sight of a “miserable, horrible-looking, degraded set of brutes” on an Alabama plantation, this change not only in appearance but in what it suggested about the mutability of supposedly fixed racial attributes was striking indeed.\textsuperscript{5}

Wills’s story is not unique among the white soldiers who served in Illinois regiments during the war. Most did not support immediate emancipation at the beginning of the conflict. Nor would many have enlisted so readily had they known that black soldiers would soon join the army’s ranks. Yet when these two processes began, the majority of troops not only remained at their posts but also came to accept them as necessary and even beneficial consequences of the war.

The Emancipation Proclamation heralded a new direction in both how the war would be fought and its purpose. While a number of Illinois soldiers at the start of 1863 felt they had been deceived about what they were fighting for, they soon endorsed the Proclamation as a sound military policy and a means to resolving the conflict. Though based on pragmatic reasoning and self-preservation, their support for immediate, uncompensated emancipation was a drastic shift from decades of toleration for the existence of slavery.

Whereas the Emancipation Proclamation helped to radicalize views on slavery as an institution, the enlistment of blacks into the military service spurred changing attitudes about blacks as individuals. Many whites severely doubted that blacks, especially those who had been enslaved, possessed the requisite masculine attributes needed to become effective fighters. However, the performance of black troops under fire quickly silenced the critics. White Illinois soldiers often found themselves reassessing their racial views as

\textsuperscript{5} Charles W. Wills to Mary E. Kellogg, July 1, 1863, August 19, 1862, in Kellogg, Army Life of an Illinois Soldier, 127, 185.
they fought alongside and fraternized with their black comrades. Many black volunteers believed that donning the Union blue would open the door to citizenship and expand their sphere of rights. By the end of the war, white troops were beginning to believe so as well and could envision a society markedly different from the one they had originally enlisted to preserve.

**Emancipation and Practical Abolitionists**

The anxiety sparked by Lincoln’s September 1862 announcement of the Emancipation Proclamation did not subside after the Republican rout in the fall elections that year. On the contrary, anxiety mounted as the first of January approached. Rumors swirled on both sides of the political divide that Lincoln would revise, delay, or abandon the plan altogether. Democrats, not content to rest on their laurels, demanded that Lincoln bend to “popular will,” as revealed by the late election, and rescind his September 22 pledge.\(^6\) Undeterred, the *Chicago Tribune* eagerly counted down to the fulfillment of the proclamation with portentous headlines—“A Fortnight Hence,” “And Yet Three Days,” “The Dawn of Liberty.” Residents of Rock Island County viewed its approach more ominously and spent New Year’s Eve passing resolutions to more effectively prevent blacks from coming into the state.\(^7\)

Soldiers in the field also sensed a quickening pulse in the weeks leading up to the new year. An officer stationed near Nashville, Tennessee, observed, “the negroes are counting the days and hours when the 1\(^{st}\) of January shall come. They meet in little knots,

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\(^6\) *Illinois State Register*, November 22, 1862. See also the *Quincy Daily Herald*, November 8, 1862, the *Joliet Signal*, December 12, 1862, and the *Chicago Times*, December 20, 1862.

\(^7\) *Chicago Tribune*, December 19, 29, 30, 1862; *Illinois State Register*, January 6, 1863.
and talk over the whole matter, and lay their plans for going...If the negroes are only as brave as they talk, slavery will soon be wiped out.” Another Illinois volunteer in Tennessee noted that the only people he encountered who were not miserable during the holiday season were blacks, whose celebrations were “lightened by the near approach of ‘emancipation day.’” Overall, he added, they “seem to be very generally in favor of setting up for themselves” as independent civilians. Joseph Ward of the Thirty-Ninth Illinois Infantry marveled at how quickly and extensively word of the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation had spread among slaves. By mid-October hundreds had arrived from North Carolina to his camp at Suffolk, Virginia, having “heard of the Proclamation [sic] a way in the south where they never saw a Yankee soldier.” In contrast to the anticipation manifested by slaves, some soldiers had doubts about Lincoln’s intentions to carry out his emancipation plan. A volunteer in the 119th Illinois Infantry noted a “great apprehension in the part of the soldiers throughout Gen. Grant’s whole department that the Administration will back down on the Emancipation Proclamation and so modify it as to make it inoperative and valueless.”

Lincoln, of course, did sign his name to the Emancipation Proclamation on the afternoon of January 1, 1863. Celebrations were already underway in Illinois. That morning, black Chicagoans gathered in Quinn Chapel of the A.M.E. Church for singing and prayer, followed by speeches and more signing that evening. They passed resolutions

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8 Quoted in the Chicago Tribune, December 20, 1862.


10 Joseph R. Ward Jr. to parents, October 10, 1862, in Cummins and Hohweiler, Enlisted Soldier’s View of the Civil War, 40.

11 “Cato,” letter to the editor, Quincy Whig and Republican, December 13, 1862.
praising Lincoln and “all lovers of the rights of man” for the historic step taken that day. Not only would four million slaves benefit from the “sacred genius of universal emancipation,” but so too would the “nominal freemen” in the North and poor whites in the South.\textsuperscript{12} The A.M.E. Church in Quincy was also the site of a New Year’s Day commemoration. The “colored citizens” of the city marked the day as a restoration of their “God-given rights,” which had been “unrighteously taken away from us.” Despite past transgressions, they pledged to never “desert that Government that respects our rights and protects them as citizens” and vowed to show themselves “worthy of liberty” by “defending it to the last moment.”\textsuperscript{13}

White Illinoisans also came together to celebrate the Proclamation. So many people turned out to a meeting at Bryan Hall in Chicago on January 12 that two other venues had to be hastily requisitioned in order to accommodate the crowd.\textsuperscript{14} An emancipation celebration held by Chicagoans of German descent hailed the “new Era of freedom” as antagonistic to the state’s black laws and hoped to soon see the day when “the people will delete the obnoxious statutes from our legal code.”\textsuperscript{15}

Not all gatherings embraced the new direction the war had taken, however. Opponents of emancipation, among whom were members of the state legislature then in session, met at the State House to denounce the president’s flouting of constitutional law. The “violent liberation” of millions of slaves, they feared, would ignite a servile

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Chicago Tribune}, January 5, 1863.
\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Quincy Whig Republican}, January 10, 1863.
\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Chicago Tribune}, January 13, 1863.
\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Illinois Staats-Zeitung}, January 13, 1863.
insurrection and social revolution in the South, the “consequences of which to both races cannot be contemplated without the most dismal forebodings of horror and dismay.”

Opposition to the Emancipation Proclamation found expression among Illinois troops as well. In general, they were principally troubled by the new aim of the war and their individual roles in it. “This is turned to be a nigger war, and not what we enlisted for,” complained one soldier. A little over a month before the proclamation was to go into effect, Sergeant Olney Andrus of the Ninety-Fifth Illinois Infantry complained about the price whites had already paid for black freedom. “Take a little look at the cost of freeing the Black Devils,” he wrote his wife. “No less than 300,000 of our own free white citizens have already been sacrificed to free the small mite that have got their freedom…I consider my life & the Happiness of my family of more value than any Nigger.”

Montraville Reeves of the Seventy-Ninth Illinois Infantry felt similarly. He was disturbed that the “re Construction [sic] of this Union” no longer appeared to be the primary goal of the war. While he was by no means “partial to the Institution of Slavery” and would “rejoice” to see all slaves freed, he refused to “stick myself up as a target…to free a Lot of dirty filthy theiving [sic] Cowardly Curs that is not capable of appresiating [sic] freedom was it given to them.” For those like Fifty-First Illinois Infantry member George Sylvester, who enlisted to bring the South back into the national fold, there was

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16 Illinois State Register, January 6, 1863.


19 Montraville Reeves to Ransom Reeves, October 16, 1863, Montraville Reeves Papers, Illinois History and Lincoln Collections.
“to[o] much abolition” in the Emancipation Proclamation, adding, “it goes hard to fight to turn the Black race free.”

Criticism of the Proclamation went beyond such personal distaste for the changing nature of the war. Some troops questioned the soundness of emancipation as a military strategy. David Ash, serving with the Fremont Rifles (the Thirty-Seventh Illinois Infantry), was dumbfounded at the president’s plan to free slaves in places outside of federal control. “I want to know how Mr Lincoln is going to get the slaves away from them he will have to get their country Before he Can get their niggers.”

A more serious concern among soldiers was that the Proclamation fomented internal dissension within Union ranks. Sidney Robinson of the 117th Illinois Infantry grumbled that the Emancipation Proclamation caused “quite a stink” among his comrades and threatened to start a “civil war” in his regiment, which was composed of volunteers from central and southwestern Illinois. Others resented the turmoil it caused back home, fearing that a divided North would erode support for those on the front lines. One soldier dreaded the possibility that northern “radical, howling revolutionists” would spark “a revolution at home, in our own free, anti-slavery North, before many years.” George Sinclair of the Eighty-Ninth Illinois Infantry voiced one of the most common complaints among soldiers about the Emancipation Proclamation: it “only exasperates the rebs to fight the harder.”

With no end game yet in sight, a reinvigorated enemy was the last thing Federal forces

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20 George Sylvester to parents, February 8, [1863?], John H. Hoffman Correspondence, Civil War Miscellaneous Collection, United States Army Heritage Center.
21 David L. Ash to Eliza, January 27, 1863, David L. Ash Collection, United States Army Heritage Center.
23 Brad Thompson to wife, November 14, 1862, Lewis Leigh Collection, United States Army Heritage Center.
wanted to face on the battlefield. Feeling “swindled into enlisting to preserve the Union when in fact it was only a cloak to raise men to fight their abolition battles,” Sinclair was determined to be “out of it forever and shall act conscientiously in leaving the army.”

Sinclair got his wish and left the army later that year, although it was because of a bullet through the lung. There were, however, Illinois troops who did lay down their arms and return home due at least in part to the Emancipation Proclamation. The desertion rate among Illinois troops peaked during the fall and winter months of 1862-63. From September (when the Proclamation was announced) to January (when it took effect), over 3,000 Illinois soldiers from infantry regiments abandoned their posts. With 832 deserters, October 1862 had the highest desertion rate for any month of the war. Two whole regiments had to be disbanded in the spring of 1863 for lack of men and discipline.

One of these, the 109th Illinois Infantry, gained a notorious reputation for its questionable loyalty to the Union cause. The regiment was comprised primarily of volunteers from deep in Egypt, with companies from Union, Alexander, Jackson, Johnson, and Pulaski counties. The 109th was mustered into service at Camp Anna in far southern Illinois on September 11, 1862, just ten days before Lincoln issued the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. Outrage over the new objective of the war spread among officers and privates of the 109th. Charles Dougherty wrote back home to his father in Jonesboro, located adjacent to Anna, that “there is a greteal [sic] said about the negers [sic]. The soldiers is going home every day more or less.” As for himself, “I

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won’t fight to free the negers if I can help it for I never come out here for that purpose.”

The 109th’s adjutant, James Evans, penned a letter to the *Jonesboro Gazette*, the paper he edited before enlisting, revealing widespread discontent over the direction of the war.

“Many now believe that the war was instituted for no purpose rather than to secure the destruction of slavery in the South. Most in the army are opposed to war. Desertion is but a natural result of an army in this condition. An Act once looked upon as a heinous crime is now seen with some degree of favor.”

Following a Confederate raid at Holly Springs, Mississippi, on December 20, 1862, the 109th, which was stationed a few miles away, was accused of disloyalty for seeking out the enemy for the purpose of surrendering and getting paroled. All but one company was disarmed and placed under arrest. Following a court of inquiry, eight officers were disgracefully discharged but everyone else was exonerated and returned to service on January 17. Still, the stain of treason could not be washed away very easily. Republican papers back home as well as fellow Illinois troops continued to view members of the 109th with a jaundiced eye. Responding to an error in the *Chicago Tribune* that reported that the 109th was raised at Jacksonville in central Illinois, the colonel of the 101st Illinois Infantry, which was organized there, asked the paper to issue a correction so as not to confuse his men with those who would “be found disgracing themselves by laying down their arms or being engaged in a mutiny in opposition to any measures proposed by the President for the suppression of this infernal wicked rebellion.”

The editor gladly complied with the request, adding, “all know that the people of Morgan

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[C]ounty don’t send traitors to the field. They go in for hurting the enemy.”

Detractors could also be found at southern tip of Illinois. A resident of Johnson County (from which some of the members of the 109th originated) recalled that while awaiting their marching orders south, the 109th “did little else but drink poor whisky, huzzah for Jeff. Davis, and curse Abolitionists.”

Attitudes like this weighed upon members of the 109th, who carried with them the stigma of treason. Wrote one soldier to his mother in mid-January 1863, “nearly everybody [in our army] down here look upon us as secessionists, and it is believed that we stacked our arms and refused to fight unless the niggers were sent back to their masters. It is further reported that our regiment cheered lustily for Jeff Davis, and wished success to the South. Of course such stories are false, but there are fools and knaves enough left to give them circulation and credit.”

Desertions continued to drain the ranks of the 109th until the 260 remaining men (of which 100 were hospitalized) were transferred to the Eleventh Illinois Infantry that April.

There appears to be a connection between the government’s emancipation policy and the rash of Illinois desertions at this time, including the ignominious end of the 109th. However, it is more accurate to view it as one of a number of factors that pushed men to abandon their posts. Historian Bob Sterling shows that time of enrollment was the most

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28 Chicago Tribune, January 26, 1863.
29 Chicago Tribune, February 6, 1863.
accurate predictor of desertion. The majority of desertions in the winter of 1862-63 occurred among troops recently organized under Lincoln’s July call. Of the 832 Illinois troops who deserted in October 1862, 698 were new recruits and only 125 were 1861 recruits. Some of the most recent volunteers signed up for service to collect a bounty or avoid the draft, thereby reducing their dedication to the Union cause and willingness to withstand the rigors of army life, including the organizational, disciplinary, and equipment difficulties faced by new regiments. As Sterling concluded in his study of Illinois deserters, “the proclamation was issued during the transition period of fifty-nine new regiments, when officers resigned and the less dedicated volunteers deserted.” The Emancipation Proclamation certainly contributed to some taking flight, but it was only one of many factors engendering dissatisfaction among the newly minted troops. As for those troops who enlisted in 1861, their desertion rates dropped after August 1862. Thus, those who deserted rather than participate in what they perceived to be an abolitionist crusade constituted only a tiny fraction of Illinois’s fighting force. Most who opposed the Emancipation Proclamation remained committed to their enlistment terms. As a disgruntled member of the 114th Illinois Infantry wrote in the spring of 1863, “I am still willing to fight for the Union but they can[’t] stuff the doctrine down me that a negro is as good as a white man.”

Therefore, it is difficult to measure with any accuracy the extent and strength of opposition to and support for the Emancipation Proclamation among Illinois soldiers. To

32 James McPherson discusses this trend more generally and the link between desertion and lack of ideological motivation in For Cause and Comrades, 102, 116, 156.
inquiries on how the soldiers felt about the Emancipation Proclamation, General Richard Oglesby, future governor of Illinois, responded, “no man knows the sentiment of so large a body of men.” Regiments, companies, and bunkmates divided on their views of the new policy, some loathing it while others complaining it did not go far enough. A member of the Seventh Illinois Infantry, which included companies from throughout the state but was mainly raised in central Illinois, remembered how the Emancipation Proclamation was received among his comrades on the day it went into effect: “it has its advocates and opposers among the members of the Seventh, some being fanatical in its praise, and others bitter in its denunciation.”

Nonetheless, a survey of soldiers’ letters and diaries suggests a general reaction to the proclamation. Although impossible to quantify, a sizeable percentage of Illinois soldiers welcomed the Emancipation Proclamation. Not all vocalized their support with the “shouts and Hurrahs” given by the Eleventh Illinois Infantry, but, as discussed in chapter 3, a number of soldiers were urging such a course even before Lincoln announced his plan in September 1862. Having been exposed to the horrors of slavery and its pervasiveness in southern culture, they wanted to fully expunge what they understood to be the root cause of the war in order to prevent the eruption of another bloody conflict in the future. As historian Robert I. Girardi concludes regarding Illinois soldiers’ opinions on emancipation, the majority of troops, “whether they were lukewarm supporters or dissenters, appreciated the practical value of the measure as a war aim, their initial

37 William Parkinson to wife, April 13, 1863, quoted in Manning, What This Cruel War Was Over, 89.
38 See also David Wallace Adams, “Illinois Soldiers and the Emancipation Proclamation,” for support among Illinois volunteers for emancipation from June to November of 1862.
opposition giving way to reluctant acceptance.”39 “On this question,” adduced an Illinois soldier, “the army has been far in advance of the people.”40

For those soldiers who lagged behind, opinions, like so much else during the war, changed rapidly. Many who were ambivalent or disparaging of emancipation quickly came to see the value in it. For some this change of heart occurred as they marched further South. For example, Thomas Odell of the Seventy-Eighth Illinois Infantry observed that his comrades softened to the idea of the proclamation after leaving Kentucky at the end of January 1863. He wrote his wife, “there is no objection to the Proclamation now, amongst the soldiers since we came to Tennessee—for it is too plain that if we don’t use them the enemy will.”41 William Ross, a corporal in the Fortieth Illinois, chronicled in his letters home how quickly sentiment changed within his regiment. Immediately after Lincoln’s announcement of proclamation, Ross heard volunteers threatening to stack their arms, desert, or enlist in the Confederacy. Nevertheless, by mid-October the proclamation was “getting to bee [sic] an old thing.” A short time later, in early November, Ross remarked, “the Negro question is about drop[p]ed.”42

Illinois soldiers embraced the Emancipation Proclamation for a variety of reasons. One of the most common was the belief that it was an expedient war measure that would precipitate the end of the war. Understood this way, the proclamation was, in the words

39 Girardi, “President’s Proclamation,” 417.
40 Chicago Tribune, October 16, 1862.
41 Thomas Odell to wife, March 8, 1863, in Virdin, Civil War Correspondence, 47.
of a member of the 78th Illinois Infantry, a “military necessity.”\textsuperscript{43} “It will kill the war sooner than anything else,” predicted Winthrop Allen of the Twelfth Illinois Cavalry.\textsuperscript{44} War weary and impatient, the earliest of volunteers were especially receptive to any plan that would subdue the rebels once and for all. Henry Sturges of the Fourth Illinois Cavalry shared with the readers of the \textit{Lincoln Herald} (the paper he edited before enlisting) how his fellow comrades reacted to news of the Emancipation Proclamation: “It is well received by all. It is acknowledged to be the boldest and most effective stroke that has been given by the Administration to the rebellion. With that and the confiscation act, we will wind this war up in a short time. We ask no more effective weapons.”\textsuperscript{45} George Barnhart, a Democrat serving in the Sixteenth Illinois Infantry, declared his support for the proclamation in a letter home. Referring to the issue of slavery, he wrote, “you know how I stood on the question when at home. My opinion is changed of late. I now say, free every slave in the South…If the nigger is gone they [the rebels] will have nothing left to fight for.”\textsuperscript{46}

Keenly aware of the material value of slavery to their enemy’s cause, many Illinois soldiers recognized that the Emancipation Proclamation had the potential to devastate the economic and productive capacity of the seceded states. They understood that decimating the South’s labor force would cripple the Confederacy’s ability to sustain its military force. Wrote one volunteer in the 111th Illinois infantry, “the soldiers, as a general thing, are in favor of anything that will weaken the southern people; and we know

\textsuperscript{43} Thomas G. Odell to wife, January 20, 1863, in Virdin, \textit{Civil War Correspondence}, 38.
\textsuperscript{44} Quoted in Girardi, “President’s Proclamation,” 400.
\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Lincoln Herald}, October 16, 1862, in Donath, \textit{Logan County}, 165.
\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Schuyler Citizen}, reprinted in the \textit{Aledo Weekly Record}, October 21, 1862.
that taking the working class from them, besides those that are in arms against us, will
cause them to fall out of ranks, in order to produce sustenance for them to keep their
army from starvation.”\textsuperscript{47} Jacob Behm, a carpenter from Mount Carmel who served as a
private in the Forth-Eighth Illinois Infantry, made a similar calculation. Writing from
Bethel, Tennessee, in early 1863, Behm explained to his siblings that he supported the
Emancipation Proclamation because freeing “the Slave” will “call him off from raising
supplies in the farm and in the shop. [W]e will thus drive the Rebels Home to support and
protect his family [and] reduce largely his effective fighting force, [and] very soon bring
him to terms of submission.”\textsuperscript{48}

Writing from Kentucky, a soldier of the 122\textsuperscript{nd} Illinois Infantry, seemingly
frustrated with the lack of support for emancipation back home, detailed for the readers
of the \textit{Carlinville Free Democrat} how the proclamation would lead to Union victory:

The wisdom of this measure seems not to be so well understood North as here. Not only do the citizens feel the force of the impending blow and tremble at the result, but the soldiers to [a] man understand that the South has taken all the laborers that can be spared from their farms and put them in the army. That if we take away a large number of strong laboring men, that their armies must of necessity suffer for want of provisions. This will force them to send a part of their army home to their farms to procure the needed supply, or abandon the struggle. If they send part of the men from the army, it will reduce the number of those to contend with us in the field, and we can defeat a small army easier than a large one. Every man in the army can see this, and to him it is a matter in which he has a personal interest, for in proportion as their armies are diminished, each soldier’s chance is increased to escape wounds and death on the battle field. It is consequently the manifest interest of the government to sweep the country as far as possible of every slave
capable of producing more than he can consume.\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Nashville Journal}, February 27, 1863.
\textsuperscript{48} Jacob Behm to brother and sister, February 18, 1863, \textit{Civil War Times Illustrated} Collection, United States Army Heritage Center.
\textsuperscript{49} \textit{Carlinville Free Democrat}, reprinted in the \textit{Chicago Tribune}, December 5, 1862.
Moreover, soldiers grew to recognize slavery as the main cause of the war. Eradicating it was the only way to secure a lasting peace. “We did not set out to fight for the abolition of slavery,” claimed a private in the Fourth Illinois Cavalry, “but we favor it now because we firmly believe that this ‘peculiar institution’ is the corner stone of the rebellion.”

After a year in the service, John Reese of the Eighty-First Illinois Infantry reversed his opinion on not wanting to interfere with slavery. He now believed slaves were the “innocent Cause of the War,” and wanted to destroy the institution so that “we will never have another War about it.”

Other Illinois volunteers supported the Emancipation Proclamation based on their devotion to the government and faith in Lincoln’s judgment. These sentiments reveal the depth of loyalty troops felt for Lincoln as well as empathy for the difficulty of his job. For example, Thirty-Eighth Illinois Infantry member John Yelton, who happened to live in the only town then named for the sixteenth president, wrote that he believed Lincoln to be “a true man, one that loves his country, and, of course, I must indorse his measures for crushing the rebellion.”

Thomas Miller of the Twenty-Ninth Illinois Infantry similarly gave the president the benefit of the doubt in pursuing a course of action that was unfortunate but unavoidable. “He is Compelled to adopt [sic] all Plans that will be Calculated to Restore Peac[e] to our distracted government,” Miller reasoned. “I don’t think that it is the Desire or wish of Mr. Lincoln to Emancipate the Slaves, but he Sees, and that Plainly to[o], that we Cannot whip th[e] South and let them hold there [sic]

50 Lincoln Herald, March 5, 1863, in Donath, Logan County, 223.
52 Lincoln Herald, March 5, 1863, in Donath, Logan County, 221-22.
slaves.” Major James A. Connolly of the 123rd Illinois Infantry was even more explicit in his allegiance to the federal government, despite his own personal views on its policy decisions. To his wife Mary he quipped, “now what do you think of your husband degenerating from a conservative young Democrat to a horse stealer and ‘nigger thief,’ and practicing his nefarious occupation almost within gun shot of the sacred ‘Hermitage’ and tomb of Andrew Jackson? Yes, while in the field I am an abolitionist; my government has decided to wipe out slavery, and I am for the government and its policy whether right or wrong, so long as its flag is confronted by the hostile guns of slavery.”

Emancipation was incorporated into an evolving understanding of the war’s purpose. Reunifying the country remained the primary goal, but many soldiers now envisioned a different America than the one they had left home to defend. Instead of restoration, emancipation offered the prospect of national regeneration. For example, in the spring of 1863 members of the 102nd Illinois Infantry unanimously adopted a resolution on their “true feeling in regard to the war” stating that the regiment was fighting “for the best interests of the human race” and against those forces adverse to “human freedom, independent of color or race.” Soldiers also reflected this perspective in more subtle ways. Early in the war, private Tighman Jones of the Fifty-Ninth Illinois Infantry explained to his father that he enlisted in order to maintain a “good government.” Three years later, Jones had a different perspective on why he was fighting: “we must[,] can and will wage this present war untill [sic] the dynasty of Davis sues for peace and on

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54 James Connolly to Mary Connolly, May 18, 1863, in Angle, Three Years in the Army of the Cumberland, 58.
terms that will give freedom to every slave and to us Nationality.”

Joshua Dickerson’s letters home also reveal how his view of the war’s purpose changed over time. Early in 1862, his motivation to endure the hardships of military life sprung from his desire to preserve “a government that has protected us all.” By the end of the following year, Dickerson defined the cause in which he was engaged as that of “Human Liberty” and wished to see the war continue until the “Accursed institution of Slavery is entirely swept from the entire face of our Land.”

Many Illinois soldiers could likely relate to the recollections of 104th Illinois Infantry Lieutenant William Calkins, who understood that most soldiers, himself included, “had not enlisted to ‘free the nigger,’ as the phrase went, but to save the Union. However, all must have foreseen the logical outcome, and no doubt came at last to accept it [the Emancipation Proclamation] as right and just.”

Of course, what was “right and just” had different meanings to different people. Writing about the war thirty years after its conclusion, Calkins’s own meaning of “right and just” likely shifted over time. What is clear from the soldiers’ own accounts recorded during the war is that, by and large, their acceptance of the Emancipation Proclamation did not stem from a humanitarian concern for slaves. Rather, the Emancipation Proclamation was “right” as a military policy and “just” as a form of punishment for the seceded states. Support for the proclamation did not translate into support for black rights or empathy with the enslaved. Just as those who opposed the spread of slavery before the war often held deep-seated racial prejudices, so too could a soldier support the

56 Tighlman Jones to father, December 24, 1861, September 30, 1864, Tighlman Howard Jones Papers, Illinois History and Lincoln Collections.
57 Joshua Dickerson to wife, February 6, 1862, December 2, 12, 1863, Joshua Dickerson Letters, Illinois History and Lincoln Collections.
Emancipation Proclamation while championing the cause of white supremacy. For example, Charles Peck, a private in the 46th Illinois Infantry, wrote with no apparent contradiction that he was “inclined to think he [Lincoln] about right in” issuing the proclamation, but then a few lines later asserted that blacks “are an inferior race of mankind.”\textsuperscript{59} Similarly, Captain Henry W. Allen of the Seventh Illinois Infantry threw his support behind the Emancipation Proclamation but made clear, “we are not fighting to liberate the slaves…\textit{If slavery must be sacrificed to the attainment of this great end, let it be done}—but not through any philanthropic motives.”\textsuperscript{60}

Due to their support of emancipation, numerous Illinois soldiers proudly declared themselves to be abolitionists. However, the connection to the antebellum reform movement was in name only. Unlike the radical agenda that William Lloyd Garrison helped launch in the 1830s, these newest self-proclaimed abolitionists cared little for the moral implications of slavery and certainly did not take up the mantle of racial equality. An officer in the Third Illinois Cavalry affirmed that he was now an “out-and-out Abolitionist,” although for him emancipation was nothing more than a tool to “cripple the South” and make the Confederacy “come to her senses.”\textsuperscript{61} Captain Amos Hostetter of the Thirty-Fourth Illinois Infantry was even more circumspect in applying the label to himself, qualifying his proclamation that he was “henceforth an Abolitionist” with the

\textsuperscript{59} Charles Peck to brother, January 21, 1863, Rudolph Haerle Collection, United States Army Heritage Center.

\textsuperscript{60} Illinois State Journal, December 8, 1862. The paper commented that Captain Allen, a Democrat, “surrendered the prejudices of party for the good of his country. It is hardly necessary that we should commend sentiments so noble.”

\textsuperscript{61} Quincy Daily Whig, November 12, 1862.
avowal, “we like the Negro no better now than we did then.” Going into greater detail, Major James Connolly explained that he was a “practical but not a political abolitionist”:

I have no affiliation with or sympathy for the political abolitionist, for they are a canting hypocritical set of cowards, having courage only to support their peculiar opinions with their tongues; they can’t be found in our armies now, but are at home, holding their little tea party conventions, mourning over ‘man’s inhumanity to man’ and adopting addresses to the President entreating him to proclaim to the world that the negro is the equal of the white man, and that it is an abolition war. The fanatical fools! Can’t they see, without conventions or proclamations, that it is an abolition war? If they were honest they would turn out and help fight the battles, instead of whining around home because the President won’t ratify God’s own decree by signing “A. Lincoln” at the bottom of it. Such abolitionists as Smith, Giddings, Phillips &c. I don’t object to now, for they have, to a great extent, dropped their cant, and are, and have been striking sturdy blows for the government.

Although this version of abolitionism often rejected or disregarded the elevation of blacks to equal status, it is nonetheless striking that a sizeable portion of the Illinois army now embraced immediate, uncompensated emancipation. Two years previously, few Illinoisans did so. Although the soldiers’ abolition sentiment differed from those radical reformers who were largely reviled prior to the war, their overall acceptance of the Emancipation Proclamation illustrates how rapidly the war created the conditions for the reevaluation of previously held beliefs. Alphonso Barto, a lawyer from Elgin who enlisted in the Fifty-Second Illinois Infantry in August 1861, was cognizant of his own transformation. In June 1863, Barto wrote home,

You know Father that I started in this war with no real abolition sentiment and I even believed in enforcing [sic] the fugitive slave law as far as could be and I believed it constitutional and when we were in Smithland a little more than a year ago I saw some fugitive delivered up to their master and thought it right but I have seen more of the curse of the thing since that and when President Lincoln came

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62 Amos W. Hostetter to Owen P. and Hannah Miles, January 29, 1863, Amos W Hostetter Papers, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.

63 James Connolly to Mary Connolly, November 22, 1863, in Angle, *Three Years in the Army of the Cumberland*, 146.
out with his emancipation proclamation I was fully prepared to endorse it and that heartily too."64

For Barto and many of his comrades, the purpose of the war remained saving the Union. But the Union they were fighting for was not the one that they enlisted to save. Instead, they were now fighting for a Union shorn of slavery, a concept that before the war most whites, North and South, never imagined seeing in their lifetimes. Writing from the nation’s capital to his brother in Richview, Illinois, H. Barber captured the feeling of being at the precipice of a profound upheaval: “what was commenced as Rebellion will end in Revolution.”65

What form this revolution would take remained to be seen. The soldiers’ reaction to emancipation offers a good barometer of how radical their stance on the institution of slavery had become. But their views on blacks as individuals did not follow the same trajectory. This becomes especially clear in how they imagined the realities of a slavery-free, postwar America. What would become of the four million persons then enslaved? What role would they play in the nation’s future? Accepting the end of slavery as a military necessity was a short-term goal many soldiers could rally behind, but its long-term consequences presented very different concerns. One member of the Fifty-Fifth Illinois Infantry believed the Emancipation Proclamation should not have been issued before these questions were answered. “I believe in confiscation,” wrote Thaddeus Capron, “but I do not in entire emancipation—at least before we know what to do with the negroes.”66 Sergeant Stephen Fleharty of the 102nd Illinois Infantry succinctly

64 Alphonso Barto to father, June 7, 1863, Alphonso Barto Letters, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.
65 H. Barber to Joseph Barber, June 24, 1862, H. Barber Letters, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.
summed up the anxieties felt by many in wondering, “what shall be the status of the negro in the future organization of our government? If the slavery question was a vexed question years ago, it seems to be inexplicable now.” Richard Puffer, a student from Mount Palatine, Putnam County, who served in the Eighth Illinois Infantry, expressed similar concerns to his sister. He realized, in reference to freed slaves, “not the first thing has been done for their future welfare. [I]f they stay here, they will be made slaves or worse; if they go north, the same prejudice meets them there.”

Illinois civilians put that prejudice on display the previous fall in their hostile reactions against the War Department’s distribution of contraband laborers throughout the state. So too did Illinois soldiers fret over the possibility that emancipation would alter the racial landscape back home. A private in the Ninety-Sixth Illinois Infantry supported the Emancipation Proclamation for its potential to weaken the South’s power, but he was adamantly opposed to having freed slaves “go North” because “that is not their place.” Another soldier avowed, “if the negroes is [sic] ever set free in the free states, I never want to lay down my old musket until I chase them out.” William Rand, a resident of far western Hancock County serving with the 118th Illinois Infantry, wrote his brother from Louisiana, “I want to keep the niggers out of the state. I do not want them to get a foot hold in Ills. We see so many darkies down here that we are sick of them.”

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69 Orson Young, February 1863, quoted in Girardi, “President’s Proclamation,” 404.
70 Newton Paschal, January 1863, quoted in Girardi, “President’s Proclamation,” 413.
71 William Rand to brother, February 28, 1863, quoted in Bahde, Life and Death of Gus Reed, 35.
Others saw no place for blacks in the reunited country, North or South, and advocated colonization as a necessary component of emancipation. A private in the Ninety-Ninth Illinois Infantry was confident that the government would not free the slaves and allow “them to run free and mingle among us” but would instead “send them off and Colonize them.”

John Yelton believed a fitting end to the war would be “sending the black people to a colony where they can enjoy their freedom—where they can learn the knowledge of a merciful God.”

Even Seventy-Seventh Illinois Infantry private Charles Enslow, who supported “equalizing the negro with the white man so far as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is concerned,” could not envision a multiracial future for America. The central Illinois farmer advocated educating the children of slaves so they could leave the United States in pursuit of “a nation of their own,” which would “make room for almost five million white laborers who are now born down and trod upon in Europe.”

Not all Illinois soldiers were unable to imagine emancipated slaves as being vested and participating members of the American polity. Some envisioned a postwar future that included blacks as free members of society. A farmer in mid-state Woodford County who enlisted as a private in the Seventy-Seventh Illinois Infantry longed to see the country remade on the basis of “freedom, Liberty and Union” and for blacks to be “elevated from [their] present degradation.”

Albert O. Marshall of the Thirty-Third Illinois Infantry reflected more deeply on what may become of former slaves. Having

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72 Joshua R. Barney to brother, October 24, 1862, quoted in Hicken, *Illinois in the Civil War*, 130.
73 *Lincoln Herald*, March 5, 1863, in Donath, *Logan County*, 222.
75 Richard A. Huxtable to Edwin C. Hewett, August 7, 1863, Edwin Crawford Hewett Correspondence, Illinois History and Lincoln Collections.
extensive interaction with them during his time in the field, Marshall confessed that his “experience proves the black man different and of greater capabilities than I had supposed.” Initially he did not believe that they would be able to thrive in freedom, but he now foresaw blacks attaining a “nobler, higher position” following the war. A soldier in the 127th Illinois Infantry also expressed surprise that the freedpeople he encountered were “enjoying their liberty in a greater degree that one could have supposed,” noting that “prejudice against color is fast going away.

Although Illinois troops were becoming proponents of (and participants in) the destruction of slavery, many still maintained their racist attitudes. When soldiers proclaimed themselves to be abolitionists, they hailed the eradication of an institution rather than the deliverance of those who suffered under it. As historian Reid Mitchell points out, “by avoiding the issue of black rights, the proclamation did little to change the minds of soldiers, and it did less to prepare them to meet future demands for black civil liberties.” However, Mitchell notes another trend that also occurred: “some Union soldiers…did find that actually meeting blacks mitigated their hostility. It may have been easier for a soldier to respond sympathetically to an individual black man or woman than to blacks en masse.” As shown in chapter 3, Illinois soldiers found their racial views challenged especially when interacting one-on-one with blacks as camp laborers, Union scouts, and escaped slaves.

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78 Mitchell, Civil War Soldiers, 128.
79 Mitchell, Civil War Soldiers, 123.
“All Loyal Men”: Black Soldiers in the Service

In the wake of Fort Sumter’s fall, Chicago blacks tendered their services to their country “whenever and wherever.”80 Their offer, like the offers of blacks across the North, was ignored.81 White Unionists and Confederates could agree that this was a conflict concerning white interests, to be conducted and fought by white men. Moreover, Americans on both sides of the conflict anticipated a quick war, one that would not overburden their manpower reserves. Undeterred, blacks demonstrated their stakes in the war from early on and claimed a role in it as guides, laborers, spies, and runaway slaves who weakened the backbone of the Confederacy. Yet the federal government stopped short of allowing them to shoulder a rifle and don the Union blue.

Black enlistment into the armed forces was not unprecedented prior to the Civil War. Blacks fought in the British and Continental armies during the Revolutionary War. Shortly thereafter, however, the 1792 Militia Act limited militia enlistment to whites. As the main support for the regular army, this effectively barred blacks from both. In 1798 the secretaries of the navy and marine corps banned blacks from their units, as did the army in 1820. However, with no explicit legislative prohibition on black service in the regular forces, blacks fought for their country in official capacity during times of crises, such as the War of 1812 and to a lesser degree the Mexican-American War. The navy, suffering from chronic labor shortages, enlisted black sailors throughout most of the early national and antebellum years, although in 1839 the Secretary of the Navy limited black seamen to five percent of white enlistees. This quota was jettisoned when the Civil War

80 Quoted in the Chicago Tribune, April 25, 1861.
began, with blacks eventually accounting for close to twenty percent of the Union Navy’s fighting force. By contrast, the Federal army maintained its prohibition against black volunteers well into the second year of the war.82

Not surprisingly, support among whites for black military enlistment grew as the Civil War dragged on and the number of white volunteers dwindled. Illinois avoided the draft in 1862 but the threat of one sent a chill throughout the state. That July, shortly after Lincoln called for 300,000 troops, Governor Richard Yates sent the president an open letter. In it, he urged Lincoln to adopt “more decisive measures” to end the war:

Summon to the standard of the Republic all men willing to fight for the Union. Let loyalty, and that alone, be the dividing line between the nation and its foes. Generals should not be permitted to fritter away the sinews of our brave men in guarding the property of traitors, and in driving back into their hands loyal blacks, who offer us their labor, and seek shelter beneath the Federal flag. Shall we sit supinely by, and see the war sweep off the youth and strength of the land, and refuse aid from that class of men, who are at least worthy foes of traitors and the murderers of our Government and of our children?...Mr. Lincoln, the crisis demands greater and sterner measures. Proclaim anew the good old motto of the Republic, “Liberty and Union, now and forever, one and inseparable,” and accept the services of all loyal men, and it will be in your power to stamp armies out of the earth—irresistible armies that will bear our banners to certain victory.83

Yates framed his suggestion in pragmatic terms. Permitting blacks to enroll in the army, he argued, would reduce the number of whites cut down in the prime of their lives. Yates did not address the social and political significance of arming blacks. Rather, he remained focused on black enlistment as a means of securing peace.


83 Illinois State Journal, July 12, 1862.
Yet Yates’s letter was radical in its unspoken belief that blacks would in fact be capable of performing military service. This was not a common assumption among whites, many of whom believed blacks possessed effeminate qualities. This was due in part to the proslavery ideology that viewed blacks as childlike, docile, and needy. White abolitionists had also promulgated these stereotypes in their depictions of slaves as models of passive forbearance. These characteristics, whether depicted as vices or virtues, lacked the manly courage believed necessary for combat. In addition to physical power, Victorian American masculinity also prized itself on self-discipline and civilized morality—essential attributes of a good soldier but absent in the stereotype of the meek, helpless slave. Moreover, arming blacks stoked the fears of a slave rebellion, where timid slaves transformed into bloodthirsty savages.84

These prejudices led many whites to believe that most blacks could not be effective fighters. A letter printed in the Waukegan Weekly Gazette, one of the state’s more progressive papers, illustrated the ambivalence of arming blacks even among radical whites. The writer, identified only as “H.,” advocated for a policy of arming northern blacks, who through “freedom and reliance upon themselves” had become “independent, athletic[,] strong and and [sic] intellectual.” However, the writer could not fathom putting slaves on the front line. They were too “degraded” and “debased” to perform efficiently and were “suitable only as laborers.”85


85 “H.,” letter to the editor, Waukegan Weekly Gazette, August 9, 1862.
Not all whites believed former slaves were incapable of performing well on the battlefield, however, and a few well-positioned supporters of enlisting them into the army helped push federal policy in that direction. Yates may not have been aware when he wrote his letter to Lincoln that the foundation for black enlistment was already being laid in Washington. Two pieces of key legislation passed Congress on July 17, 1862. The Second Confiscation Act authorized the president to “employ as many persons of African descent as he may deem necessary and proper for the suppression of this rebellion, and for this purpose he may organize and use them in such manner as he may judge best for the public welfare.” The other, the Militia Act, was even more groundbreaking by its repeal of the seventy-year ban on blacks in the militia. It permitted Lincoln to “receive into the service of the United States, for the purpose of constructing intrenchments, or performing camp service, or any other labor, or any military or naval service for which they may be competent, persons of African descent.” The army had already been making use of contraband labor by this time. This legislation permitted blacks, both free and enslaved, to enlist as official members of the army.\(^{86}\)

Black military enrollment began shortly thereafter, although it was limited and sometimes unauthorized during the second half of 1862. Acting independently, a brigadier general in Kansas began enlisting blacks in August. Although the First Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry conducted out-of-state expeditions that fall and suffered casualties at the Battle of Island Mound in Missouri, it would not be mustered into official service until January. At the same time that the First Kansas was being organized, General Benjamin Butler began organizing colored volunteers in Louisiana, forming

three regiments in four months. Also in August 1862, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton
ordered General Rufus Saxton to begin organizing what would become the First South
Carolina Volunteers, the first federally authorized black regiment.  

This trickle of black recruitment turned into a torrent with the Emancipation
Proclamation. In it, Lincoln declared that “such persons of suitable condition, will be
received into the armed services of the United States to garrison forts, positions, stations,
and other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in said service.” Within a month,
Secretary of War Butler had authorized the raising of black infantry regiments in
Louisiana, South Carolina, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts. In May 1863, the War
Department, under the aegis of the Adjutant General’s Office, established the Bureau of
Colored Troops to recruit black soldiers and organize the resulting infantry, cavalry, and
artillery units into the United States Colored Troops (USCT). Eventually, almost 200,000
black men served in the Union armed forces during the Civil War, accounting for ten
percent of its ranks.  

A number of Illinois blacks were eager to contribute to the formation of the black
regiments. John Jones, a prominent Chicago activist, wrote to Massachusetts Governor
John Andrews requesting approval to recruit Illinois cavalry troops for the colored
regiments being raised in that state.  

Jones, along with Martin Delany, also sought
permission from Secretary of War Stanton to organize southern blacks into the army.  

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88 Oakes, *Freedom National*, 379; Berry, *Military Necessity*, 56; Glatthar, *Forged in Battle*, 10; Berlin and


90 Martin R. Delany to Edwin M. Stanton, December 15, 1863, Black Abolitionist Papers. Stanton did not
reply to the request.
By the spring of 1863, Illinois blacks who wanted to volunteer were growing frustrated at the lack of opportunity to do so in their own state. At a meeting in Quinn’s Chapel in Chicago at the end of April, they expressed their desire for Illinois to form a colored regiment but had no intention to stand idly by in the meantime. A committee was appointed to encourage enlistments in the Massachusetts regiments. During the spring and summer months of 1863, hundreds of Illinois blacks went east to join the Massachusetts and Rhode Island colored regiments.  

These recruits were leaving Illinois precisely when fears of a draft were once again intensifying. On March 3, 1863, Congress passed the Enrollment Act to facilitate the creation of a nationwide draft. The Enrollment Act facilitated the establishment of enrollment boards in every congressional district, staffed by a provost marshal and enrolling marshals who were charged with creating a list of all potential draftees. Although Illinois would avoid the draft until late 1864, this reach of federal bureaucracy into Illinois communities stoked animosity and resentment. Tensions rose and antiwar civilians resisted, sometime violently, the efforts of the enrollment officers during the summer of 1863.  

Against this backdrop, the Chicago Tribune urged the War Department to authorize Governor Yates to raise a colored regiment in Illinois, making

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91 Edward A. Miller, Jr., *The Black Civil War Soldiers of Illinois: The Story of the Twenty-Ninth U.S. Colored Infantry* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 12; Ricke, “Illinois Blacks Through the Civil War,” 283-84. Newspapers frequently commented on blacks leaving from or passing through Illinois to enlist in other states. For example, see the Champaign County Patriot, May 28, 1863 and the Belvidere Standard, April 28, 1863. The Illinois State Journal, May 18, 1863, carried a report of seventy-four Missouri blacks being attacked and robbed at Millville in Adams County on their way to enlist in Massachusetts.

the simple calculation that “a thousand blacks will save a thousand white men from being drafted.”  

The War Department finally authorized Governor Yates to organize a colored regiment in September 1863, and recruiting of what would become the Twenty-Ninth U.S. Colored Infantry began in Quincy that November. Volunteers, however, came forward slowly. There were only 1,622 military age black males living in Illinois at the start of the war. Hundreds had already left to enlist in regiments that formed elsewhere earlier that year. The ranks of the Twenty-Ninth USCT began to fill out eventually due in large part to non-Illinois enlistees, many of whom had recently come to Illinois to escape slavery. For example, a private in Company B, George Brooks, was born in Tennessee. His owner refugeed him to Mississippi at the start of the war but Brooks escaped, making his way first to St. Louis and then to Chicago, where he enlisted. Recruiters also crossed the Mississippi River to canvass for recruits in Missouri. The first company formed was made up mostly of Missourians and included fifty-six escaping slaves. Still, when the regiment was mustered into service in April 1864, it contained only five companies, each with the minimum number of privates.  

This sluggish recruitment was also a consequence of discriminatory policies and practices of the Union Army. Until June 1864, USCT soldiers received a salary of $10 per month ($3 of which was deducted for clothing), equivalent to what black government laborers earned. Whites, by contrast, received $13 per month plus an allowance for clothing. Black soldiers were not only segregated by regiment but were almost entirely officered by whites. Only a handful of blacks received commissions, sending a clear

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93 Chicago Tribune, June 15, 1863.
94 Miller, Black Civil War Soldiers of Illinois, 6, 12-13, 19, 24, 37, 209.
message that battlefield valor would not result in promotion. However, for many USCT troops the difficulty was getting to the frontlines in the first place; many shouldered a heavy burden of fatigue duty. Black troops even faced discrimination in medical care due to substandard post hospitals and a shortage of physicians.95

For many blacks, therefore, fighting for the Union Army was an ambivalent prospect. In order to drum up enthusiasm for the Twenty-Ninth United States Colored Infantry, the Chicago Tribune advised all eligible Illinois black men to “go gladly into the ranks” to face the “chief oppressors and tyrants of the black race.”96 Joseph Stanley, a black Chicagoan, responded in a scathing letter pointing out the existence of oppressors and tyrants in the North: “the Government has overlooked us, and has failed to do anything for this class of men at the North. If our services are needed, enlist us as free men, with the same bounty and pay which you give white men.” Anything less would be “degrading to their manhood” and “indignantly spurned by every white American.” Stanley singled out Illinois as especially unworthy of black recruits:

There are abundant reasons why colored men should not enlist in Illinois regiments. When you have answered for the preservation on your statute books for those inhuman enactments by which needless insults are added to needless wrongs; when you can justify the hate, the bitter scorn, the falsehoods and reviling we have suffered in the State; when you have placed the status of the colored men on the same basis with Massachusetts and Rhode Island—then, and only then, will you see able bodied men of color ready to fill up the quota of the State and uniting their destiny with all that pertains to her welfare. This is the kind of State pride which every colored man should possess who feels himself a man and a true American.

95 Glatthar, Forged in Battle, 169-95.
96 Chicago Tribune, November 12, 1863.
He ended his letter doubting the long-term success of a government that continued “denying the most ordinary rights to a persecuted people.”

Being able to enlist in the United States Army was a right denied to blacks for most of the country’s history. Militia service, like voting and jury duty, had long been a public signifier of local membership and civic inclusion. Aspiring politicians launched their careers by forming a local militia. Drill days were occasions of social festivities and volunteer companies paraded at community celebrations. Military service did not confer citizenship but it was understood as an obligation and privilege of it. Following federal militia law, therefore, almost every state restricted militia service to white males.

However, the call to arms of black Americans exemplified a new trend toward national citizenship. The creation of the USCT as a federal—as opposed to a state—organization altered the monopoly states had over determining citizenship and its attendant rights. Before the war began, there was no federal consensus on the status of free blacks or which basic rights they possessed. The wartime expansion of a powerful centralized government helped clarify these ambiguities by elevating national citizenship above state citizenship. By claiming primacy in defining and safeguarding the privileges and immunities of its citizens, the federal government created a new legal status during Reconstruction, one that unambiguously included blacks.

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97 Quincy Daily Whig, November 20, 1863.


This process was well underway during the Civil War. In August 1862, a Treasury Revenue Service cutter detained a schooner off the New Jersey coast. The ship master was black, and only citizens could legally command American vessels. Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase asked Attorney General Edward Bates whether or not black men were in fact citizens. Bates mulled over the question for two months. He consulted law books and court records but discovered that “eighty years of practical enjoyment of citizenship, under the Constitution, have not sufficed to teach us either the exact meaning of the word, or the constituent elements of the thing we prize so highly.” In his extensive written opinion, Bates defined an American as “neither more nor less than a member of the nation.” Since “nativity furnishes the rule,” free blacks, he reasoned, were unquestionably citizens. Bates left no doubt that he believed national citizenship trumped state laws; the latter were “of no force” if they conflicted with the laws of the nation. Moreover, there were no gradations of citizenship, no “intermediate between citizens and aliens” or “fractional parts.” All citizens were “politically and legally equal,” from the “child in the cradle to its father in the Senate.” This was a direct assault on and total overthrow of the Dred Scott case.\(^{100}\)

Bates’s opinion had no force of law, but coming from the executive office it was a powerful statement on the place of blacks in American society. Issued just over a month before the Emancipation Proclamation was to go into effect, it offered a prospective blueprint for how the government might view the legal status of freed slaves after the war. Foreshadowing the Fourteenth Amendment, Bates’s opinion placed national citizenship

above state citizenship and intimated that the federal government could and would enforce compliance with its decision. However, for all its import, Bates’s judgment contained some conservative elements. When it came to deciding if slaves were citizens or not, he balked, dismissing the matter as “not within the scope” of Chase’s inquiry. Bates was also careful not to link citizenship with any political, social, or civil rights. Being a citizen had no bearing on the “number or magnitude” of one’s “rights, privileges, and immunities.” If it did, then white women and children would be excluded from citizenship.  

While Bates chose not to tether citizenship to explicit rights, many blacks saw military service as the conduit to both. Despite the pervasive discrimination faced by colored volunteers, many blacks welcomed the opportunity to take up arms in their country’s defense. Not only was this a chance to strike a blow at slavery (and for many to gain liberty for themselves and their families), but it also was a political act imbued with significant social consequences. Free blacks recognized the link between national defense and national inclusion before the war began. Frederick Douglass, as chair of the Committee on Declaration of Sentiments at the 1853 Colored National Convention in Buffalo, attacked laws that “preclude the enrollment of colored men in the militia, and prohibit their bearing arms in the navy” as “anti-Democratic” and “unmagnanimous, since such laws are made by the many, against the few, and by the strong against the weak.” Blacks in Ohio and Massachusetts unsuccessfully petitioned to have their state militia laws revised in the decade before the war. William Watkins, making the case for

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black enlistment before a Massachusetts legislative committee in 1853, declared the
“absolute right to demand” inclusion for “law-abiding, tax-paying, liberty-loving,
NATIVE-BORN, AMERICAN CITIZENS; men who love their country, despite its
heinous iniquities.”\(^\text{103}\) Denied state recognition, blacks across the North formed their own
independent militia companies. These became crucial sites of resistance in the years
following the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act.\(^\text{104}\) Yet the continual refusal of official recognition
served to reinforce the status of free blacks as less than fully American.

Thus, many blacks saw participation in the USCT as a means by which to gain
recognition of their national citizenship. At an 1863 mass meeting in Philadelphia to
drum up support for black enlistments, Frederick Douglass said he understood the
motivation of those who refused to enter the service at anything less than equal terms
with whites. However, he cautioned that sitting out this fight would do nothing to further
the struggle for equal rights. “The speediest and best possible way open to us to manhood,
equal rights and elevation,” Douglass argued, “is that we enter the service…Once let the
black men get upon his person the brass letters U.S.; let him get an eagle on his button,
and a musket on his shoulder, and bullets in his pocket, and there is no power on the earth
or under the earth which can deny that he has earned the right of citizenship in the United
States.”\(^\text{105}\)

Black leaders in Illinois encouraged enlistments based on the same connection
between the obligations of citizenship and the rights associated with it. Chicago

\(^\text{103}\) William Watkins, Our Rights As Men: An Address Delivered in Boston, Before the Legislative
Committee on the Militia, February 24, 1853 (Boston: Benjamin F. Roberts, 1853), 6, 7.
\(^\text{104}\) Horton and Horton, In Hope of Liberty, 263-64.
\(^\text{105}\) Frederick Douglass, “Address for the Promotion of Colored Enlistments,” July 6, 1863, in Douglass’
Monthly (August 1863), reprinted in Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings, ed. Philip S.
Foner (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1999), 534-37.
abolitionist Sattira Douglas advised black potential recruits to grasp the “liberty, honor, social and political position” now available to them. Failing to do so, she argued, would “prove the correctness of the aspersion indulged in by our enemies, that we are unworthy of those rights which they have so long withheld from us, and that freedom would not be appreciated by us, if possessed.” A speaker at a Chicago mass meeting in April 1863 explained to the audience that they had to prove themselves “worthy by taking up arms.” As a result, “the Government will acknowledge us as good men and worthy citizens.”

This meeting was held before Illinois began raising a colored regiment. Therefore, the organizers urged eligible men to enroll in Massachusetts. The committee that drafted the address acknowledged that Illinois was “politically degraded by a cruel system of black laws at variance with the progress of the age.” But enlisting in the Union Army would “maintain the government, re-establish the freedom of their country, and extend liberty and political equality ‘to all the inhabitants thereof.’” Here was a clear expression of faith in the federal government over the states to safeguard black rights.

Blacks were not the only ones asserting the relationship between military service and rights. Illinois Republican papers were also. When the prospect of arming blacks began to be seriously debated in the summer of 1862, papers staked out partisan sides on the issue. Democrats warned that black enlistment would deter whites from volunteering. This was a “white man’s war yet,” reminded the Chicago Times, and permitting blacks to don the Union blue would force “white soldiers into an unnatural and repulsive association.” Democrats sensed an abolitionist scheme to eliminate “all social

106 Anglo-African (NY), June 20, 1863.
107 Chicago Tribune, April 30, 1863.
108 Chicago Times, reprinted in the Illinois State Register, July 14, 1862.
differences between the two races.”\textsuperscript{109} Democratic papers expressed the full spectrum of racial attitudes by fearing black troops would “be turned loose to murder and exterminate with fire and sword,” while also being “as ferocious as a flock of sheep.”\textsuperscript{110} As the \textit{Illinois State Register} made explicit, “Democrats will continue to assert the superiority of white soldiers.”\textsuperscript{111} That they did, as their attitude remained largely unchanged throughout the remainder of the war.

Republican papers, on the other hand, underwent a rapid transformation of their views of black soldiers. Initially, they supported the use of black troops but, much like their backing of the Emancipation Proclamation, did so first and foremost as a war measure. In July 1862, the \textit{Illinois State Journal} endorsed Governor Yates’s call for black enlistment based on the rationale that the country should use “all the means which God and nature have placed in our hands for the preservation of our glorious Union.”\textsuperscript{112} This was very similar to the language the paper would use in a few months’ time to support the Emancipation Proclamation. In both cases, the role of and consequences for blacks would be elided. Other Republican papers pointed out how the enlistment of black soldiers would benefit their white counterparts. The \textit{Greenville Advocate} voiced a common refrain in reminding readers that black bodies stopped bullets just as good as whites ones, and would “as soon see negroes killed as white men.”\textsuperscript{113}

Yet the need to fill the ranks of the newly created colored regiments forced Republican papers to appeal directly to potential black recruits. In doing so, they helped

\textsuperscript{109} \textit{Jonesboro Gazette}, July 19, 1862.

\textsuperscript{110} \textit{Joliet Signal}, January 27, 1863; \textit{Cairo Daily Democrat}, September 15, 1863.

\textsuperscript{111} \textit{Illinois State Register}, November 11, 1863.

\textsuperscript{112} \textit{Illinois State Journal}, July 15, 1862.

\textsuperscript{113} \textit{Greenville Advocate}, reprinted in the \textit{Belleville Advocate}, July 18, 1862.
forge the connection between service and black rights. The *Bloomington Pantagraph* urged local blacks to enlist in the colored regiment then forming in Illinois as an opportunity to “claim their birthright as men, and earn the gratitude and respect of future generations.” The Chicago correspondent of the *New York Independent* was more specific in naming the benefits of black service. The writer acknowledged that black Illinoisans faced widespread discrimination at home: “in this State your oath has not been allowed in court; your vote has been rejected at the ballot-box; your residence here is at the risk of a legally threatened penalty, with the alternative of being sold into bondage; you have been made the subject of social proscription that has shut you out of all but menial occupations; you know that these laws and this diabolical prejudice yet remain in force.” Military enlistment offered a route to breaking down these barriers. The correspondent pled, “if we are worthy of your aid, if we are worthy of the restoration of our Union, we shall hasten to remove the black laws from our statutes and to equalize the pay and bounty and protection of all soldiers under our flag. This is sure to come.” The need to fill colored regiments put blacks in a rare position of influence. They could leverage the situation to convey their desires and shape political goals in return for their cooperation in the war effort.

Once black soldiers began to see battlefield action in 1863, the focus of Republican papers shifted once again. Rather than justifying the use of black troops as a means to an end, the papers celebrated their prowess under fire. From the coastal regions of Georgia and Florida to the fortifications of Hudson and Wagner, black troops proved that they could and would fight. Highlighting the link between service and black

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115 *Chicago Tribune*, January 27, 1864.
masculinity, the *Chicago Tribune* honored “those brave black men at Port Hudson, who, in one hour, vindicated anew the manful courage of their race!”\(^\text{116}\) By August the paper had affirmed that “the negro will fight—for his liberty, for his place among men, for his right to develop himself in whatsoever direction he chooses.”\(^\text{117}\) The *Waukegan Weekly Gazette* determined “their efficiency as soldiers is well proven,” and it was “very proper that they should take a hand in achieving their independence.”\(^\text{118}\) The *Rockford Weekly Register Gazette* printed a report by an officer who witnessed the exploits of the 1\(^{st}\) South Carolina Volunteers, which disclosed, “contrary to my expectations, I did not see a man flinch.” The paper concluded that the debate was settled: “slaves will fight, well, and are fearfully in earnest when the price is freedom.”\(^\text{119}\)

These reports served a political purpose of discrediting Democratic naysayers. But they also played a critical role in challenging racial stereotypes and debunking the idea that this was a “white man’s war.” The widespread and positive coverage of the actions of black troops highlighted the contribution of blacks to the war’s outcome and consequently their claim to determining its meaning. Republican papers acknowledged that black military service portended more equitable race relations in post-war America. Out of the mass casualties suffered by the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts Regiment’s costly and failed assault on Fort Wagner, the *Centralia Sentinel* foresaw the beginnings of “unity between the two races” that would extinguish “forever the long line of prejudices that have been hitherto so powerful among us.”\(^\text{120}\) The *Chicago Tribune* concurred,

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\(^{116}\) *Chicago Tribune*, June 29, 1863.

\(^{117}\) *Chicago Tribune*, August 1, 1863.

\(^{118}\) *Waukegan Weekly Gazette*, April 18, 1863.

\(^{119}\) *Rockford Weekly Register Gazette*, November 22, 1862.

\(^{120}\) *Centralia Sentinel*, August 27, 1863.
believing that “there is no nobler way” for the colored man to “earn a place among citizens than by ranking himself among the defenders of the land.”\textsuperscript{121} The Belvidere \textit{Standard} predicted that war would not end “without forcing the white man to respect him and be prepared to do him justice, denying him his rights no longer.”\textsuperscript{122}

It was one thing for Republican newspapers to support the administration’s decision to enlist black men into the army. It was quite another for white troops to accept them as their comrades-in-arms and willingly fight alongside them. In addition to doubts that blacks could fight effectively, some white troops bristled at what they believed was the debasement of their status as soldiers. The idea of soldiering together with black troops was enough for some whites to pledge violence against those who threatened their racial privilege. “When I hafta Stan up and fight by the Sied of a Big Buck Negro I will shute the Negro first and then the Rebels,” vowed John Daniel Shank of the 125\textsuperscript{th} Illinois Infantry.\textsuperscript{123} William Ross of the Fortieth Illinois Infantry felt likewise, pledging to fire at “the first Negro that I ever see caring a Musket…as shoore as they is a god.”\textsuperscript{124} Others voiced humiliation at the need to turn to blacks for assistance. David Ash of the Thirty-Seventh Illinois Infantry preferred to lose the war rather than rely on black troops, believing it to be “as honorable to give up whipped as to Claim a victory By the aid of the Blacks.” Winning the war with the aid of black troops would be ignoble. “If we do whip them at all,” Ash concluded, “I want to do it honorable so we can Claim a victory.”\textsuperscript{125}

\textsuperscript{121} \textit{Chicago Tribune}, November 12, 1863.
\textsuperscript{122} \textit{Belvidere Standard}, December 29, 1863.
\textsuperscript{123} Quoted in Girardi, “President’s Proclamation,” 414.
\textsuperscript{124} William Ross to father, February 2, 1863, quoted in Wells, “Lincoln’s Boys,” 93-94.
\textsuperscript{125} David L. Ash to Eliza, February 22, 1863, David L. Ash Collection, United States Army Heritage Center.
Many other Illinois soldiers, however, understood the necessity of arming blacks. Like their views on emancipation, the use of black troops was not something they would have accepted at the outset of the war. Yet the exigencies of a bloody and drawn-out war necessitated increasingly radical measures. As a soldier in the Fifth Illinois Cavalry bluntly stated, “when I started out with the army I was opposed to the freeing and arming of negroes, but now, as things stand, I am for arming everything and anything to put down this rebellion, even to a jackass, is he could use a musket.” In a letter printed in the *Bureau County Republican*, Thompson Gordon, a captain in the Forty-Seventh Illinois Infantry, admitted that early in the fighting he “did not anticipate for a moment, that the war would assume such large dimensions, but I now begin to realize its significances.” If bringing the war to a successful conclusion required black military aid, Gordon reasoned, then “arm them, and let them fight to protect their rights as freemen.”

Other Illinois soldiers, too, were less concerned with who was wearing a Union uniform and instead were more interested in the assistance those troops would provide. Writing to his parents in early 1863, Ninety-Third Illinois Infantry member Ira A. Payne, who would be killed later that year in the Battle of Missionary Ridge, expressed bafflement by those who “say that they would not fight if the negroes were armed.” He reasoned that those soldiers must not have realized that “a negro could save their lives by sacrificing” his own. A fife player with the Seventh Illinois Infantry wrote a friend about a conversation among his fellow soldiers over the raising of black troops. “Some

126 *Nashville Journal*, April 17, 1863.
127 *Bureau County Republican*, April 16, 1863.
128 Ira A. Payne to parents, February 27, 1863, Payne Family Papers, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.
make a few objections to it,” he recalled, “but as a general rule most all say if a negro can
stop an enemy’s ball, why let him go in and do it.”\footnote{David Givler to friend, February 14, 1862, in “Intimate Glimpses of Army Life,” typewritten MS, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, 101.} Thomas Odell of the Seventy-Eighth Illinois Infantry understood the other side of that equation, which was that “a bullet will do as much execution, when a darkey holds the gun as when a white man holds it.”\footnote{Thomas Odell to wife, January 20, 1863, in Virdin, \textit{Civil War Correspondence}, 38.} Others commented on the benefits black soldiers provided off of the battlefield. In correspondence with the editor of the \textit{Centralia Sentinel}, a member of the Fifteenth Illinois Cavalry camped in Helena, Arkansas, conveyed gratitude for the more mundane support, such as digging trenches, guarding supply lines, and constructing fortifications, offered by black troops: “these colored troops make soldiering quite easy on the white soldiers; for they relieve us of all the Government work, which formerly had to be done by us and of which there is considerable at this post.”\footnote{\textit{Centralia Sentinel}, February 4, 1864.}

The white Illinois soldiers who enthusiastically embraced the government policy to arm blacks saw the measure as a means of hastening Union victory and bringing the war to an end. “We will never be free from trouble until slavery is annihilated,” concluded Twentieth Illinois Infantry private George Hull before Lincoln announced the Emancipation Proclamation, “so arm the negroes, and let them help put down this wicked rebellion. Nothing will do it so quickly.”\footnote{Clinton Public, July 31, 1862, in Hubbard, \textit{Illinois's War}, 90.} D. L. Branch, a farmer from Mt. Pulaski who enlisted as a private in the 106\textsuperscript{th} Illinois Infantry, rebuked those back home who recoiled at the thought of black men bearing arms. If they could see the “devastation and ruin” that is left in the wake an army, he wrote in a letter to the editor of
the *Lincoln Herald*, they would “ardently encourage any measure, consistent with civilized warfare, to put down the rebellion.”\(^{133}\) Addison McPheeters, Jr., a farmer from Sullivan, Illinois, who served as a private in the Twenty-First Illinois Infantry, wrote his sister, “I am glad to know that the Government is now organizing, and arming the negroes, they will make good soldiers, and I am satisfied will fight well…The war is now conducted on the right Policy, and our prospect of of [sic] final success, is truly cheering.”\(^{134}\) Rankin McPheeters, Addison’s twin brother in the 126\(^{th}\) Illinois Infantry, felt likewise. After witnessing a training session of a newly formed black regiment, he concluded, “they drill awkward but seem anxious to learn. I think they will make good soldiers. I am in favor of having the experiment tried or in other words I am in favor of putting a musket in the handes [sic] of every negro that we can get in our lines.”\(^{135}\) The colonel of the Ninety-Fifth Illinois Infantry, Thomas W. Humphrey, endorsed putting “arms in their hands…to look after the interests of Uncle Sam and themselves. Thus the Federal army occupies the country! The persons held in bondage desert their masters!”\(^{136}\)

As Humphrey suggested, blacks who enlisted had multiple investments in the conflict. Not only would they bolster the Union cause, but their participation involved a unique personal stake as well. As more than one white Illinois soldier realized, those who had been enslaved would “have a chance to fight for their freedom.”\(^{137}\) Some would also fight for the freedom of their loved ones. Thaddeus B. Packard of the Fifth Illinois

\(^{133}\) *Lincoln Herald*, February 14, 1863, in Donath, *Logan County*, 212.

\(^{134}\) Addison W. McPheeters, Jr., to sister, May 31, 1863, McPheeters Family Papers, United States Army Heritage Center.

\(^{135}\) Rankin P. McPheeters to Annie M. McPheeters, May 17, 1863, McPheeters Family Papers, United States Army Heritage Center.

\(^{136}\) Belvidere Standard, August 4, 1863.

\(^{137}\) Edwin W. Payne to Cornelia (Kim) Hudson, May 3, 1863, Payne Family Papers, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.
Cavalry relayed a conversation he had with his body servant Tom, who was leaving to become a sergeant in a colored regiment. Tom hoped to have the “privilege” of meeting his master while armed so that he “will not hold his mother in slavery after that time—she shall be freed, and he will be satisfied.”  

The notion that blacks could and should “fight for their civil rights on the battlefield,” as one private in the Eighty-Second Illinois Infantry put it, tapped into the Revolutionary inspired ideology that freedom was a privilege that had to be fought for and won. Recognizing the larger consequences of the war for blacks was also an admission that this was not, after all, a “white man’s war.” The widespread assistance provided by black spies, scouts, and laborers had already undermined that perception. But the sight of a black man in a Union uniform brought home that reality most strikingly to white troops.

Witnessing a colored regiment drill was a spectacle to many white soldiers. Their reactions ran the gamut from amusement to revulsion. Many, however, were reassured by their first glimpses of black enlistees. Austin Andrews of the Twelfth Illinois Infantry observed in the June 1863 that black soldiers “have an aptness for drill that is astonishing and it gives them a bold manly appearance which I never expected to see those southern negroes assume.” A nurse with the 127th Illinois Infantry recorded in his journal that same month, “I have seen a good many of them lately dressed in uniform and they look well and are proud of the position.”

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139 Friedrich A. Braeutigam, diary, April 24, 1863, Civil War Miscellaneous Collection, United States Army Heritage Center; Furstenburg, “Beyond Freedom and Slavery,” 1295-1330.


141 Orrin Albert Kellam, diary, June 12, 1863, Civil War Miscellaneous Collection, United States Army Heritage Center.
to the Eighty-Third Illinois Infantry testified about his confidence in blacks troops to the
readers of the *Aledo Weekly Record*. “I have witnessed the colored regiment on dress
parade, &c.,” he wrote, “and I do not see but what the *colored* troops are as apt in
learning the ‘manual of arms’ and other parts of *military* [sic] as any other troops.”¹⁴² The
readers of the *Fairfield War Democrat* received a similar dispatch from an officer in the
Fifth Illinois Cavalry. After watching the Forty-Sixth USCT train, the officer believed if
“they will fight, as well as they drill, I assure you that I don’t care about being pitted
against them in the field, but would much rather have them on the same side of the drink
as myself.”¹⁴³

Drills and dress parades were important affairs in terms of legitimizing black
troops, but white troops reserved their greatest judgment for conduct on the battlefield.
They did not have to wait long. The first major clash involving black troops occurred at
Port Hudson, Louisiana, in the spring of 1863, where Union forces strove to claim one of
the last remaining Confederate positions on the Mississippi River. An assault on the fort
on May 27 involved two regiments of Louisiana Native Guards. They were mowed down
in the ill-advised attack, yet they continued to charge into enemy fire. Their high
causality rates—one in five—testified to their mettle. Though the assault failed, the
actions of these black troops refuted the critics who believed black troops would turn and
flee at the first hint of danger.¹⁴⁴

Less than two weeks later black troops again saw major action, this time about
250 miles up the Mississippi River at Milliken’s Bend, a Union outpost near Vicksburg.

¹⁴² *Aledo Weekly Record*, April 4, 1864.
¹⁴³ *Fairfield War Democrat*, June 2, 1864.
The black regiments that helped repel the Confederate attack were poorly equipped and scarcely trained. Yet by most accounts they fought fiercely and remained steadfast, as demonstrated by their staggering high causality rate (35 percent).\textsuperscript{145} Ira Bloomfield, colonel of the Twenty-Sixth Illinois Infantry, was stationed nearby when he received news of the battle. He immediately understood the larger implications of the Federal victory. “This is an important event in the annals of western warfare,” he noted to the editor of the \textit{Bloomington Pantagraph}, “one to which the soldiery looked forward with much anxiety and interest, inasmuch as it demonstrates the \textit{fighting} qualities of the African—the negro will fight. We are all satisfied of that fact.”\textsuperscript{146}

An Illinois native, Matthew M. Miller, participated in the fight at Milliken’s Bend. Miller had left his studies at Yale University to enlist in the 45th Illinois Infantry. He later transferred as a captain to the Ninth Louisiana Regiment Infantry (African Descent). He described the battle to his aunt as a bloody affair and a “horrible fight,” the worst he had ever taken part in, “not even excepting Shiloh.” As for the green recruits under his command, he had nothing but praise for their valor: “I never more wish to hear the expression—‘The nigger won’t fight.’ Come with me 100 yards from where I sit, and I can show you the wounds that cover the bodies of sixteen as brave, loyal, and patriotic soldiers as ever drew bead on a rebel.” Of their conduct, Miller swore that he had never seen “a braver company of men in my life. Not one of them offered to leave his place until ordered to fall back; in fact very few ever did fall back...They met death coolly,

\textsuperscript{145} Glatthaer, \textit{Forged in Battle}, 130-35.

\textsuperscript{146} \textit{Bloomington Pantagraph}, July 1, 1863, in Munson, \textit{It Is Begun!}, 121.
bravely;—not rashly did they expose themselves, but all were steady and obedient to
orders.’’\textsuperscript{147}

The following month saw the famed storming of Fort Wagner in Charleston
Harbor by the Fifty-Fourt Massachusetts (Colored) Infantry. Like the assault on Port
Hudson, Union forces were repulsed, this time with even higher rates of death and injury.
Once again, the performance of the black soldiers at Fort Wagner was lauded by white
Union soldiers and the northern press. Herbert Anthony, a private in the Thirty-Ninth
Illinois Infantry, was stationed at nearby Folly Island when the July 11 attack on Fort
Wagner occurred. In a letter penned to his father, Anthony had a clear message for those
back home. “For the benefit of some of our friends at the north who are howling against
the negro-soldiers saying they will not fight, I will say that question is permanently
settled, for they will fight, & that too with a will that would do credit to some of our
white Regiments. The fifty fourth led the charge & did it nobly suffering severely.”\textsuperscript{148}

Port Hudson, Milliken’s Bend, and Fort Wagner did much to convince doubters
about the aptitude of black soldiers. Of course, the issue was far from “permanently
settled,” as Anthony claimed, but the meritorious conduct of black troops in these early
engagements encouraged further recruitment and formation of USCT regiments.\textsuperscript{149} As the
war progressed, more and more white northern regiments crossed paths with, fought
alongside, or simply heard stories about their black comrades. These interactions could
leave lasting impressions on individuals. For example, a member of the Eleventh Illinois
Infantry shared with readers of his hometown newspaper details of an expedition up the

\textsuperscript{147} Galena Advertiser, reprinted in the Chicago Tribune, July 3, 1863.

\textsuperscript{148} Herbert Anthony to father, July 18, 1863, Earl M. Hess Collection, United States Army Heritage Center.

\textsuperscript{149} Glatthar, Forged in Battle, 141.
Yazoo River early in 1864. The Eighth Louisiana Regiment Infantry (African Descent) had accompanined them on the voyage, giving the Eleventh all the evidence it needed to decide “the question in our minds that negroes will fight.” Levi Ross of the eighty-Sixth Illinois Infantry grudgingly came to this viewpoint as well. Although he still did “not have much confidence in the efficiency of colored troops” at the close of 1864, he nonetheless had to “give the Devil his due” in praising the black troops who “conducted themselves bravely” and continued to fight after their “cowardly…white faced” commander ordered them to surrender Athens, Georgia, to Major General Nathan Bedford Forrest. A soldier from Belleville, Illinois, wrote his parents about his involvement in the Camden Expedition through Arkansas under General Frederick Steele in May 1864. Referring to the two colored regiments from Kanas that also participated, he recalled, “it was a splendid sight to see, that of white men and black pulling captured artillery together and helping each other’s wounded. There is a complete revolution of sentiment in this army, and no one now hesitates to praise our colored regiments as highly as they do our white ones.”

He was not the only one to recognize this sea change in attitude among white soldiers. A number of Illinois soldiers commented on it, sometimes turning the gaze on themselves in moments of introspection. Another soldier on the Camden Expedition, Adam McJunkin of the Springfield Independent Light Artillery, was also deeply moved by witnessing black troops in action. He confessed to his sister, “they are as good if not the best soldiers we have. I would never have believed it. But I have seen it with my own

150 Amboy Times, March 10, 1864.
151 Levi Adolphus Ross, diary, October 3, 1864, Levi Ross Papers, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.
152 Belleville Advocate, May 27, 1864.
eyes and there is no longer any room for doubt. They have had three hard fights since we started and fought well every time.”\textsuperscript{153} Writing to his former teacher at the Illinois State Normal University, Eighth Illinois Infantry member Charles Clarke expressed interest in applying for a commission in a colored regiment, adding, “one year ago I would not think of such a thing. The world moves. Sentiments changes [\textit{sic}].”\textsuperscript{154} Joseph Ward of the Thirty-Ninth Illinois Infantry recognized how rapidly views on black troops had evolved. He mused, “what would have been said at the North of a man who two years ago had prophesied [\textit{sic}] such a thing? Why he would have been considered a fit subject for a mad house. Now it is passed by with very little comment. The troops who drill with them do not consider themselves disgraced by the association.”\textsuperscript{155}

Changes in attitude also assumed more subtle or unconscious forms. A St. Clair County native with the 117\textsuperscript{th} Illinois Infantry was in the habit of calling blacks “niggers” but began using other labels—“negroes,” “soldiers of color,” “citizens of African descent”—when referring to black soldiers.\textsuperscript{156} Sergeant Major Stephen Fleharty of the 102\textsuperscript{nd} Illinois Infantry also used a different tone over time when discussing black soldiers. In July 1863, Fleharty mocked his “insignificant, stammering” cook Bob for catching the “prevailing military mania.” Bob wanted to “carve for himself a niche in the temple of military fame” despite being immersed in the “thick gloom of semi-barbarism” that “enveloped the race.” The following April Fleharty was in Vicksburg, where a number of black soldiers performed picket duty. Fleharty’s impressions of these troops evinced little

\textsuperscript{153} Adam McJunkin to sister, [May?] 1864, Ronn Palm Collection, United States Army Heritage Center.

\textsuperscript{154} Charles M. Clarke to Edwin C. Hewett, February 13, 1863, Edwin Crawford Hewett Correspondence, Illinois History and Lincoln Collections.

\textsuperscript{155} Joseph R. Ward Jr., diary, January 22, 1864, in Cummins and Hohweiler, \textit{Enlisted Soldier’s View of the Civil War}, 96.

\textsuperscript{156} Quoted in Manning, \textit{What This Cruel War Was Over}, 123.
of the derision that colored his earlier impression of black soldiers. He observed, “those on duty make a fine military appearance. We noticed one fellow pacing to and fro on his beat in front of a Colonel’s headquarters, and must confess, that we have never seen a white soldier conduct himself more faithfully while on duty.—Nor have we seen any white soldier surpass him in the military precision which characterized all his movements.” In July 1862, Allen Morgan Geer of the Twentieth Illinois Infantry recorded in his diary that he was “conscientiously [sic] opposed…in every manner” to arming blacks. Yet in June of the following year, Geer casually notes, “the negroes said to have had another fight at Milliken[‘]s Bend coming out ahead as usual.” In the closing months of the war, Geer accepts without any misgivings the reports of “good behavior” of black soldiers at the Second Battle of Fort Fisher.

White soldiers also formed connections with black soldiers through comradeship, which had the power to bridge the racial divide. The bonds forged in the thick of battle, around a campfire at night, and through the shared sacrifices and hardships of a soldier’s life created intense feelings of loyalty for one’s “band of brothers.” A musician with the Fiftieth Illinois Infantry documented an evening of fraternization with a black regiment encamped nearby. His colonel gave the colored troops a flag, which was received with “sincier [sic] thanks” and a promise that “they would see this war out with us.” Amos Stanford, who left the Fifty-Fifth Illinois Infantry at the end of 1863 to

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157 Stephen Fleharty, letters to the editor, Rock Island Union, August 5, 1863, April 20, 1864, in Reyburn and Wilson, “Jottings from Dixie,” 130, 193.


159 McPherson, For Cause and Comrades, 77-89.

160 Frederick Sherwood, diary, June 16, 1863, Earl M. Hess Collection, United States Army Heritage Center.
become an officer in the Fiftieth USCT, witnessed multiple mundane but significant interactions between black and white troops. “It was no uncommon thing to see a white soldier ask of a sable one a piece of hard tack or a chew of tobacco and VICE VERSA, which was always granted when the giver had any to spare.”

A farmer from Xenia, Illinois, who fought with the Twenty-First Illinois Infantry, contemplated the less tangible aspects of gaining “the negro as an ally.” To his sister he wrote, “the compact has been sealed by the blood of the white and black soldier poured out on the same field and co-mingling in the same soil, shed in the defense of the same government.”

The ties that bound Union soldiers to one another were perhaps most discernable in response to the Confederates’ refusal to recognize black soldiers as prisoners of war. Instead, they were returned to slavery, forced into hard labor, or killed outright rather than be allowed to surrender. The most infamous slaughter occurred at Fort Pillow, Tennessee, in April 1864, when Confederate forces under Major General Forrest executed black troops who had surrendered. This atrocity provoked outrage in the North, where newspapers condemned the “cruel, inhumane, brutal butchery” of the rebels. Major James A. Connolly predicted the tragedy would “create a hundred fold more sympathy in the army for the negro than ever existed before.”

The bonds of allegiance among soldiers were especially apparent in the convictions of an Eightieth Illinois Infantry volunteer. He believed only “cowards, traitors and copperheads” would

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161 *Canton Weekly Register*, May 8, 1865.
162 John Russell to sister, June 12, 1863, *Civil War Times Illustrated Collection*, United States Army Heritage Center.
164 *Chicago Tribune*, April 16, 1864.
165 James Connolly to Mary Connolly, April 17, 1864, in Angle, *Three Years in the Army of the Cumberland*, 191-92.
think the massacre was justified because blacks should not be fighting. Rather, he insisted, “the negro is a United States soldier and ought to be respected as such, and will be; and if our Government does not shoot just as many rebel prisoners and officers in retaliation for the soldiers that Forrest murdered at Fort Pillow, I shall always think they have not done right.”

Prejudice against blacks, or even just black soldiers, did not evaporate from Union lines by the end of the war. But the performance of black troops and interactions with them did force whites to take account of and sometimes reevaluate their own racial beliefs. Whereas emancipation stirred anxiety about the future of blacks in the country among some whites, the actions of and experiences with black troops often provoked a very different outlook. As many black enlistees anticipated, accepting blacks into the military service portended larger consequences beyond the battlefield. “You can never make slaves of them after using them as soldiers,” acknowledged a member of the 125th Illinois Infantry. U.S. Army surgeon Humphrey Hood also recognized that “these soldiers will never make good slaves.” Rather, Hood believed, due to “the Education they are now receiving,” they “will some day, make good Freeman [sic].” By “crossing bayonets” with their former masters, they were earning “their rights” as well as “securing the elevation” from “slavery to independence,” deduced Jacksonville native Charles Berry, who left the Seventeenth Illinois Infantry to become a captain in the Tenth Louisiana Infantry (African Descent).

A member of the 142nd Illinois Infantry realized,

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166 Centralia Sentinel, May 5, 1864.
167 Quoted in Girardi, “President’s Proclamation,” 414.
168 Humphrey Hood to Joseph Hood, November 24, 1865, Humphrey H. Hood Letters, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.
169 Peoria Daily Transcript, December 19, 1863.
“their endurance and discipline is admirable and fighting qualities undisputed even by the lordly southerners who heretofore deluded us into the monstrous belief that he was not worthy of being called a man, and had no rights that a white man was bound to respect.”

Which rights should come with military duty was an issue far from settled at the time, although political rights were not out of the question. President Lincoln suggested in a speech just days before his assassination that the franchise should be extended to black veterans. The connection between the obligations of military duty and the benefits of citizenship was broached by a member of the Chicago Board of Trade Independent Battery Light Artillery, who reflected after the war that giving a black man a musket was “the same thing as putting a ballot into his hand,” for “whether he fought bravely or not, then the access to the ballot box was his right, and his especial privilege.”

The colonel of the 104th Illinois Infantry came to accept this correlation during the war, coming to believe that “a negro, in my estimation, is good enough to kill a rebel, and just as much entitled to vote as any copperhead traitor in the north. If I was formerly undecided on this question I can assure you that I am now an out and outer, determined to occupy the platform of freedom and equal justice to all.”

That platform was, of course, far from reality back at home in Illinois. Democrats had interpreted their victory in the 1862 election as a mandate to shore up the state’s borders against the feared onslaught of former slaves and to resist the federal

170 Freeport Weekly Journal, August 24, 1864.
173 Amboy Times, July 9, 1863.
government’s increasingly radical measures of prosecuting the war. Yet Illinois soldiers were not the only ones reassessing the meaning of and consequences of the war. As the shock of emancipation wore off and the achievements of black soldiers circulated among the northern population, white Illinois civilians also began to consider what a slave-free, postwar society would look like. While Democrats strove to maintain the old order, Republicans cautiously but deliberately began championing a more equitable future. With a reversal of fortunes in the 1864 election, they were poised to take the first steps to that end.
On February 6, 1865, gun blasts rang out in Springfield, Illinois. Unlike most of the fusillades launched during the preceding four years of gruesome civil war, this salvo reflected merriment rather than malice. The cause for jubilation was the legislature’s repeal of the most stringent state black laws, including the ban on black immigration. Supporters fired sixty-two shots, one for each legislator who voted for the repeal. The celebrants then moved to the A.M.E. Church and sang, “the year of jubilee is come.” The following day Governor Richard Oglesby signed the repeal bill into law. Only a week earlier Illinois ratified the Thirteenth Amendment, which would legally end slavery throughout the nation. Illinois was the first state to do so, a nod to President Lincoln and an affirmation of the war’s evolving aim of universal freedom. The process of Reconstruction had begun in Illinois.

These events were scarcely imaginable even two years earlier when an aggressively anti-administration and anti-black legislature convened in Springfield. The Emancipation Proclamation had just gone into effect on the first of the year. Democratic majorities in the 1863 general assembly braced against what they anticipated would be a rush of former slaves fleeing the South and sought to more effectively close Illinois’ border to blacks. Disgusted by the direction the war had taken, and having little confidence that an end to the hostilities could be achieved on the battlefield, Democrats

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1 Christian Recorder (PA), February 18, 1865; Illinois State Journal, February 7, 1865.
sought an immediate cease-fire and proposed holding an armistice summit with the seceded states.

To many, especially those risking their lives on the front lines, talk of an armistice was tantamount to defeat. Illinois soldiers railed against what they perceived to be treasonous activity engaged in by their elected officials. Their animosity towards Copperheads back home matched and sometimes exceeded the loathing they felt toward their enemies across the battlefield. This rallied the troops to embrace the administration’s war policy, including emancipation. A similar polarization occurred on the home front during 1863. Republicans speedily distanced themselves from the provocative and sometimes violent Peace wing that dominated the Illinois Democracy. Against the Democrats’ virulent anti-black rhetoric, Republicans warmed to the enlarging sphere of black participation in the war and grew increasingly outspoken against flagrant racial abuses and punitive proscriptions.

These different partisan ideologies became especially noticeable during the 1864 presidential campaign. Four years earlier Republicans had touted their conservative credentials and tried to match the Democrats’ allegiance to white supremacy. Now, they endorsed a constitutional amendment to permanently end slavery. Though Illinois Republicans stopped short of advocating for full racial equality, they could no longer sustain a legal code that erected barriers to the enjoyment of natural rights, such as freedom of movement, and fostered overt legal disabilities, such as not being allowed to testify on one’s own behalf. While Democrats sought to wield the black laws as a means of racial oppression, Republicans began to envision a postwar future free from the taint of slavery, which they held responsible for the country’s worst failings. The tyranny of the
“peculiar institution” engendered unequal protection under the law, inhibited the pursuit of free labor, and denied the most basic rights to a specific class of individuals. The war offered an opportunity to right these wrongs, both in the South and at home.

Following a decisive victory at the polls in November, Republicans had the opportunity to put these beliefs into action. With control over both chambers of the general assembly, they quickly got to work repealing the black laws. Petitions for the same poured in from throughout the state. Democrats fought against removing any laws that oppressed and excluded blacks, but a united Republican front triumphed in striking some of the harshest anti-black laws from the statue books. With a Union victory on the horizon and slavery in extremis, the repeal of the black laws was Illinois’s opening foray into shaping a post-emancipation society. Reconstruction in Illinois meant grappling with a new understanding of freedom, not just for former slaves elsewhere but for free blacks at home. Safeguarding natural rights and guaranteeing legal protection regardless of race was a crucial first step in recognizing black citizenship and laid the foundation for future civil liberties, even in the face of continual popular prejudice.

“Civil War is Almost upon Us”: Dissension at Home and Abroad in 1863

The Twenty-Third General Assembly opened its session in Springfield on January 5, 1863. With a majority of one in the senate and twenty-five in the house, Democrats arrived to the state house energized from their substantial electoral gains in November. As one historian characterized the inaugural of what would become an infamous and combative session of the general assembly, “the new Democratic legislature convened
with political murder in its heart, seasoned with a touch of sexual paranoia.”

This was not mere partisan rancor, however. Democrats fervently pursued what they considered to be in the best interests of the state and country by tightening the racial cordon around Illinois, denouncing emancipation, and trying to stop a war that had overshot its original purpose.

Despite—or because of—the tempestuous atmosphere at the capitol building, Republican Governor Richard Yates gave full backing to the federal government in his address to the general assembly on its second day in session. He threw his support behind the policy of emancipation and went so far as to assert that a higher power was responsible for protracting the war until slavery became a casualty of it. He assured those “timid, conservative mind[s]” that were opposed to the Emancipation Proclamation that their displeasure would only be “temporary,” as the proclamation’s success would soon become evident. As for the growing population of escaped slaves coming into Illinois, which had caused a great deal of protest throughout the state over the past few months, Yates promised that the labor demands of the postwar South would draw every single former slave back home. In the meantime, he counseled Illinoisans to “treat them kindly.”

Yates’s message rankled the Democratic majority; one representative criticized its “revolutionary and unconstitutional doctrines” while another mockingly suggested it should be referred to “a committee of ‘free American citizens of African descent.’”

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2 Guelzo, Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation, 189.


4 Illinois State Register, January 8, 1863.
Democrats were not all bluster. They quickly set to work on strengthening the 1853 black exclusion law. Both houses agreed to form a joint committee to “inquire what legislation may necessary to prevent the emigration and importation of free negroes into this State.” The senate drew up a bill to that effect but it bounced in and out of the judiciary committee without coming to a final vote. The house had more success and passed an amendment to the 1853 law by a vote of 48 to 28. The final provisions of this act were not recorded in the house journal or contemporary newspapers, but earlier iterations included whipping as a punishment for blacks who entered Illinois illegally. Unlike the 1853 exclusion law and the 1861 house of representatives vote on strengthening that law, this vote split along party, as opposed to geographical, lines. No Republican backed it, including the party’s handful of southern- and mid-state representatives.

Given how toxic the contraband issue was the previous fall, it is somewhat surprising that house Republicans came together to oppose further legislation barring blacks from entering Illinois. This did not necessarily indicate opposition to racial exclusion; instead, they may have taken issue with specific provisions of the proposed law. Yet it was also true during this session that the most extreme vocalizations of racial prejudice came from the Democratic side of the chamber. So too did criticisms of emancipation, Lincoln, and the war in general. By the time the vote was taken on

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5 *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Twenty-Third General Assembly of the State of Illinois, at Their Regular Session, Begun and Held at Springfield, January 5, 1863* (Springfield: Baker and Phillips, 1865), 94; *Journal of the Senate* (1863), 100.

6 *Illinois State Register*, January 31, 1863; *Chicago Tribune*, January 17, 1863.

7 *Journal of the House* (1863), 94; *Journal of the Senate* (1863), 500-501. The senate never voted on the bill. Perhaps this was due to the death of a Democratic senator, which evened each party’s representation in the chamber. In the event of a tie, the speaker of the senate (the lieutenant governor) gave the casting vote. At that time the speaker was a Republican.
amending the 1853 exclusion law, Illinois Democrats had staked out an extreme anti-war agenda that pitted them not only against Republican politicians but also against many soldiers and civilians.

This showdown was foreshadowed early in the session with a string of resolutions critical of the Lincoln administration and its war policy. One Democrat from the house decried the Emancipation Proclamation for unleashing the “lusts of freed negroes who will overrun our country.” Another claimed it was “calculated to bring shame, disgrace and eternal infamy upon the hitherto unsullied flag of the Republic” and urged Illinoisans to protest the war as long as emancipation remained its object. Senate Democrats offered similar resolutions. One condemned the war for having “crippled and impoverished the government, weighed down the people with an onerous public debt, filled the land with cripples, widows and orphans, and brought mourning into every neighborhood.” This resolution also proposed a national convention aimed at securing an armistice. Another senator urged Congress and the northern states to pass a constitutional amendment that would bring about a “peaceable” end to the conflict.

These resolutions were referred to each branch’s federal relations committee. They might have been dismissed as the indulgences of the most extreme and vocal members of the anti-war faction, but in early February the house federal relations committee released a report endorsing these viewpoints. The preamble began with a solemn pledge of allegiance to the Constitution and the rule of law before denouncing the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus, the trampling of civil liberties, the freeing of

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8 *Journal of the House* (1863), 94; *Journal of the Senate* (1863), 78.
9 *Journal of the House* (1863), 94; *Journal of the Senate* (1863), 83.
10 *Illinois State Register*, January 22, 1863.
slaves (belonging to both loyal and disloyal owners), the introduction of contraband slaves into Illinois, and the creation of the state of West Virginia. These common Democratic complaints were followed by a resolution claiming the war had shifted from its initial purpose of “subjugation” to that of “the abolition of slavery,” which was a “fraud, both legal and moral…perpetuated on the brave sons of Illinois.” National restoration could occur, the report argued, only if the Emancipation Proclamation were repealed. Moreover, the majority report pushed for an immediate armistice so that a convention could be held in Louisville, Kentucky, to negotiate peaceful terms of reunion.11 The report was adopted by a strict party vote of 52-28.12

The senate never voted on the house federal relations resolution. It debated the measure during the evening of the penultimate day of the session, adjourning at midnight without a vote. Perhaps the announcement of the death of Democratic senator James Rogers earlier that day quashed Democratic hopes of it passing now that each party had equal representation (with the casting vote going to the Republican lieutenant governor). On February 14 the general assembly recessed, with plans to reconvene in early June. The peace resolutions would hold over until then.13

In the immediate postmortem of the legislative session, Republicans declared victory. “A great danger has been passed,” breathed the Chicago Tribune with a sigh of relief. Despite being “at the mercy of a majority that was at once factious, ignorant, and malignantly disloyal,” Republicans saved the state the ignominy of sanctioning an

11 Journal of the House (1863), 372-75.
armistice.\textsuperscript{14} The far northern \textit{Rockford Register} heralded the “wisdom, determination, and patriotism of the loyal minority” over the “hateful measures” taken by their opponents.\textsuperscript{15} Just to the east of Rockford, the \textit{Waukegan Weekly Gazette} commented, “a more shameless, imbecile and corrupt body of men could not have been sent to our halls of legislation should the whole nether world be raked and scraped.” The paper was pleased to find Illinois “still in the good old Union” after such a debacle.\textsuperscript{16} The \textit{Illinois State Journal}, out of Springfield, praised those Democrats who were “not too far gone beyond the reach of reason” with helping to wrap up the session with results that would please “friends of the Union.”\textsuperscript{17}

Even Democratic organs had to concede defeat. “It is not to be disguised that the Democracy of the state are grievously disappointed in the result of the action of the legislature,” admitted the western \textit{Quincy Herald}.\textsuperscript{18} Although the Democrats began the session with an advantage in size and spirit, the session was “anything but a profitable one,” lamented the \textit{Illinois State Register} from the capital city. The \textit{Register} blamed filibustering Republicans and lobbying interests for preventing measures of substance from being passed.\textsuperscript{19} The \textit{Chicago Times} attributed the senate’s failure in passing the peace resolutions to the “unpardonable” and “criminal” conduct of the handful of Democrats who postponed placing them on the agenda until the closing hours of the

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Chicago Tribune}, February 17, 1863.
\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Rockford Register}, February 21, 1863.
\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Waukegan Weekly Gazette}, February 21, 1863.
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Illinois State Journal}, February 16, 1863.
\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Quincy Herald}, February 18, 1863.
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Illinois State Register}, February 16, 1863.
session. Yet Democratic papers held out hope that the legislature would redeem itself when it reconvened in June by finally passing the peace resolutions.

Democrats understood that the legislative session had been a fiasco, but they did not fully grasp the enormity of it. While they saw their inability to work toward an armistice as a failure, their desire for one earned them the enmity of thousands of Illinois soldiers. Entertaining the prospect of peace during the winter of 1862-63, when the Union outlook was far from sanguine, added insult to injury. This was a time, wrote a Civil War military historian, “when it appeared that the North was least able to carry the war to a successful conclusion…it was a nine-month winter of discontent and despair.”

Confederates scored a brutal and bloody victory at Fredericksburg, Virginia, that December. The new year brought with it the Federal victory at Stones River, Tennessee, but with a Union casualty rate of nearly one in three. To the southwest, General Grant’s army was wallowing in mud and disease as it struggled to find a way to take Vicksburg. An armistice at this time would have to concede some Confederate demands, although Democrats proffered no proposals of acceptable terms for peace. To Illinois soldiers, negotiating with the enemy was an affront to the blood they had spilled and a vote of no confidence in their ability to end the war on Union terms. For many, it was nothing short of treason.

Illinois soldiers reacted swiftly and strongly against the actions taken by their state legislators. As historian Mark E. Neely, Jr., points out, this was during a time when most Union soldiers were encamped in winter quarters and had leisure time to read

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21 Hicken, Illinois in the Civil War, 121.
22 McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom, 582.
newspapers and discuss politics. With Illinois papers on both sides of the political divide reporting on the proceedings of the legislature, deployed soldiers closely followed the drama unfolding in the state house. This was no mere spectacle, however, as many troops became increasingly incensed over what they perceived as disloyal sentiment spewing from the seat of power in their home state. Albert O. Marshall of the Thirty-Third Illinois Infantry recalled twenty years after the fact that the only public meeting held by his regiment during the war was in response to the actions of the 1863 legislature.

In letters to family members and newspaper editors back home, Illinois troops made their displeasure known. Referring to the “traitorous legislature,” Charles Wills of the 103rd Illinois Infantry informed his sister, “it would make your blood run cold to hear the men in this army, without regard to party, curse those traitors.” If his men were ordered home to “quell those Illinois tories,” he predicted that “orders to burn and destroy will not be necessary.” James S. True, colonel of the Sixty-Second Illinois Infantry, expressed his disgust to the editors of the Chicago Tribune for those legislators who defamed “the noble dead, the gallant soldiers who have severed the sacred ties of social life and gone forth to chastise the wicked and debased enemy of our Government.” Colonel True believed his enemies across the battlefield to be the “more honorable portion of treason” than “Jeff. Davis’ pimps in the North.” A member of the Second Illinois Cavalry wished that the copperhead politicians were in the Confederate Army so

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26 James S. True, letter to the editor, Chicago Tribune, February 7, 1863.
he could “be one of the first to draw the heart’s blood of all such scandalous villains.”27 A correspondent of the Bloomington Pantagraph also sensed this bloodlust. Writing from Memphis, he disclosed how the soldiers there yearned to hang the legislators and “send them, before their time, to that place where a drop of cold water would be of much more interest to them than the secret signs of the ‘Golden Circle.’ This is the general feeling here, without regard to their heretofore political associations.”28

Policy trumped party ties for many soldiers in the field. A member of the Eighty-Fourth Illinois Infantry proclaimed, “although I am a Democrat, and, as such, am as much in favor of peace as any man; yet I sincerely believe that the Radical Abolition party is on a shorter way to peace than those would be conservatives.” Calls for compromise, he believed, would only serve to lengthen the war and lead to an independent Confederacy.29 Sidney Little, a private in the 118th Illinois Infantry who was born and raised in the far western city of Carthage, Illinois, affirmed his political identity as a Democrat but felt compelled to clarify that he was “not a Copperhead” and was willing to “fight to the last for the old Stars and Stripes and more.”30

Illinois regiments across the South held meetings to draft and adopt resolutions condemning the Illinois legislature. At St. Helena Island, South Carolina, the Thirty-Ninth Illinois Infantry unanimously adopted resolutions critical of the “home faction that are covering their treason under the pretext of party antagonism…God helping us they

27 G. H., letter to the editor, Chicago Tribune, February 23, 1863.

28 Q. D., letter to the editor, Bloomington Pantagraph, January 28, 1863, in Munson, It Is Begun!, 93-94. The Knights of the Golden Circle was a antebellum secret, pro-southern society dedicated to establishing a slavery empire. During the war, it operated in the North as a paramilitary organization hostile to the federal government.

29 Aledo Weekly Record, March 3, 1863.

30 Sidney Little to Sarah P. Durant, April 12, 1863, quoted in Bahde, Life and Death of Gus Reed, 34-35.
will have their just deserts.” Officers of the Eighth Illinois Cavalry approved of

censuring the “course pursued by the dominant party in the Illinois Legislature in their
efforts to cause dissatisfaction among the troops and citizens of the State.”

In the

Eighty-Second Illinois Infantry, which had joined with the Army of the Potomac in
Virginia, officers voted to “condemn the report of the majority of the House Committee
on Federal relations, and we regard all those who voted for it as traitors to the
Government, who deserve to be strung up with Jeff. Davis & Co. on the first best tree.”

Twenty-five Illinois troops convalescing at a hospital in Jackson, Tennessee, calling
themselves the “One-Legged Brigade,” passed a resolution vowing to foil the treacherous
designs of the “Democratic Conservative party” and to “warn them against a day of
reckoning, to turn from their evil way, before they see the handwriting on the wall, and
there read their doom in blazing characters that will remind them of Belshazzar, with a
terrible smiting of the knees; and the verdict of Illinois’ true sons, who have gone forth to
battle for the Union…is against them.”

Some troops went further than damning biblical allusions and threatened to turn
their weapons on their fellow Illinoisans. Officers from multiple regiments stationed at
Corinth, Mississippi, pledged their readiness to “promptly obey a proper order” by
Governor Yates to “return and crush out treason there.”

Every member of Company F

of the Sixty-Second Illinois Infantry agreed to a resolution stating, “if by the unavoidable

31 Chicago Tribune, March 25, 1863.
32 Chicago Tribune, March 3, 1863.
33 Bloomington Pantagraph, March 4, 1863, in Munson, It Is Begun!, 99-100.
34 Chicago Tribune, March 25, 1863.
35 Aledo Weekly Record, February 17, 1863. The regiments involved included the Seventh, Ninth, Twelfth,
Fiftieth, Fifty-Second, Sixty-Fourth, and Sixty-Sixth Illinois Infantry.
necessity of circumstances, it should become our duty to return to Illinois to punish
traitors and uphold the laws; we will still deem it a pleasant duty to fight for the Stars and
Stripes.”

With only a few dissenting votes, Illinois soldiers from six regiments serving
under General Rosecrans near Murfreesboro upheld a resolution that they would “as soon
fight the enemies of our country on the prairies of Illinois as in the South, and that we
hold ourselves ready to obey an order from the President to march into our State with
bayonets fixed to enforce the laws.”

The Seventy-Second Illinois Infantry had just one opposing vote for its resolutions, which included a warning to traitors “in and out of the
Legislature”:

should they succeed in the design of calling home her patriotic soldiers, while the
rebels in arms are defiantly resisting the Government, we shall bring with us
arms, which we have learned how to use, and bodies inured to many hardships,
and though we would regret as deeply as any men could do, transferring the war
to the North, we will, while God gives us strength, fight traitors, whether in the
streets of Chicago, in the broad prairies of our State, or in the rebel territory of the
South.

Historian Mark E. Neely found resolutions critical of the legislature from sixty-six
Illinois military units during the winter and spring months of 1863, accounting for around
50,000 enlisted men. One-third of these resolutions included language warning of
carrying the violence home, which, according to Neely, was the first time in U.S. history
that there were “threats from large numbers of organized military forces against civil
power.” This put Democratic papers in uncharted waters, and they often chose to ignore
the resolutions while Republican papers, expectedly, dedicated many columns to them.

36 Chicago Tribune, April 22, 1863.
37 Chicago Tribune, April 22, 1863. The regiments involved included the Twenty-Second, Twenty-Seventh,
Thirty-Sixth, Forty-Second, Fifty-First, and Eighty-Eighth Illinois Infantry.
38 Chicago Tribune, April 1, 1863.
39 Neely, Union Divided, 44-47.
These resolutions demonstrate the breadth of dissatisfaction among Illinois soldiers with Democratic proposals for a cease-fire. In responding to the actions of their legislators, Illinois troops claimed their frontline experience gave them the authority to determine what they were fighting for and how they should do it. After all, they and their families were carrying the burden of reuniting the country. Democratic criticisms of the war motivated many Illinois troops to pledge unequivocal support for northern political leaders and their handling of the war.

A number of the resolutions drafted and approved by Illinois soldiers condemning the legislature included pledges of out-and-out support for President Lincoln, Governor Yates, and the Emancipation Proclamation. For example, the Sixteenth Illinois Infantry “heartily” endorsed the Emancipation Proclamation as a means of bringing about the “final extinction of slavery” and the “re-establishment of our Government upon the principles of justice and liberty, without which we cannot have permanent peace.” From the Ninety-Fifth Illinois Infantry came an endorsement of emancipation, which was “making a new era in our National existence” and “placing us much higher before the world.” The Seventy-Second Illinois Infantry passed a resolution stating, “there is as much good sense in making the negro help us in our struggle for free government, in any way which his capacity will admit of, as there is in the rebels using him in their struggle for despotism.” It was no coincidence that these affirmations of support for federal war

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41 Girardi, “President’s Proclamation,” 410; Manning, What This Cruel War Was Over, 93.

42 Chicago Tribune, April 22, 1863.

43 Chicago Tribune, April 22, 1863.

44 Chicago Tribune, April 1, 1863.
policy were embedded in the resolutions condemning northern peace advocates. As opposition to the Emancipation Proclamation became increasingly identified with those critical of the war, Illinois troops made their position unambiguous. The perceived line between traitor and patriot was coming into much sharper relief.

This type of categorical thinking affected how some whites thought about race. There was now a group perceived as inferior to blacks—traitors, especially the northern variety. Around the same time that Illinois troops became enraged over the “fire in the rear,” black soldiers began to see increased action on the battlefield. For many white soldiers, these two trends altered traditional thinking about the racial hierarchy. As a soldier in the Forty-Seventh Illinois Infantry remarked about blacks, “I do not rate them our equals, but in my opinion they are the superiors of any man who dares to rebel against our Constitution and Union.”

Tighlman Jones, a native Indianan who farmed in Cumberland County when he enlisted in the Fifty-Ninth Illinois Infantry, recorded in his diary, “a negro union soldier is worth 50 white Copperheads of the north.” Responding to criticism back home about the use of black troops, one Illinois soldier countered, “I do not think that such white men as the rebels South, (or North,) are one whit too good to be subjugated and shot by the negroes, or any body else.”

In his memoir, Ephraim A. Wilson of the Tenth Illinois Infantry recalled that he had never “met a colored rebel in all my experience in the South.”

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45 Bureau County Republican, April 16, 1863.
46 Tighlman Jones, diary, August-September 1864, Tighlman Howard Jones Papers, Illinois History and Lincoln Collections.
47 David C. Smith, letter to the editor, Nashville Journal, April 24, 1863.
48 Wilson, Memoirs of the War, 224.
Republican newspapers back home were also making capital out of the juxtaposition between traitorous whites and loyal blacks. In southwestern Illinois, the *Belleville Advocate* ran a story about an injured member of the 117th Illinois Infantry whose shoes were stolen by “conservative southern gentlemen” in Mississippi. A “darkey” got ahold of the shoes and gave them back to the soldier. The writer requested “some Copperhead” to “inform the public which of these men were the best—the conservative chaps who robbed the wounded soldier, or the darkey who returned the stolen property?”49 Quincy’s Republican paper praised the black soldier who “fights well, and dies heroically for the country which has so long abused him,” while deprecating his “slanderers” who “neither fight nor urge others to fight, and hold out no particular promise of dying until they sacrifice themselves on the altar of whisky.”50 An article in the central Illinois’s *Bloomington Pantagraph* relayed an anecdote about a local black volunteer who instructed that his savings should be used to advance “the cause of freedom to his race” in the event that he died during the war. “Does not that man possess a larger soul than a Copperhead,” the paper wondered.51 Referring to the valor of fourteen black soldiers who died saving a white officer at Port Hudson, the mid-state *Peoria Daily Transcript* chided, “are there fourteen copperheads in Illinois who would have made such a sacrifice? Yet the negroes are a despicable race—they have no courage—no heroism!”52 The paper later disparaged whites who evaded the draft while

50 *Quincy Daily Whig*, July 4, 1863.
51 *Chicago Tribune*, March 25, 1863.
52 *Peoria Daily Transcript*, July 3, 1863.
patriotic blacks, just liberated from the house of bondage, assume the responsibilities attaching only to citizens, shoulder their muskets and go forth to battle in defense of—the “white man’s government.” Who is most deserving of his country’s gratitude, the cowardly copperhead who evades the draft and shirks his responsibility as a citizen to do military duty when occasion requires, or the loyal Negro, who, at the call of the President, responds heartily and uncomplainingly to the demands of the government to peril life an all that makes life dear in the holy cause of sustaining the integrity of our glorious Union?53

These comparisons were calculated to shame and humiliate Peace Democrats, but they also served to normalize the participation of blacks in the war and lay the foundation for their national citizenship.

Illinois Democrats refused to be cowed. They fought back against the “misapprehension respecting our position” and remained strident that the Democratic Party was the “true Union party.”54 The partisan war of words turned violent on the Illinois home front in 1863. The catalyst was the Enrollment Act passed by Congress that March. Although Illinois did not have to enforce the draft until the fall of 1864, the intrusion of federal bureaucracy into communities in the form of provost marshals sparked outrage. Riled civilians attacked enrolling officers and formed armed groups throughout central and southern Illinois.55 A lieutenant in the Fifty-Eighth Illinois Infantry, who was charged with investigating treasonous activity in the south-central town of Salem, reported to the commander of the District of Illinois in April 1863,

inflammatory speeches are made, incendiary periodicals, and publications are circulated, and threats of the destruction of the property, and the death of Loyal persons, are so rife as to excite in them apprehensions of alarm, and members of

53 *Peoria Daily Transcript*, September 26, 1863.
54 *Chicago Times*, November 20, 1863.
loyal citizens have been driven from their homes. Prominent men are scouring the
country holding meetings of secret societies almost nightly, and often daily.  

From Montgomery County, south of Springfield, a concerned resident warned the
governor, “everything indicates that civil war is almost upon us.” An imprisoned
Confederate soldier who escaped captivity at St. Louis and traveled east across Illinois
told his father that the anti-government sentiment was “very strong” there. In two
locations he disclosed his status as a captured Confederate fighter and “received the very
kindest treatment and when we left we did so with many prayers for our success.”

In June fuel was added to the fire with two bold moves that incensed Democrats.
First, General Ambrose E. Burnside, commander of the Department of the Ohio,
suppressed the staunchly anti-war Chicago Times due to “repeated expression of disloyal
and incendiary sentiments.” Many civilians and politicians on both sides of the aisle
rebuked this flagrant attack on the liberty of the press, and Lincoln rescinded Burnside’s
order three days later. Later that month, Governor Yates took advantage of a
constitutional provision that allowed him to suspend the legislature, which had
reconvened for its second session only nine days prior. Unprecedented in Illinois
history, the Democratic press lashed out at this “insane and revolutionary” act of
prorogation.

56 James E. Moss to Jacob Ammen, April 24, 1863, in Hubbard, Illinois’s War, 114.
57 James Brewster to Richard Yates, March 6, 1863, quoted in Bahde, Life and Death of Gus Reed, 26.
59 Chicago Tribune, June 3, 1863.
60 Harold Holzer, Lincoln and the Power of the Press: The War for Public Opinion (New York: Simon and
61 Nortrup, “Yates, the Prorogued Legislature, and the Constitutional Convention,” 31-34.
62 Chicago Times, reprinted in the Illinois State Register, June 13, 1863.
Illinois Democrats had plenty to protest in 1863, yet they kept race front and center amongst their grievances. Their dire predictions about white subjugation were similar to those made before the war, although now they had an air of prescience. Whereas Republicans gradually embraced the evolving role of blacks in the war, Democrats foresaw in it their own demise. A resolution passed at a Democratic meeting in far southern Union County claimed Republicans “have shown the world their intention not to restore the Union, but to erect upon the ruins of this once happy and free government an Aristocratic Despotism, in which the poor white man will be reduced to the social level of the negro, and the spirit of freedom suppressed by an army of black men.” Republican machinations to eradicate the white race through intermixing were already underway, alerted the Belleville Democrat: “they will first free the negro; then they will make him a soldier; next a voter; and then they will take him to their ‘hearts and homes.’”

To these perceived threats, Democrats redoubled their commitment to white superiority and racial exclusion. The western Carthage Republican vowed to fight for “the exalted pre-eminence, intellectually and physically, of the white race over the black, and to combat the fell schemes of all potentates and powers, great and small, in this land, to assimilate, associate or amalgamate those races.” Democrats in centrally located Logan County did not mince words regarding their animosity toward blacks: “We are unalterably opposed to the emigration of free negroes to this State; that we want these prairies for the white man and his posterity, and we will ever oppose the introduction of

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63 Jonesboro Gazette, February 14, 1863.
64 Belleville Democrat, February 20, 1864.
65 Carthage Republican, October 8, 1863.
such persons into our country, and while we are willing to try the civil process to put them out, if, however, that shall fail, we will drive them out by force.”\textsuperscript{66} Nor were these views confined to Peace Democrats. A group calling itself the Union War Democrats of Illinois held a meeting in Decatur in October 1863. Among the resolutions passed was one stating, “we are opposed to the political and social equality of the white and black races; but we are in favor of the separation of the races, and the colonization of the black race at the earliest practicable period.”\textsuperscript{67}

This extreme racist rhetoric was quickly becoming a uniquely Democratic hallmark. Whereas many Republicans felt compelled to prove their anti-black credentials during the 1860 election, they now distanced themselves from these overt and hostile racial views. For example, one Republican paper described an attack on blacks in Mason County as resulting from “copperhead prejudice to negroes.”\textsuperscript{68} Republicans lampooned Democrats for their fixation on race. The southwestern \textit{Nashville Journal} mockingly listed the symptoms of “Negrophobia” as including utterances such as “‘Abolition war,’ ‘Lincoln’s war,’ ‘habe-ass corpus,’ ‘Constitution violated,’ ‘blessed martyrs [sic],’ and a quantity innumerable of like expressions.” In the advanced stages of this disease, the inflicted would utter such phrases as “Illinois to be flooded with free niggers” and “a slave! A slave! My kingdom for a slave!”\textsuperscript{69}

In addition to ridiculing their opponents’ virulent racism, Illinois Republicans began acknowledging the role that slavery, as opposed to slaveholders, played in bringing

\textsuperscript{66} \textit{Lincoln Herald}, March 5, 1863, in Donath, \textit{Logan County}, 217.

\textsuperscript{67} \textit{Fairfield Prairie Pioneer}, October 29, 1863.

\textsuperscript{68} \textit{Peoria Daily Transcript}, September 19, 1863.

\textsuperscript{69} \textit{Nashville Journal}, February 20, 1863.
about the conflict. By 1863, Republicans had no qualms naming slavery as “the cause of this unhappy condition of our country.” Even more, some had begun to advocate for the complete legal abolition of the institution. Although the Emancipation Proclamation was radical when Lincoln first announced it, observed the *Belleville Advocate*, “it is conservatism now.” The paper recommended expunging all laws that sanctioned the slavery throughout the nation. Up until that year, the northern *Amboy Times* would have accepted terms of peace “under the old order of things.” But now it saw no road to a lasting peace unless slavery were eradicated in its entirety.

At a mass Union meeting in Springfield in September 1863, Isaac N. Arnold, U.S. Representative from Chicago, spoke openly about his desire for Congress to “abolish the remnants of slavery in the rebel States, and prohibit its existence forever.” One of the resolutions adopted at that meeting insisted that slaves freed by the Emancipation Proclamation could never again be re-enslaved. This was a far cry from the party’s earlier declarations that it would not interfere with slavery where it existed. As a result, the label “abolitionist” began to lose its stigma. It is “played out” as a term of abuse, noted the *Chicago Tribune*. The *Peoria Daily Transcript* dared a Copperhead to “bawl ‘abolition’ until his voice cracks, and then let him whistle it the balance of the time till doomsday, without one man stopping or caring to stop to deny the impeachment.”

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70 *Illinois State Journal*, April 18, 1863. This quote is from a meeting of Unionists at Carlinville.
71 *Belleville Advocate*, December 4, 1863.
72 *Amboy Times*, August 20, 1863.
73 *Chicago Tribune*, September 4, 1863.
74 *Chicago Tribune*, November 17, 1863.
75 *Peoria Daily Transcript*, November 9, 1863.
This is not to say that Illinois Republicans came out en masse for racial equality. However, they were staking out a position on race relations that was clearly distinct from the Democrats. Republicans could envision a postwar America that in some capacity included blacks. After all, claimed the *Quincy Daily Whig*, the colonization scheme had been “busted” and there was no time “to permit our conservative grannies” to invent new plans.\(^{76}\) So then what was to become of blacks after the war? Early in the war, the *Whig* scoffed at such a question. The paper “care[d] little what becomes of the negroes,” preferring the earth to open up and swallow every one of them. This was, after all, a “white man’s war,” fought to preserve the rights and liberties of whites.\(^{77}\) Now, two years into the fighting, the *Whig* had a different outlook: “We would have the negro treated respectfully, protected by the law in his personal rights and in his rights of property, free to go where he chooses and to stay as long as he chooses.”\(^{78}\)

Whereas Democrats sought advantage by appealing to perceived white self-interest and remained unwavering in their desire to maintain all legal restrictions against blacks, Republicans were warming to the expanding role of blacks in the war and began to foresee an end to the conflict that would result in freedom for four million individuals. Just over a year into the war the *Chicago Tribune* distinguished these two different ideologies. Democrats, the paper charged, saw blacks as brutes, mere property, whereas Republicans recognized the universal humanity of all. The *Tribune* admitted that “neither party have [sic] any especial sympathy or regard for the black man as an individual,” but one worshipped slavery and the other freedom. This meant that Democrats strove to

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\(^{76}\) *Quincy Daily Whig*, July 3, 1863.

\(^{77}\) *Quincy Daily Whig*, November 1, 1861.

\(^{78}\) *Quincy Daily Whig*, July 3, 1863.
“deprive the colored man of his inalienable right to liberty and the pursuit of happiness,” while Republicans “would endow the colored man with freedom.” What this freedom looked like in practice remained unclear. It would take a Republican return to power in Illinois to put these beliefs to the test. But first Republicans needed to convince a divided home front they were the ones best suited to lead the state into an uncertain future.

“The Whole Union, Universal Freedom”: The Election of 1864

The 1864 campaign season opened bleakly for Republicans. Morale for the war was once again flagging across the North. The spring and summer months saw staggering Union casualties with little military gain. Confederate General Jubal Early’s troops threatened the nation’s capital. In July, Lincoln called for 500,000 more men. For the first time, Illinois could not meet its quota and had to enact the draft. The Bloomington Pantagraph observed, “a feeling very near despondency is settling over the loyal portion of our people.” Soldiers perceived the waning support too. “The war sentiment among the people of the North appears to be at its lowest ebb,” noted Major James Connolly of the 123rd Illinois Infantry in August.

Republicans also suffered from internal rifts. Refashioning themselves as the Union Party, they strove to unite war supporters of various political stripes under their banner. This placed radical abolitionists under the same tent as conservative but pro-Union anti-emancipationists. Moreover, there was widespread dissatisfaction with

79 Chicago Tribune, July 15, 1862.
81 Bloomington Pantagraph, July 11, 1864.
82 James Connolly to Mary Dunn, August 21, 1864, in Angle, Three Years in the Army of the Cumberland, 313.
Lincoln’s managing of the war and serious discussion about placing another candidate on the ticket. A splinter group of radicals backed the party’s first presidential nominee, John C. Frémont, in an aborted campaign that threatened to siphon off votes from Lincoln. Even the Illinois Union State Convention, meeting at the end of May, clashed over Lincoln’s renomination. A resolution giving faint praise to the administration’s war policy ended with a pledge to support Lincoln “if” he received the nomination. The resolution was laid on the table, the committee that wrote it was replaced with another, and a new series of resolutions was adopted by the convention, this time with instructions to “use all honorable means to secure” Lincoln’s renomination at the Baltimore convention in early June.\textsuperscript{83}

Democrats fared little better in fusing their ranks. Though united in their condemnation of how Lincoln prosecuted the war, they divided over how to end it. Peace Democrats wanted an immediate end to hostilities while more moderate Democrats supported the continuation of the war with reunification as the sole goal. Meeting in Chicago in late August, the Democratic National Convention nominated George McClellan for the presidency. The ex-major general appealed to the pro-war mainstream of the party, while conservatives settled for peace advocate George Pendleton for the vice presidential slot. Additionally, notorious Copperhead Clement Vallandigham helped draft the platform, which had a decidedly anti-war bent.\textsuperscript{84} Putting McClellan at the head of a party with a peace platform was a glaring incongruence. Such discord was less stark in Illinois, where Democrats ran Peace men for state office. At the nominating convention


\textsuperscript{84} Weber, Copperheads, 167-75.
in early September, Illinois Democrats unanimously adopted a resolution that declared the war a “failure” and sought “a cessation of hostilities” at once.\textsuperscript{85}

This was essentially the same stance taken by the legislature in 1863. Democrats either overlooked the blowback they received from promoting an armistice the year before or believed that the majority of Illinoians now saw the necessity for one. Apart from the dire Union military outlook in the summer of 1864, one reason they may have been more confident in this strategy now was Lincoln’s mandate that abolition be a condition for peace. In a July letter to two men posing as Confederate peace emissaries, Lincoln laid out his terms for ending the war: reunification and the abolishment of slavery. Whether or not the seceded states needed to end slavery before readmission remained unclear, but they would at least need to agree to its (eventual) demise. For Democrats, this was an unnecessary demand and would only spoil attempts at a negotiated peace. Democrats were careful not to defend slavery per se; instead, they blamed the continuation of the war on zealots who placed black liberty above white lives.\textsuperscript{86} “The half crazed Abolitionists are willing to dissolve the Union and continue this terrible war indefinitely,” complained the northeastern \textit{Joliet Signal}, “in order to free a race of people incapable of enjoying the blessings of freedom.”\textsuperscript{87} Although the Confederate government had given no indication that it would accept anything less than

\textsuperscript{85} \textit{Illinois State Register}, September 7, 1864.


\textsuperscript{87} \textit{Joliet Signal}, October 25, 1864.
independence, Democrats branded themselves as the party of peace and campaigned on their ability to end the war.  

Most Illinois soldiers remained unreceptive to this plan. They continued to seethe at the suggestion that the war be concluded on anything other than southern surrender. “One party seems to want peace,” surmised Major James Connolly. “That suits us here. We want peace too, honorable peace, won in the full light of day, at the cannon’s mouth…instead of cowardly peace purchased at the price of national dishonor.”  

Many Illinois troops continued to view Democrats as disloyal. Joshua Dickerson of the Thirty-Eighth Illinois Infantry swore he would support Jefferson Davis before McClellan, adding hopefully, “I cannot think that there is enough fool Devil yet in the American people to put in power the traitorous choice of the Copperheaded Slavery loving rebble Simpathizing government hating Party.” Many believed, as did James Jessee of the Eighth Illinois Infantry, that a victory for Lincoln would be “the heaviest Blow to the rotten Confederacy.” Because the last legislature deemed that absentee voting was unconstitutional, the pen and paper were often the only means soldiers had to express their views back home. They made sure civilians back in Illinois understood the stakes

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89 James Connolly to Mary Dunn, September 11, 1864, in Angle, Three Years in the Army of the Cumberland, 260.
90 Joshua Dickerson to wife, September 28, 1864, Joshua Dickerson Letters, Illinois History and Lincoln Collections.
91 James Jessee, diary, February 22, 1864, in LaBounty, Civil War Diaries of James W. Jessee, section 5:11.
92 Journal of the House (1863), 589-91. In February 1863, the house judiciary committee determined that deployed enlisted men could not vote in elections because the state constitution prohibited Illinois residents from casting ballots outside their district or on a day not designated by law. Therefore, although the committee “felt an honest desire” to enfranchise soldiers, it was compelled by the constitution to deny them the ability to do so. Democratic papers (such as the Illinois State Register, October 27, 1864) denied that partisan interests motivated this decision. However, the majority reported denying military voting was
of the election. A major in the Thirty-Third Illinois Infantry told his father, “I have never been discouraged about the end of this war, and shall not be, unless McClellan is elected.” He beseeched him, “if you never worked in a political campaign, work now for Lincoln and the Union.”

Undeterred, Democrats positioned themselves as the soldiers’ true friends because they wanted to end the slaughter while Republicans sought to prolong it. The government’s mismanagement of the war had resulted in nothing but death and destruction. At a Democratic rally in Joliet in early November, one banner depicted Lincoln pointing to a heavily populated graveyard. Another read, “nobody hurt—ask the widows and orphans.” Worse still, the North’s sons were being sacrificed to free the slave. The far southern Jonesboro Weekly Gazette counseled its readers that the issue being decided upon in November was whether whites wanted to “lay down their lives for the freedom of the negro.” If victorious, Democrats promised to end the bloodshed. At the same rally in Joliet, a chariot carrying two women—one representing the North, the other the South—rode in the procession with hands clasped and an olive branch suspended above them. A man clad in black, grasping a sword and torch, depicted war. He crushed beneath his feet the “emblems of peace and happiness” while a “drooping” American flag hung feebly above him. Democrats also campaigned as the true defenders of the Constitution, which they claimed the administration desecrated through the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus, the draft, and suppression of free speech.

adopted 46-23. Only one Republican voted for it and no Democrats voted against it. Only four other states (Indiana, Delaware, New Jersey, Oregon) denied soldiers the franchise in 1864.

93 Bureau County Republican, September 29, 1864.
94 Jonesboro Weekly Gazette, August 13, 1864.
95 Joliet Signal, November 8, 1864.
Racial hysteria reached new levels during the presidential contest of 1864, helped in part by a literary swindle. Late in 1864 two writers of the New York World, a staunch Democratic sheet, wrote a pamphlet entitled Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to the American White Man and Negro. Pretending to be an anonymous abolitionist, the authors looked forward to the day when “the highest type of manhood will not be white or black, but brown, or colored.” The war, they hoped, would inaugurate “as its final fruit” this interracial blending. The pamphlet was exposed as a hoax in November, but not before it had entered a new word into the lexicon and given Democrats fuel for the political fire. Editors ran lurid stories about white female abolitionists copulating with black men and accused the Republican Party of angling for the extinction of the white race.⁹⁶

Springfield’s Democratic paper, the Illinois State Register, beat the drum of amalgamation and began referring to Republicans simply as “miscegen.” The paper prophesied a racial dystopia for the state and country should Republicans be victorious at the polls. The writing was already on the wall. If a black man were good enough to fight alongside a white soldier, then it followed that “he is good enough to vote at our elections, and to marry the daughters of white citizens, and that his children are good enough to attend the public schools.” Only the most ignorant of voters could be blind to the fact that Republicans were “tending inevitably towards the entire abolition of all distinctions between the races.” They will first repeal the black exclusion law, the paper predicted, and then admit blacks to all the privileges of citizenship, including the

franchise. The only way to avoid such a dreadful fate was to vote for Democrats, who will “not only keep the negro in his proper inferior position, but will keep them out of the state.” Nothing less than “the freedom of the white race of these United States” was at stake.  

These were the same themes Democrats campaigned on two years earlier, but now more than ever they posed an immediate danger. Some of their worst fears had come to pass. The government had shut down opposition newspapers and arrested dissenters, war casualties were skyrocketing, black men fought in Federal uniforms, and the end of the war was nowhere in sight. Furthermore, the “Abolition Party” now had a plank in their platform endorsing a constitutional amendment to end slavery everywhere. Only four years ago the Republican Party merely wanted “no more territory for slavery,” reminded the *Illinois State Register*. Now, it strove for universal abolition and racial equality, grounds “from which they shrank a few years ago.”

While Illinois Republicans fell short of advocating for racial equality, the *Register* was correct in pointing out the large shift the party had taken towards slavery. Before the war began only the most radical fringe members demanded universal and immediate abolition. Now, this desire had become mainstream. In April the U.S. Senate voted in favor of a constitutional amendment ending slavery throughout the country, but it was later rejected in the House. The Illinois Union State Convention, meeting in May, backed amending the Constitution “to prohibit the existence of slavery within its jurisdiction.”

This was simple and straightforward language. It did not provide any justification for the

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97 *Illinois State Register*, August 6, 9, October 14, 1864.
endorsement, unlike two years earlier when the state convention sanctioned the Emancipation Proclamation “as a great and imperative war measure, essential to the salvation of the Union.” Also unlike the Emancipation Proclamation, which freed slaves only in rebel-controlled areas, the constitutional amendment would end slavery wherever it existed, including the border states. When the Union Party held its national convention the following month, it also approved a plank in its platform to end slavery via a constitutional amendment. Here was the path to a lasting, legal abolition of slavery throughout the country, supported by a major political party.

Democrats were not alone in commenting on this rapid transfiguration. “The world has moved since 1860,” observed the Freeport Journal from northern Illinois. “To strike at the root of the disease, and eradicate it entirely, is now the prescription of all loyal doctors, no matter what former political preferences.” While Democrats continued to blame abolitionists for igniting the powder keg of war, Republicans placed the blame squarely on slavery. The national Union platform declared slavery the “cause” and “strength” of the rebellion. To the east of Freeport, the Rockford Register understood slavery as the source of “three years of unexampled war” but was determined to keep fighting until it was dead and could “never again place the nation’s life in peril.” Even the moderate Illinois State Journal came around to understanding slavery as the root cause of war. Shortly after the bombing of Fort Sumter, the Journal blamed slaveholders for stirring trouble. Now, the paper was predicting how many congressional

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100 Illinois State Journal, September 25, 1862.
101 Freeport Journal, August 24, 1864.
102 For example, see the Joliet Signal, October 25, 1864, the Illinois State Journal, October 3, 1864, and the Rockford Rock River Democrat, September 29, 1864.
103 Rockford Register, July 2, 1864.
seats Republicans would pick up in the election, thereby “insuring the passage of the amendment to the Constitution abolishing slavery, and removing the cause of the war.”\textsuperscript{104}

For Republicans, winning the election was essential to winning the war, but neither of these victories should be purchased at any price. They hoped to attract conservatives and disaffected Democrats to their ranks not by jettisoning abolition or minimizing its connection to the war, but instead by convincing the electorate of its necessity. This was a way for Republicans to “define themselves against the Democrats,” as historian Michael Vorenberg points out. However, this was not simply a political calculation. Contrary to Vorenberg, Illinois Republicans did not downplay emancipation as a campaign issue during the 1864 election.\textsuperscript{105} Their support for it, coupled with a growing commitment to legal equality, marked a shift away from their conservative stance on race. The 1864 presidential campaign was, in the words of historian Adam Smith, a “vital staging post in the revolution in Northern antislavery attitudes…Unionists—whether or not they previously had been antislavery advocates—now conceptualized American nationhood in a way that embraced the end of slavery.”\textsuperscript{106}

Illinois Republicans, who had shown themselves to be far from progressive on matters relating to race and slavery, could have chosen to narrowly frame abolition as a means of ending the war. Instead, many Republicans believed the war had to achieve more than reunification and desired freedom become integral to the Union cause. Campaign rhetoric in 1864 embraced rather than downplayed the changing nature of the war. Republicans at the nominating convention in southwestern St. Clair County passed a

\textsuperscript{104} Illinois State Journal, June 21, 1861, October 18, 1864.

\textsuperscript{105} Vorenberg, Final Freedom, 89-114, 141-75 with the quoted material at 90.

\textsuperscript{106} Smith, No Party Now, 148.
resolution vowing to oppose any presidential candidate who did not “embrace the unconditional salvation of the Union, and ignore every condition for man except that of freedom for all men of every race and of every color.” Republican papers reprinted a list of gains made since Lincoln took office, including emancipation in the District of Columbia, recognition of Haiti and Liberia, black testimony permitted in federal court, integrated streetcars in the nation’s capital, the formation of schools for freedpeople, tens of thousands of blacks serving in the armed forces, and freedom for the soldiers’ wives and children. These were issues that four years earlier Illinois Republicans would have disowned. Banners brought to mass meetings also reflected expanding war aims. At a rally in Princeton, one delegation’s sign read, “The whole union, universal freedom,” while another encouraged “Bullets for rebels, ballots for northern allies.”

Republican racial ideology in 1864 was a far cry from the egalitarian, mixed-race scenario painted by Democrats. But it was undoubtedly liberal in comparison. Whereas Republicans in 1860 strove to distance themselves from accusations of racial equality by overt appeals to whiteness and colonization, in 1864 this rhetoric was muted or absent. Rather than try to match Democratic racial abuses, Republicans frequently scorned them. For example, one banner at a Republican meeting mocked the Democracy’s platform as “the constitution as it is, the negro as he was.” The northern Amboy Times printed the “Copperhead Creed,” a satirical list of conservative Democratic values. Number four on the list parodied Democratic ambivalence towards blacks:

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107 Belleville Advocate, May 6, 1864.
108 Ottawa Republican, July 16, 1864; Belleville Advocate, August 12, 1864.
109 Bureau County Republican, October 20, 1864.
110 Bureau County Republican, October 20, 1864.
A black, unless I know whether he be a slave or a freeman, I neither love nor hate. A black, enslaved, I love—embrace—buy—value—fight for—I could do no more for my God. A black, free, I hate—expel—colonize—hang—I could not do no worse for the Devil. An enslaved black is fragrant—I would be suckled, dandled, played with, fed, dressed, shaved, amused, loved by it. A free black stinks. I would not ride in the same car, walk in the same street, live in the same city or State; and yet I defy any man to say that it is his slavery I love, or his freedom that I hate.¹¹¹

Furthermore, while Democratic politicians complained about black soldiers receiving the same pay as whites,¹¹² Republicans applauded the heroism of black troops and prized loyalty over race. At a Chicago speech in July 1864, Congressman Isaac Arnold told the audience, “I would protect at any cost, every black man or white, who wears the national blue and fights for the old flag. A black patriot is better than a white traitor.”¹¹³ The future “Great Agnostic” Robert G. Ingersoll, whose brother was running for a seat in the U.S. House, spoke at a large Union rally in Springfield a month before the election. Like Arnold, he had greater respect for a black patriot, who was “an honor to his race,” than a white traitor, who was “a disgrace to his,” adding, “I think more of him who sustains the Government than I do of a Democrat with a copy of the Chicago Times in one pocket and McClellan’s report in the other.”¹¹⁴ Republicans maintained this stance even in the Democratic stronghold of southern Illinois. Andrew Kuykendall, a former Democrat of high regard, ran for Congress on the Union ticket in the southernmost district in the state. This was a sign of end times, for “we have seen the lion lie down the lamb,” quipped the Democratic press.¹¹⁵ While stumping in Union County, he was interrupted during his speech by a spectator who asked him “if he did not love the

¹¹¹ Amboy Times, April 28, 1864.
¹¹² Illinois State Register, September 28, 1864.
¹¹³ Chicago Tribune, July 15, 1864.
¹¹⁴ Illinois State Journal, October 6, 1864.
¹¹⁵ Illinois State Register, May 26, 1864.
negroes.” Kuykendall replied that he “thought forty times more of a loyal black man than a disloyal white man.”

This inversion of the racial hierarchy impacted the way whites viewed the place of blacks in America. Rather than existing as permanent outsiders, some moved toward greater acceptance of their belonging to the community and nation. The events of the war that had brought the country to the verge of universal freedom transpired so quickly that Republicans in 1864 failed to develop a coherent view on how blacks would fit into the reunited nation. If Illinois Republicans had any semblance of vision for a post-emancipation society, it was one dictated by the inviolability of natural rights and equal protection under the law. This meant, at the very least, letting “the negro…do for himself and family.” Freedom as it evolved during the war meant more than ending slavery. It necessitated protecting against the most extreme violations of a person’s self-ownership. This mentality was nothing new; Republicans had championed the free labor ideology since the party’s inception. But Illinois Republicans had been wary to embrace its implications for an interracial society. This was evident throughout the 1860 election in their pledges to keep western lands for whites only and in 1861 by their refusal to repeal any of the state’s black laws. However, Illinois Republicans were warming to the idea that universal freedom needed to be accompanied by universal opportunity. Whereas Democrats wanted to simply restore the country, many Republicans began to view the war as a means of national regeneration and an opportunity to fulfill the lofty promises found in the Declaration of Independence. The extreme legal prohibitions leveled

116 Chicago Tribune, August 11, 1864.
117 Carlyle Union Banner, reprinted in the Nashville Journal, January 8, 1864.
118 Manning, What This Cruel War Was Over, 84-84; Smith, No Party Now, 142-47.
against blacks were increasingly correlated with slavery, Democratic malice, and backwardness. To Republicans, lifting them was not seen as bestowing rights upon blacks but rather as removing artificial disabilities against them.

In 1858 Senator Lyman Trumbull had given a speech in Chicago endorsing colonization because he believed “it is better for us that they [blacks] should not be among us…we should not mingle together.”¹¹⁹ Six years later, the co-author of the Thirteenth Amendment articulated a new perspective in a speech at Princeton, Illinois. He endorsed nationwide “constitutional liberty,” wherein the government recognizes “the rights of all men as equal under the law. A government in which every man shall attain that position to which his intelligence, industry and conduct shall entitle him. I want liberty protected by law.” Instead of a systematic relocation of blacks, Trumbull wanted to leave social interactions to individual preference:

We can give them their liberty and protect them in their rights without making them our associates. Our associations are all regulated by our tastes. One man selected one kind of companions, and another a different kind. That is not a matter to be regulated by law, but by choice. If my democratic friends don’t prefer the association of negroes—although he may have the same rights before the law—they need not be afraid of social equality.¹²⁰

To Robert Ingersoll, this form of liberty was not a matter of politics but of natural existence. In a speech at Bryan Hall in Chicago, the former Democrat explained, “if a negro dug the ground and planted the corn thereon, and God blessed that seed with the rain from heaven, the negro had a perfect right to reap the crop, and no matter by what

¹¹⁹ Great Speech of Hon. Lyman Trumbull, 8.
¹²⁰ Bureau County Republican, October 20, 1864.
name they might call it, he who drove him off it was nothing better than a Democratic
thief.”

For many Republicans, pledging support for universal natural rights fit comfortably within a hierarchical racial framework. Whether due to biology, the environment, or divine will, whites, they believed, were superior to all other races. At a Chicago speech just days before the election, Governor Yates espoused the doctrine that the “Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman races are the highest types of humanity, and I believe that the negro is perhaps the lowest type of created humanity, and that between these all the tribes of earth exist.” Yet this did not mean that blacks should be deprived of certain rights. Yates favored “conferring upon every human being the right to the proceeds of his own labor and to all the advantages which he has a right to under the constitution of the United States and our glorious declaration of American Independence...he should be allowed a free, fair and open contest with every other man.”

William Herndon, Lincoln’s last law partner, spoke at the dedication of the Union Wigwam in Springfield and expressed similar views. In more subdued language than Yates, Herndon explained his understanding of the ordering of humanity as an “infinite chain of creation, rising by regular gradations from the lowest and humblest to the greatest and highest being.” This in no way conflicted with his conviction that everyone deserved liberty, which he defined as “the natural and divine rights of each man, let his accidents be what they may, to think, will and act just as he wishes and pleases, working out his own happiness in his own way, subject alone to the equal rights of every other

121 Chicago Tribune, October 7, 1864.
122 Chicago Tribune, November 4, 1864.
man.” The Union platform, Herndon proudly proclaimed, held that liberty was the
“natural and inalienable right of all men,” one to be regulated by the due process of
law.123

Although Republican views of racial justice were shaded by prejudice, their espousal of equality before the law and enjoyment of universal natural rights differed significantly from the racial views of Democrats, who continued to stridently proclaim Illinois a land “by white men, for white men.”124 Democrats backed racial exclusion and philosophically denied that the Declaration of Independence applied to non-whites. Such overt appeals to whiteness disappeared from Illinois Republican campaign rhetoric in 1864. Illinois Republicans not only backed the abolition of slavery, but they did so with the premise that universal liberty needed to be accompanied with natural rights. If blacks were to become free labor workers, they would need basic legal protections to ensure security for themselves and their property.

By the end of the summer, Republicans were uncertain about their prospects in November. Their trouncing at the polls two years earlier had reinvigorated the Democratic Party and remained an open wound. The bleak military outlook, coupled with Lincoln’s July call for half a million more men, reminded a weary North that the war’s end was not imminent. In his “Blind Memorandum,” written in late August, Lincoln expressed grave doubts about his own chances for reelection. As late as mid-October, Elihu B. Washburne, the congressional Republican representative from northwestern Illinois, wrote Lincoln, “it is no use to deceive ourselves about this State…Everything is

124 Illinois State Register, April 3, 1864.
at sixes and sevens; and no head or tail to anything. There is imminent danger of losing the State.”

However, the tide was already turning. Key Union victories revived northern morale. First, Rear Admiral David G. Farragut’s capture of Mobile Bay in August brought encouraging news from the western theater. Then, on September 2, Atlanta fell to General Sherman. “Atlanta answers to Chicago,” crowed the Illinois State Journal, referring to the national Democratic convention that wrapped up only two days earlier. The following month, troops serving under General Sheridan in the Shenandoah Valley enjoyed decisive victories against Early’s columns and took control of that strategic region. The staying power of the Confederacy was severely compromised. Democratic indictments of the war as a hopeless catastrophe lost much of their resonance.

The October congressional elections in Ohio, Indiana, and Pennsylvania gave a good indication of which way the wind was blowing. The Buckeye State gave the Union Party a huge majority. Voters there elected seventeen out of nineteen Republicans to the congressional delegation, up from only five in 1862. Republicans picked up four seats in Indiana, where Oliver P. Morton, the ardent pro-administration governor who (as with Illinois’ governor) had been fighting bitterly with Peace Democrats, was reelected by 20,000 votes. His victory could only have been obtained by “the most stupendous and

126 Illinois State Journal, September 5, 1864.
127 McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom, 761, 774-81.
wholesale fraud,” complained one Democratic paper in Illinois.\textsuperscript{128} In Pennsylvania, the soldiers’ vote helped Republicans score a 13,000 majority.\textsuperscript{129}

Still, Lincoln doubted his odds in Illinois, believing McClellan might well carry his state. His fears were unfounded. On November 8, Illinois joined with the majority of northern voters by electing Lincoln to another term. With only New Jersey, Kentucky, and Delaware going to McClellan, Lincoln enjoyed an easy electoral victory and bested McClellan by over 400,000 votes nationally. Soldiers gave their commander-in-chief irrefutable support with 78 percent of the vote. This was a stinging rebuke to General McClellan and his party’s view on the war.\textsuperscript{130}

In Illinois, Lincoln secured 54 percent of the vote, up from 51 percent four years earlier in that state.\textsuperscript{131} This figure is especially noteworthy considering tens of thousands of Illinois soldiers were barred from casting a ballot, although some came home on furloughs to do so.\textsuperscript{132} Given that only 20 percent of soldiers in Sherman’s western army voted for McClellan, it is likely that Illinois soldiers, had they been permitted to vote, would have given Lincoln a strong majority.\textsuperscript{133} At home, Lincoln’s largest majority came from northern Illinois, which gave 65 percent of the vote to the president. This was a half percentage less than four years earlier. Central Illinois gave Lincoln 49 percent of the vote, just shy one percent more than in 1860. The results in Southern Illinois were most striking. In 1860, only 31 percent of voters cast a ballot for Lincoln. Four years later, 48

\\textsuperscript{128} Illinois State Register, October 13, 1864.
\textsuperscript{129} Waugh, Reelecting Lincoln, 335-36.
\textsuperscript{130} Waugh, Reelecting Lincoln, 339, 354.
\textsuperscript{131} Lincoln received 189,515 votes and McClellan 158,724.
\textsuperscript{133} Waugh, Reelecting Lincoln, 354.
This was a markedly large increase in a region viewed by many outsiders at the start of the war as a hotbed of treason.

Illinois Republicans also scored big in the congressional races. They captured eleven of fourteen seats, up from five seats two years earlier. Their gains came from three districts in central Illinois, one in the southwest, and one in the southernmost district of this state. This last one was a particularly noteworthy upset. In 1862, Democrats had easily captured the district with 69 percent of the vote. Now, the former Democrat Andrew Kuykendall won it with 52 percent of the vote. Republicans also secured the at-large congressional seat with 55 percent of the vote. In each of the three congressional districts that Democrats retained, the percentage of votes for the Democratic candidate decreased from 1862. Additionally, the entire Republican slate of state officers was elected with a 31,000 majority.

The crowning achievement for Republicans was taking back the general assembly, which was all the sweeter after the combative 1863 legislative session. In that legislature, Democrats had held a thin thirteen to twelve majority in the state senate. In 1864 Republicans captured eight of the thirteen senate seats up for election, giving them a majority in the senate of fourteen to eleven. Republicans lost a senate seat in west central Illinois but gained another one from that region. They also picked one up in the district

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134 Here, Southern Illinois is defined by the counties south of and including (from west to east): Calhoun, Jersey, Madison, Bond, Clinton, Marion, Clay, Richland, and Lawrence. Northern Illinois is defined by the counties north of and including (from west to east): Mercer, Henry, Bureau, Putnam, LaSalle, Grundy, and Will. Central Illinois includes the forty-seven counties in between. Percentages were calculated using Allen and Lacey, *Illinois Elections*, 144-45, 154-55.

across the river from St. Louis and another one directly to its the east, where the Republican candidate won by a single vote.\footnote{Secretary of State, “Record of Election Returns,” Record Series 103.033, Illinois State Archives.}

More interesting is the contest for the lower house, since all eighty-five seats were in play. In 1862 Democrats controlled the house fifty-five to thirty. Republicans nearly reversed the numbers, winning fifty-one seats to the Democrats’ thirty-four. Democrats maintained control of twenty-nine districts; in all but two of these, their percentage of the vote decreased from two years earlier. For example, in 1862 the Democratic candidate in the First District, comprising the three most southwestern counties in the state, won with 80 percent of the vote. In 1864, the First’s Democratic candidate garnered only 57 percent of the vote. The biggest gains for Republican representatives came from the border between central and northern Illinois, where they took eleven seats from Democrats. They also picked up four in east-central Illinois, three in the southwestern part of the state, and one in a far southern district that bordered on Kentucky. Overall, northern and east central Illinois went solidly Republican while Democrats won west-central and southern Illinois, with the exception of the area around St. Louis and one far southern district. Illinois remained a divided state with a divided center.\footnote{Secretary of State, “Record of Election Returns,” Record Series 103.033, Illinois State Archives.}

Still, Republicans had made inroads in Egypt. In 1860, only one of the eleven southernmost counties gave a majority to Lincoln. In 1864, five did. Three of these gave Lincoln more than seventy percent of the vote. For example, 97 percent of Johnson county voters went for Stephen Douglass in 1860. In 1864, 76 percent voted for Lincoln. This was undoubtedly partly the influence of Andrew Kuykendall, who stumped for the party in the southern part of the state. His election to Congress gave the southern tip of
Illinois its first Republican representative, and his efforts there most likely helped elect the first Republican state representative from the region.\textsuperscript{138} Also aiding the Union Party cause in southern Illinois was John A. Logan, who left his command of the Fifteenth Corps to stump for Lincoln.\textsuperscript{139} A popular Egyptian Democrat at the start of the war, his political conversion “led thousands out of the mazes of Copperheadism and secret treason.”\textsuperscript{140} The \textit{Illinois State Journal} credited southern Illinois, a region where “fidelity to the Union was tabooed as ‘Abolitionism,’” for the “glorious triumph of the Union cause in this State.”\textsuperscript{141} Republicans were able to claim victory in 1864 due in no small part to new converts in traditionally hostile districts. Even if they all did not share the pro-emancipationist and moderate racial views that many Republican politicians and editors espoused during the campaign, those views were not abhorrent enough to scare them away.

Democrats were understandably dismayed and did not attempt to conceal it. “We are subjugated!” cried the \textit{Carlinville Spectator}, adding, with no little hyperbole, “this world is all a fleeting show, and the land of the free and home of the brave played out.”\textsuperscript{142} The far southern \textit{Jonesboro Weekly Gazette} lamented, “thus passeth away the glory of the American Republic.”\textsuperscript{143} At a time of great strife, the \textit{Illinois State Register} saw the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{138} Kuykendall beat his opponent 11,762 to 10,759. William Looney, the Republican state representative candidate from the Second District (comprising Johnson, Pope, and Massac counties), beat his opponent 3,280 to 957.
\item \textsuperscript{139} Gary W. Kent, “Evolution of Change: The Ideological Migration of John A. Logan During the Civil War Era, As Evidenced in His Public Speaking,” (PhD diss., Southern Illinois University, 1989), 239-58.
\item \textsuperscript{140} Centralia Sentinel, reprinted in the Nashville Journal, November 30, 1865.
\item \textsuperscript{141} Illinois State Journal, November 15, 1864.
\item \textsuperscript{142} Carlinville Spectator, reprinted the Jonesboro Gazette, December 3, 1864.
\item \textsuperscript{143} Jonesboro Weekly Gazette, November 12, 1864.
\end{itemize}
Republican victory as the “heaviest calamity that ever befell this nation.”\textsuperscript{144} The \textit{Joliet Signal} envisaged a “dark future” in store for the prairies of Illinois, which would become an “abode of blacks” after the next legislature repealed the state’s black laws.\textsuperscript{145}

The \textit{Signal’s} prediction about the repeal of the black laws was not baseless. During the campaign, a number of Republicans had broadcast their belief in universal natural rights, which the black laws violated. The radical northeastern \textit{Waukegan Weekly Gazette} believed the issue to be an important one for the election. Drawing on the service of black soldiers, the paper asked, should we “deny to the loyal colored man, who upholds the Government and fights our battles, a retreat among us at the close of his patriotic service”?\textsuperscript{146} The nearby \textit{Aurora Beacon} agreed, calling the black laws an injustice “upon a class of our native born population.” This discrimination was glaring in the face of the “good and valuable service” done by blacks in the army.\textsuperscript{147}

In mid-November the \textit{Chicago Tribune} launched an attack on the black laws in order to “urge the subject upon the attention of our new legislature.” These articles discussed the history of the laws from their earliest incarnation in 1819 to the 1853 exclusion act. They drew upon the discourse of natural rights, arguing that blacks “have the same right to come here and breathe the air of heaven undisturbed as any other human being.” They also used legal arguments for black citizenship by referencing the Privileges and Immunities Clause of the Constitution and Attorney General Edward Bates’ 1862

\textsuperscript{144} \textit{Illinois State Register}, November 10, 1864.  
\textsuperscript{145} \textit{Joliet Signal}, December 6, 1864.  
\textsuperscript{146} \textit{Waukegan Weekly Gazette}, August 8, 1864.  
\textsuperscript{147} \textit{Aurora Beacon}, July 28, 1864.
pronouncement on the subject. The Tribune urged its readers to petition their legislators to repeal these laws.148

Other voices joined the chorus for repeal in the weeks leading up to the convening of the new legislature. The Quincy Daily Whig hoped that the state would soon be rid of such “disgraceful and barbarous enactments” and encouraged residents to circulate petitions to send to their legislators.149 The northern Amboy Times blamed the black laws on the “pro-slavery Democracy” and, apparently forgetting the make-up of the legislature four years earlier, was confident that they would be wiped away once the Republican majority arrived in Springfield.150 Thirty miles south of Amboy in Princeton, the Bureau County Republican believed abolishing these laws was “simple justice” and suggested Democrats who were unhappy with it could immigrate somewhere with a more congenial climate.151 To the east, the Ottawa Republican concurred, calling the exclusion law the utmost “destruction of human rights.”152 The Central Illinois Gazette, out of Urbana, called the black laws “heathenish” and an embarrassment to the people of Illinois.153 The moderate Illinois State Journal urged the general assembly to make repealing these “monstrosities” a top priority.154 A paper in Belleville, near St. Louis, called for the abolishment of laws depriving someone of the rights and privileges of citizenship based on skin color.155 Even from Cairo, at the southern tip of the state, came a call to cleanse

148 Chicago Tribune, November 19, 22, 26, 1864.
149 Quincy Daily Whig, November 28, 1864.
150 Amboy Times, December 22, 1864.
151 Bureau County Republican, December 22, 1864.
152 Ottawa Republican, December 3, 1864.
153 Central Illinois Gazette, November 25, 1864.
155 Belleville Advocate, November 25, 1864.
the statute books of this “burning shame.” Calls for repeal also came from outside the state. Horace Greeley’s New-York Tribune caught wind of the groundswell against the black laws and counseled the incoming legislature to do its duty: “the Union party of Illinois cannot afford to be held responsible for the continuance of these laws. And not merely the Union party, not merely the State, but the [sic] Union itself is made odious and contemptible by the toleration of such legislative barbarity as this.—Away with it forever!”

Newspaper editors were not the only ones advocating for repeal. In the lead-up to the January convening of the new legislature, Illinois blacks launched a concerted effort to disseminate information about the black laws and collect signatures for their abolition. In November Chicago blacks organized a music festival at Metropolitan Hall to raise money for literature and other material useful for the campaign. The following month Chicago hosted the Northwestern Freedmen’s Fair, an event to raise money for the relief of former slaves. At a table just to the left of the entrance at Bryan’s Hall, visitors were invited to sign a repeal petition. Nearly 4,000 did.

Nonetheless, many Illinoisans resisted racial reform. After all, it was less than three years since seven out of ten civilian voters had upheld the black exclusion law. Chicago black activist John Jones noted a number of reasons individuals refused to sign their names to a petition for repeal. Some believed blacks had all the rights they needed. Others thought it appropriate for blacks to testify in civil but not criminal cases. Still

156 Cairo Morning News, December 13, 1864.
158 Chicago Tribune, November 22, 23, 24, 1864.
159 Chicago Tribune, December 22, 26, 1864.
others were ignorant of the black laws and did not understand what their abolishment entailed. Democratic papers pushed back against calls for repeal. For example, the Chicago Times warned that doing so would inevitably lead to social and political equality.

To address these anxieties, that November Jones wrote and published a sixteen-page pamphlet entitled, “The Black Laws of Illinois, and a Few Reasons Why They Should Be Repealed.” Jones began by arguing that blacks, who were “born on the soil, of parents belonging to no other nation or tribe,” were American citizens. The black laws violated both the state and national constitutions by denying some citizens liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Moreover, Jones continued, the laws were ignoble. They could have been written in the “dark ages” but instead “were approved in the nineteenth century by a Christian Legislature.” Jones also pointed out how the black laws could be injurious to whites. For example, a black individual who witnessed a crime between two whites could not testify on behalf of the victim. Self-interest aside, Jones underscored that all Illinois residents, black and white, were “inseparably and rightfully connected…the interest of one, is the interest of all.” He closed by beseeching readers to petition the general assembly to wipe the black laws off the statute books and asked next session’s legislators to “try the experiment.”

Jones would not have long to wait for a response.

“**A Glorious Weeks’ Work**” for the Twenty-Fourth General Assembly

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160 Chicago Tribune, December 9, 1864.
161 Chicago Times, November 29, 1864.
162 Jones, Black Laws of Illinois, 4, 13, 14, 16.
In the days leading up to the convening of the Twenty-Fourth General Assembly on January 2, 1865, Springfield teemed with commotion. Legislators arrived from throughout the state. A few members of the previous prorogued legislature met and officially closed the discredited session. Contenders for the U.S. senate seat came to the capital city with their backers in tow. Advertisements for boarding rooms dotted the newspapers and downtown shops prepared for the uptick in business. The town was abuzz with speculation about the upcoming legislative term. A correspondent of the *Chicago Tribune* reported he heard “but one voice in regard to the Black Laws. All say they must be wiped from the statute book, and it will be done.”

Not leaving anything to chance, John Jones traveled to Springfield as a representative of the Repeal Association of Chicago. He planted himself outside the capitol building morning and night to lobby on behalf of his cause. Jones must have been gratified by the news coming from inside. In his last message to the assembled body, Richard Yates, the outgoing governor who would be chosen as the next senator from Illinois, advised repealing the black laws with a “swift, relentless hand.” Growing out of a “public prejudice against the friends of liberty, and an inhuman feeling towards a poor, unfortunate class of our fellow-citizens,” Yates argued the black laws were “inconsistent with the humanity of the age and the spirit of our free constitution.”

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163 *Chicago Tribune*, December 31, 1864.

164 *Anglo-African (NY)*, January 14, 1865; *Christian Recorder (PA)*, February 25, 1865.

acts as governor, Yates pardoned six men recently convicted under the 1853 exclusion law.\textsuperscript{166}

Agitation for repeal was brewing in both chambers of the general assembly, where legislators introduced a number of petitions for repeal. These came from locations throughout Illinois, such as northern Lake and Will counties and the southwestern town of Alton, where abolitionist Elijah Lovejoy was murdered in 1837.\textsuperscript{167} Participants of the annual meeting of Quakers from southwestern Indiana and eastern Illinois sent a petition to the general assembly to “repeal all constitutional and statute laws which divest \textit{negroes} and \textit{mulattoes} of their natural rights.”\textsuperscript{168} State senator Francis Eastman of Chicago presented a petition that was 125 feet in length and contained 7,000 signatures. The following day he asked to be allowed to add additional names to it. Eastman also introduced a petition from 1,000 residents of Quincy.\textsuperscript{169} The \textit{Chicago Tribune} welcomed this popular support, noting, “petitions continue to pour into the General Assembly from all parts of the State for the repeal of the infamous Black Laws.”\textsuperscript{170} Even the Democratic \textit{Illinois State Register}, which staunchly supported these laws, had to concede, “petitions almost without number are constantly poured into the house and senate praying for the repeal of the black laws.”\textsuperscript{171}

\textsuperscript{166} Bohn, “Richard Yates,” 32-33.


\textsuperscript{168} Journal of the Senate (1865), 231, 239; General Assembly, 1865, “Petitions Black Laws,” Number 30, Illinois State Archives.

\textsuperscript{169} Journal of the Senate (1865), 72, 80, 105; Illinois State Journal, January 6, 7, 12, 1865.

\textsuperscript{170} Chicago Tribune, January 15, 1865.

\textsuperscript{171} Illinois State Register, January 12, 1865.
Despite this outpouring of support for the repeal of the black laws, early in the session on January 4 there was an attempt in the house to make the 1853 exclusion act even more stringent. Ambrose Miller, a Democratic representative from mid-state Logan County, complained that the current law was not adequate to keep out blacks. Worried about job scarcity for returning white soldiers and desiring to maintain “purity of the blood,” Miller asked that the judiciary committee amend the law to more effectively prohibit blacks from moving to Illinois. In a vote that foreshadowed how the struggle over the black laws would proceed, only Democrats supported Miller’s resolution. Republicans successfully tabled it and immediately countered by passing a resolution instructing the judiciary committee to report a bill repealing the black laws.\textsuperscript{172}

Although house Republicans introduced four different bills for the repeal of the black laws, it was a bill originating in the senate that eventually landed on the governor’s desk. On the same day that Representative Miller attempted to strengthen the black laws, Senator Cornelius Lansing of northeastern McHenry County introduced a bill for “An act to repeal certain statues known as the black laws.” After a second reading, the bill headed to the judiciary committee. The substitute bill that came out of the committee specifically targeted three sections in the legal code: the 1853 exclusion act, the prohibition on black and Native American testimony involving whites, and the entire chapter of laws, dating back to 1819, regulating black indentured servants. This last item had long lost its relevance, but, as time would soon tell, the first two remained areas of fierce contention.\textsuperscript{173}

\textsuperscript{172} *Journal of the House* (1865), 76-79.

\textsuperscript{173} *Journal of the Senate* (1865), 67, 157; *Illinois State Journal*, January 20, 1865.
The judiciary committee’s report on the repeal of these laws revealed the impact of the war on Illinois Republican racial ideology. The “lessons of the hour,” the report stated, demanded “equal laws” and for the “oppressed” to “go free.” Social and political equality were matters for the future, but for now the “great and sublime teachings of the age” necessitated abiding by the maxim, “all men are created free and equal.” The nation was awakening to a “new born day” and Illinois needed to purify itself by removing its “deepest stain.” With slavery withering everywhere it existed, Illinois stood in infamy for effectively re-enslaving blacks who entered the state. This was not only an issue of natural rights but of positive law as well. Other states recognized blacks as citizens and therefore, according to the Privileges and Immunities Clause of the U.S. Constitution, they were entitled to come to Illinois. The report mentioned the popular support for repeal as evidenced by the petitions that had poured into the general assembly, as well as the results of the November election, which it claimed were “a virtual repeal of these odious laws.”

The report also anticipated possible objections about the constitutionality of repealing the exclusion law. Because it was enacted as the result of an amendment the 1848 constitution, the legislature’s authority to override the law was open to question. The amendment stipulated that the succeeding general assembly pass an anti-immigration law. This task had fallen to the Sixteenth General Assembly, which convened in 1849. But that legislature had failed to pass such an act while in session, as did the subsequent one. In addition, even if the Sixteenth General Assembly had passed the exclusion law, the committee reasoned, such legislation would be of the same class as any passed by any

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legislature and thus subject to future revisions by the general assembly. Furthermore, the wording of the constitutional amendment provided that the general assembly “shall” pass an anti-black immigration law. The committee translated this as “may,” thereby relieving all general assemblies from the obligation to carry out the legislation authorized by the amendment. Therefore, the judiciary committee reasoned that the 1853 exclusion act could not claim sanctity as constitutional law. The senate ordered the committee’s report to be printed so that the body could examine it prior to a vote on the measure.

In the meantime, Illinois legislators took heed of what was unfolding in the nation’s capital. New life was given to the abolition amendment that had passed in the Senate but failed in the House the previous June. Over the winter, through public lobbying and behind-the-scenes dealing, Republicans labored to secure its passage before Congress adjourned in March 1865. With the start of the new year, debate on the amendment again consumed the House. However, it appeared doubtful that a second vote would turn out differently from the first.

Back in Springfield, Republican legislators added their voice in support of the prospective Thirteenth Amendment. On January 4, the Illinois house passed a resolution urging the state’s congressmen to secure an amendment prohibiting slavery in all the states and territories. The senate concurred later that month. Then, on January 31, the U.S. House narrowly passed the amendment, clearing the way for its ratification by the states. The following morning, Governor Oglesby sent a note to both chambers of the

175 Illinois State Journal, January 20, 1865.
176 Vorenberg, Final Freedom, 176-97.
177 Journal of the House (1865), 79-80.
178 Journal of the Senate (1865), 246-47.
legislature, asking them to ratify the amendment “without delay” so that Illinois could be first to do so. The governor made his case for ratification succinctly: “it is just, it is humane, it is constitutional, it is right to do so. The whole public mind of the country is rapidly arriving at this conclusion. So far as we can by any act of our State destroy this pestilent cause of civil discord, disruption and dissolution—the source of so much unhappiness and misery to the people of the whole nations, let us do so, and do so now.”

The legislature wasted no time. That same day the senate referred the matter to the committee on federal relations, which recommended its passage after the lunchtime break. An attempt to postpone a vote until the following day was defeated, and the senate passed the amendment 18-6. Five Democrats joined with the Republicans in support, one of whom explained his vote as due justice to the slaveholders who “thrust themselves into the Democratic party” and nearly destroyed it. In the house, the amendment was adopted that afternoon 48-28. Unlike in the senate, no Democratic representatives gave their support to it. With the house’s vote, Illinois became the first state to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment, a fitting achievement, claimed the Illinois State Journal, for the “home of Lincoln and Grant.” After nearly four years of devastating warfare, the Rockford Rock River Democrat believed “every drop of blood spilt, has but watered the

179 Journal of the Senate (1865), 314.
180 Journal of the Senate (1865), 315, 319-20.
181 Illinois State Journal, January 25, 1865. This comment was made by Murray McConnell of Morgan County during earlier debate over the adoption of a resolution asking Illinois congressmen to pass an abolition amendment.
182 Journal of the House (1865), 490-91.
183 Illinois State Journal, February 2, 1865.
tree of human liberty.” By the end of the year, three-fourths of the states had ratified the amendment to secure its adoption. Slavery was dead. There would no longer be any property rights in people, but what freedom meant in slavery’s absence remained unclear. This would remain the major conflict during Reconstruction and beyond.

Illinois took an early lead in tackling this issue by repealing its black laws only days after ratifying the Thirteenth Amendment, thereby bringing the matter of black rights in postwar society into sharp relief. The senate acted first. On January 24, the week after the judiciary committee released its report on repealing the black laws, the bill came to a third reading. For the next five hours the body fiercely debated the proposed law, eventually approving it in a strict party vote of 13-10. The house took up the senate bill at a special night session on February 3, adjourning just before midnight. The following morning the house passed it 49-30. Like the senate, the house’s vote fell along party lines. Three days later Governor Oglesby signed the bill into law.

As the voting suggests, the repeal process was a contested affair. Both houses spent hours debating the measure. If these were dead letter, meaningless laws, and some have suggested, then Democratic legislators would not have fought so intensely to prevent their annulment. Nor would Republicans have mounted a united front against them. Even if their enforcement was sporadic or lacking in some parts of the state, their presence on the statute books clearly mattered to both parties.

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184 Rockford Rock River Democrat, February 2, 1865.
186 Journal of the House (1865), 549; 551-52.
187 Journal of the Senate (1865), 420.
The repeal of the black exclusion law was devastating to Democrats. For years they had advocated the vigilant policing of Illinois’ borders and warned of the calamities that would befall the state if the black population increased. Now, with abolition on the horizon and black immigration legal, Democrats braced themselves for a demographic upheaval. “Look out for the hordes of freed blacks that will swarm upon us from the South,” alerted the *Belleville Democrat*.\(^{189}\) Other papers warned that Illinois would now become an “asylum” and “paradise” for blacks who would depress wages and drive white laborers out of work.\(^ {190}\) The editor of Oquawka’s paper, located across the river from Iowa, lamented that “our brave boys will come home from the war after awhile to find darkies working at about half price and themselves left out in the cold.”\(^ {191}\) This was not just an issue of quantity but of kind. Democratic representative William Logan of southern Jackson County expected the blacks who “flood our state” will “lead lives of idleness and crime…You may being them among us, give them lands and furnish them with the implements of husbandry, and they will soon forsake them all and fall into a state of indolence and barbarism. The many fiendish and brutal crimes committed by them should be sufficient to warn us to keep them away from our midst.”\(^ {192}\)

Democrats also resisted doing away with the prohibition on blacks testifying against whites, a law that dated back to the first general assembly.\(^ {193}\)

\(^{189}\) *Belleville Democrat*, February 11, 1865.

\(^{190}\) *Joliet Signal*, February 14, 1865; *Chicago Times*, reprinted in the *New York Herald*, January 30, 1865; *Madison Intelligencer*, February 9, 1865.

\(^{191}\) *Oquawka Spectator*, February 23, 1865.

\(^{192}\) *Illinois State Register*, February 8, 1865.

\(^{193}\) *Laws of Illinois* (1819), 143.
one of two northern states with such a restriction in 1865.\textsuperscript{194} The senator representing the southernmost county in the state refused to consent to a “Hottentot as a witness,” believing it distasteful for a jury to have to judge the credibility of a black individual.\textsuperscript{195} Even more repugnant, according to the representative from Jackson County, was the idea of a black man, who was “predisposed to perjury,” testifying to the “good name and honor of our wives and daughters.”\textsuperscript{196} Interestingly, one Democratic legislator, John T. Lindsay of Peoria, supported lifting the ban on black testimony. He viewed it as a duty rather than a privilege, one that would not “break down the difference between a white man and a black man.”\textsuperscript{197}

Protecting that difference was the driving force behind the Democrats’ opposition to repeal. Many feared that any weakening of the system of racial oppression would open the floodgates to a greater expansion of black rights.\textsuperscript{198} The senator from central Tazewell County pointed out that allowing blacks to testify suggested they possess intelligence and integrity, which could open the door to allowing blacks to become jurors or even voters.\textsuperscript{199} Even if that never came to pass, repealing the black laws sent the message that blacks were welcome in Illinois. According to one Democratic organ, lifting the ban on black immigration was tantamount to shouting, “Lubly Dinah, Sambo, come!”\textsuperscript{200} They

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\textsuperscript{194} Finkelman, “Prelude to the Fourteenth Amendment,” 425. Indiana was the other state.
\textsuperscript{195} \textit{Illinois State Journal}, January 31, 1865.
\textsuperscript{196} \textit{Illinois State Register}, February 8, 1865.
\textsuperscript{197} \textit{Illinois State Journal}, January 31, 1865.
\textsuperscript{198} \textit{Illinois State Register}, February 5, 8, 1865; \textit{Madison Intelligencer}, January 5, February 16, 1865; \textit{Joliet Signal}, January 17, 1865; \textit{Belleville Democrat}, February 11, 1865.
\textsuperscript{199} \textit{Illinois State Journal}, January 31, 1865.
\textsuperscript{200} \textit{Oquawka Spectator}, February 23, 1865.
clearly were not welcome, Democrats argued, citing the 1862 referendum where 71 percent of voters had favored exclusion.

As a practical measure to stop blacks from moving to the state, the 1853 exclusion law was ineffective. But as a symbol of white Illinoisans’ desire to maintain systematic racial dominance throughout the state, it was a powerful statement. It declared, as did one Democratic representative, that “different races can never be brought to consider each other as brethren.” 201 It flatly asserted, as did another Democratic legislator, that “this country is given to the white people.” 202 The black laws were the statutory embodiment of one Democratic senator’s declaration, “I want the noble soil of Illinois for the white man and not for the negro.” 203 Put simply, they served “as a standing notice to all the world that negroes are not wanted here.” 204

Republicans thought so too, but, unlike Democrats, they believed the black laws were a black mark against the state’s reputation, a reason for the state to “blush at its history.” 205 While Illinois Republicans did not necessarily extend an enthusiastic welcome to blacks, they could no longer countenance a legal code that so severely restricted the freedom of a certain class of the population. Numerous Republican legislators and newspapers saw the black laws as an outgrowth of slavery. Like a cancer spreading, claimed the Chicago Journal, immigrants from the slave states had brought their hatred of blacks with them to Illinois, resulting in the barbaric legal code. 206 The

201 Illinois State Register, February 8, 1865.
202 Illinois State Journal, February 1, 1865.
204 Ottawa Free Trader, January 28, 1865.
205 Central Illinois Gazette, February 10, 1865. See also the Alton Telegraph, February 10, 1865.
206 Chicago Journal, reprinted in the Alton Telegraph, January 6, 1865.
Rock River Democrat reprinted an article from the popular New York based Harper’s Weekly, which called the black laws “another proof of the fearful demoralization which slavery had wrought in this country.” They bound Illinois to the “man-seller and woman-whipper,” claimed the Chicago Tribune.

While Illinois’ soldiers helped to destroy slavery in the South, Republicans could advance the cause of freedom in their own backyard. Many understood slavery to be the cause of the war and supported abolition as a goal. It only made sense then to excise the footprint of the “peculiar institution” at home. The black laws were as ruthless as any slave code, argued a Cook County state senator, because they bound, degraded, and tore down other humans. Since Illinois had fought nobly to vanquish slavery, “shall she not also be free,” he asked. A representative from northern Ogle County viewed his support for repeal as a “vote for freedom,” explaining, “the tide of battle, and blood, and death that has flowed over our hearts and hearths, has brought with it a healthy sentiment of freedom.”

That tide also included the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment. The Illinois State Journal congratulated the legislature for having “not only wiped out all traces of the institution of slavery at home, but we have assisted to wipe them out from all the States of the Union.” Commenting on the “progress of freedom” heralded by these two events, the Belvidere Standard marveled at the “rapid succession” with which “great events now

208 Chicago Tribune, February 6, 1865.
209 Illinois State Journal, February 1, 1865.
211 Illinois State Journal, February 17, 1865.
pass.”\textsuperscript{212} The \textit{Chicago Tribune} praised the “men at home” for “hasten[ing] the end of the great war for freedom.”\textsuperscript{213} Illinois would not only be remembered for its heroics on the battlefield, foresaw the \textit{Chicago Journal}; it would also be lauded for “the humanities of the pace which shall follow war.”\textsuperscript{214} It was “A Glorious Weeks’ Work,” read a headline in the \textit{Waukegan Weekly Gazette}.\textsuperscript{215}

The war spurred the repeal of the black laws in other ways. During the debate over repeal, legislators in both chambers brought up the role of black soldiers to the Union cause. In this regard, the punitive nature of the black laws was especially galling. One Republican senator asked his colleagues across the aisle, “why be so reluctant to let the negro come here when every soldier is not only willing to work with him in the trenches, but to fight by his side and to lay down and die with him?”\textsuperscript{216} In the house, a representative found it nightmarish that a black veteran, who had fought rebels “under the federal flag,” could potentially find himself being auctioned off under the 1853 exclusion act if he came to Illinois.\textsuperscript{217} The \textit{Waukegan Weekly Gazette} reasoned that a black veteran deserved to “enjoy the inalienable rights of—‘life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness’” as well as “the protection of our laws and our courts of justice.”\textsuperscript{218} Those who fought for the country’s liberty earned the right to enjoy it themselves.

A more abstract reason Republicans supported repealing the black laws was because they believed doing so was in keeping with “the enlightened sentiment of the

\textsuperscript{212} Belvidere Standard, February 6, 1865.
\textsuperscript{213} Chicago Tribune, February 6, 1865.
\textsuperscript{214} Chicago Journal, reprinted in the Alton Telegraph, January 6, 1865.
\textsuperscript{215} Waukegan Weekly Gazette, February 11, 1865.
\textsuperscript{216} Illinois State Journal, February 1, 1865.
\textsuperscript{217} Illinois State Register, February 8, 1865.
\textsuperscript{218} Waukegan Weekly Gazette, December 17, 1864.
age.”\textsuperscript{219} With military victory on the horizon, many Republicans felt they were at the dawn of a liberal awakening, one where people would not be held as property. Removing the barbaric remnants of slavery from Illinois’ legal code was a necessary step to atone for “past wrongs” and the “white man’s cupidity.”\textsuperscript{220} This was the “work of political regeneration,” according to the Republican \textit{Rockford Democrat}.\textsuperscript{221} It promised, wrote the \textit{Illinois State Journal}, to bring Illinois to the “front rank of free States.”\textsuperscript{222} The north-central \textit{Bureau County Republican} hailed the “progressive, radical and advancing character” of the repeal measure. This was a very different tone compared to five years earlier, when the paper stressed the conservative credentials of the Republican Party. Now, the paper criticized Democrats who opposed repeal for their “conservatism, prejudice, and hatred.”\textsuperscript{223} The future was going to be one where Americans would build each other up instead of tear each other down, foresaw a Republican state senator. He warned those who stood “across the path of the progressive chariot of this age” that they would be “ground to dust.”\textsuperscript{224}

Republicans’ liberal stance on racial justice set them apart from Democrats, but they remained fractured over how far to take it. Though they presented a united front in repealing the black laws, they disagreed over the appropriate extent of black civic and political involvement. While some Republicans publicly voiced their support for a greater expansion of black rights, including the vote, others resisted any further changes. For

\textsuperscript{219} \textit{Illinois State Journal}, February 6, 1865.

\textsuperscript{220} \textit{Chicago Journal}, reprinted in the \textit{Alton Telegraph}, January 6, 1865; \textit{Belvidere Standard}, February 6, 1865.

\textsuperscript{221} \textit{Rockford Democrat}, January 26, 1865.

\textsuperscript{222} \textit{Illinois State Journal}, February 18, 1865.

\textsuperscript{223} \textit{Bureau County Republican}, January 12, 1860, December 22, 1864.

\textsuperscript{224} \textit{Illinois State Journal}, February 1, 1865.
example, shortly after voting to repeal the black laws, a Republican state senator from southwestern Madison County objected to a bill for the establishment of an industrial university on the grounds that it did not exclude blacks. “Notwithstanding that I am a Republican,” he explained, “I am, and forever will be, opposed to mixing whites and blacks together in our schools, colleges and seminaries.” When challenged by a Democrat on why, given this point of view, he had voted to repeal the blacks laws, he replied, “there is a very great difference between voting for the abolition of these laws, and, when you are establishing a college, voting for the admission of blacks and whites indiscriminately. If we have the negro here we ought to have them educated, and to this end we should have [separate] colleges on purpose for them.” On the other end of the spectrum, during the same debate, a Republican senator from northeastern Kankakee County asserted that he would not vote for the bill if it did in fact exclude blacks. It is perhaps not surprising that these two senators represented different geographical, and therefore demographic, regions of the state.

This spectrum of sentiment was nothing new to the Republican Party. Just as before the war, Republicans who professed the strongest concerns for racial equality hailed from northern Illinois. Even after the war Radical Republicans remained a minority. Instead, the metamorphosis occurred among the central and southern members of the party. These were the party members who had voted against repealing any of the black laws when Republicans took control of the general assembly in 1861. Their shift to a more moderate view on black rights allowed the vote for repeal to succeed. As the

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senator who protested black admission to the industrial university saw it, repealing the black laws was a matter of “justice.”

It was on this idea of justice that Illinois Republicans found common ground at the end of the war. Their support for the repeal of the black laws was rooted in a discourse on natural rights and commonly articulated with an indifference towards race. For example, the Ottawa Republican objected to the 1853 exclusion law for “keeping out, and driving out, unoffending people, however poor, or of whatever complexion.”

Unlike Democrats, Republicans did not consider repealing these laws as extending privileges to blacks. Rather, they saw it as the elimination of punitive barriers to self-sufficiency. To the opponents of repeal, the Illinois State Journal asked, “why not allow ‘the negro to take care of himself,’’ instead of placing him under disabilities which effectually prevent his doing so?’ It was pointless, argued the Belvidere Standard, “to concoct schemes to colonize him in some place that he does not wish to go to…the best thing to do is to let him alone and allow him to do for himself.”

Democrats feared that lifting legal discriminations would weaken white supremacy, but Republicans saw it as neither a net gain nor a loss. A Republican state senator said he felt no threat from blacks making the best life that they could for themselves in Illinois: “It would not make me poor—it would not destroy my rights.”

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227 Ottawa Republican, January 28, 1865.
228 Illinois State Journal, January 26, 1865.
229 Belvidere Standard, June 6, 1865.
230 Illinois State Journal, February 1, 1865.
Allowing them to do so was nothing more than “simple justice” and a “fair show,” alleged the Bureau County Republican.\textsuperscript{231}

To ensure what Republicans considered to be a fair shot at self-sufficiency, blacks had to be secure in their natural rights. They had the same right to live under the broad sky of Illinois as anyone else, claimed the Chicago Journal. But, in order for this to happen, “the black race must be recognized as having rights.”\textsuperscript{232} In a play on Chief Justice Taney’s Dred Scott decision, a Republican state representative declared, “the age in which we live demands that the colored man in the free state of Illinois shall have some rights which white men are bound to respect.” These did not include political rights, only the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.\textsuperscript{233} Another representative eloquently summarized why Republicans supported repeal:

There are certain rights which the black man is as much entitled to as the white man; such as the natural and divine law recognize man endowed with [sic], we claim is due the negro the same as any other human being. And why not? Because a person has a weak mind, or is uncomely in features or form, or has a black skin, should the law withdraw its protection from him, or because he may belong to an inferior race, has he no rights which the superior race is bound to respect? If that be so, we are a little if any above the brute creation, for they manifest more tenderness, or at least less ferocity towards the weak than their equals…the first duty of government is to provide proper protection to her citizens or subjects, and to see that these natural rights are not invaded; and that is all the republican or abolition party ever proposed to do. We never proposed to do anything in favor of the negro, but simply to cease to abuse, rob, and oppress him.\textsuperscript{234}

Black Illinoisans were not oblivious to the prejudice embedded in these arguments. Nonetheless, they recognized the repeal of the black laws as a major accomplishment and celebrated with public commemorations in cities throughout the

\textsuperscript{231}Bureau County Republican, December 22, 1864.

\textsuperscript{232}Chicago Journal, reprinted in the Alton Telegraph, January 6, 1865.

\textsuperscript{233}Illinois State Register, February 8, 1865.

\textsuperscript{234}Illinois State Register, February 8, 1865.
state. In Springfield, John Jones received a gift bearing the inscription, “Remember, this is the Western hero, against the black laws. Through his untiring zeal these odious laws were repealed.” Black residents of Alton paraded through the city before congregating at City Hall, where they enjoyed speeches and dancing until the early hours of the morning. At the celebration in Chicago, a reverend performed a funeral sermon for the black laws. Another speaker asked audience members to forgive him for not addressing them as “fellow citizens,” for having so recently become a citizen he did not yet have that word in his vocabulary.

No one at the meeting corrected the speaker by telling him that the state of Illinois still did not recognize him as a citizen. At the close of the Civil War, the meaning of citizenship and the rights associated with it remained a contested arena. Illinois blacks could not sit on juries, vote, hold office, marry whites, or send their children to public schools. The passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1866 and the adoption of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868 did nothing to change that. They did, however, establish the precedence of a national citizenship, safeguarded by equal protection under the law. Although enforcement of this fundamental principle was, and remains, problematic, it nonetheless transformed the way Americans understood their rights and how to secure them. The repeal of the black laws in Illinois both shaped and was shaped by the national process of Reconstruction, giving meaning to emancipation in a free state and establishing the foundation for future civil rights movements.

235 Christian Recorder (PA), February 18, 1865.
236 Alton Telegraph, February 17, 1865.
237 Chicago Tribune, February 14, 1865.
Epilogue

The southern Illinois town of Salem hosted a massive Fourth of July celebration in 1866. The crowd, estimated to be between 20,000 and 40,000, enjoyed a day of songs and speeches, interrupted by a midday picnic lunch. Casks of ice water scattered throughout the grove provided relief from the summer heat, while intermittent clouds offered momentary respite from the overhead sun. With the exception of an intrusive wandering cow, the day passed smoothly. In addition to celebrating the ninetieth birthday of the country, attendees also commemorated those who had so recently fought to sustain it. Illinois regimental battle flags, torn and tattered, draped the speaker’s stand where General Sherman captivated the audience by recounting his march to the sea.¹

This was not just a day for reminiscing, however. Only a little over a year had passed since the war ended. Physical and psychological wounds remained raw, and Americans continued to grapple with the meaning of so profound an upheaval. John A. Logan spoke to these concerns at Salem. In the esteemed general’s judgment, the great questions faced by the nation, which “have grown out of this rebellion,” revolved around liberty. Logan threw his full support behind the Civil Rights Act, passed over President Johnson’s veto in April, and the Fourteenth Amendment, then in the early stage of ratification. The government had an obligation, he believed, to safeguard the civil rights of all its citizens, which included every “man, woman and child, irrespective of color.”²

There were likely some in attendance who remembered Logan as the state legislator who introduced and authored the 1853 law criminalizing black immigration.

¹ Centralia Sentinel, July 5, 12, 1866; Illinois State Journal, July 6, 1866; Chicago Tribune, July 6, 1866; Western Reserve Chronicle (OH), July 18, 1866.
² Illinois State Journal, July 10, 11, 1866.
Others may have recalled that he earned the nickname “Dirty Work” by his impassioned defense of the Fugitive Slave Act as a freshman congressman in 1859. Now, he stood before them making the case for universal citizenship and the “right of locomotion” for everyone born on American soil. How had one of Egypt’s most revered Democratic politicians become an outspoken advocate for black rights? Logan explained it this way:

I have had my prejudices just as other men in this land, but when I marched with the columns of loyal men on Southern soil and saw the flag of treason defiantly flaunted in our faces, when I looked around me and asked for friends I appealed to the white man in vain; he was the friend of the traitor, the sympathizer with rebellion; he owed allegiance, he thought, to treason and not to the Government of the United States. But at the deep, dark hour of the night, the poor colored man, bowed down by the chains of slavery, would crawl through the marshes, through the thickets, wade the rivers, and come into your picket lines, into your camps, and tell you where the rebel forces lay, and how you might attack treason and destroy it. (Cheers) That is the reason why I cared not when I found a man that was my friend—a friend to my country, though his skin was black. I could trust him sooner than I could the white traitor. (‘That’s so.’) Hence I want him to have the protection of the law; I am in favor of his having it, and ever shall be until he does get it.

That fall Logan ran on the Republican ticket for the at-large congressional seat, easily capturing it with 58 percent of the vote. Republicans also gained seats in the general assembly, giving the party its highest majorities ever. Democratic predictions that the repeal of the black laws would “forever sink” the Illinois Republican Party came

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6 Republicans outnumbered Democrats sixteen to nine in the state senate and sixty to twenty-five in the state house. Moses, *Historical and Statistical*, 2:1189.
to naught.\textsuperscript{7} Instead, Republicans touted their role in bringing about “the equality of all men before the law” and for years shamed Democrats for their opposition to repeal.\textsuperscript{8}

The alliances Logan and other white Illinois troops formed across racial lines serve as reminders that racial prejudice is not fixed and unchangeable. While some soldiers forgot about these relationships by the time they mustered out of service, for others they were formative experiences that made a lasting impact on their worldview. Thirty years after the war began, a former officer of the Twelfth Illinois Cavalry spoke at a memorial dedication at Gettysburg. William Luff extolled the war for allowing all Americans to be “born free and equal and with equal rights before the law.”\textsuperscript{9} Although it is impossible to gauge how many Illinoisans reflected back on the war as a boon for racial justice, the prevailing historical view that white northerners eschewed slavery’s role in the war for the sake of national reconciliation has been challenged in recent years by scholarship documenting their ongoing commitment to black freedom.\textsuperscript{10}

Racial justice was, of course, a moving target. Those who believed that repealing the black laws achieved it soon saw the need for the federal government to protect the

\textsuperscript{7} Speech of William H. Logan, \textit{Illinois State Register}, February 8, 1865. See also the speech of Murray McConnell, \textit{Illinois State Journal}, February 1, 1865.


right of citizens by way of the Fourteenth Amendment. Not long after, they rallied behind
the Fifteenth Amendment, an admission that political rights were imperative for
safeguarding civic rights. Black suffrage “ought, and we fervently trust will, take the
negro question finally out of American politics,” presumed an Illinois Republican
newspaper, adding, the black man “can ask no further legislation in his favor.”11 A new
state constitution ratified in 1870 made no distinctions on account of race. By the
estimation of many whites, all barriers to equality had been removed. The absence of
legal discrimination meant individuals would rise or fall on their own merits.

Illinois blacks understood better than anyone how momentous these legal changes
were, and how insufficient. Equal opportunity remained a chimera as long as black
children were barred from public education or forced into inferior, separate facilities.
Two state laws passed in 1872 and 1874 significantly increased access to primary
education for blacks, although local districts remained the final arbiter of whether or not
to integrate schools. The burden, financial and ideological, remained on blacks to
challenge segregation through the court system. Eighty years after the start of the Civil
War, over 9,000 students attended “colored schools” throughout the state.12

Racial justice in other public spaces also had an ambivalent trajectory. Blacks
were often forced into secluded sections in restaurants, theaters, and cars, or refused entry
altogether. According to one resident in 1885, Chicago was “getting to be as bad as a
Southern city.”13 Shortly after the Supreme Court struck down the Civil Rights Act of

11 Peoria Weekly Transcript, March 11, 1869, quoted in Roger Bridges, “Equality Deferred: Civil Rights
93.

12 McCaul, Black Struggle for Public Schooling, 108-42.

13 Chicago Tribune, January 5, 1885.
1875, Illinois, along with numerous other northern states, passed its own version of the law. The Illinois Civil Rights Act of 1885, introduced in the general assembly by the state’s first black legislator, aimed to ensure that all citizens enjoyed the “full and equal enjoyment” of public accommodations. However, just as with the national civil rights law, enforcement was problematic. Few offenders faced criminal charges, and judgments in civil cases were often less than the cost of bringing the case to trial.\textsuperscript{14} 

No longer legally barred from coming into the state, blacks found themselves excluded in other ways in the late nineteenth century. From the suburbs of Chicago to the hamlets of Egypt, whites employed various tactics, such as violence and intimidation, to expel blacks or prevent them from taking up residence. A particularly brutal example of this occurred in 1898 in Pana, where a fierce and bloody backlash against black strikebreakers at a coal mine drove away almost all the town’s black residents.\textsuperscript{15} Mine owners throughout Illinois frequently utilized blacks in labor disputes, an effective strategy since blacks were shut out of unions and could not obtain such work otherwise.\textsuperscript{16} Occupational segregation was not limited to the mines. Blacks faced limited employment opportunities and depressed wages across industries. In Springfield at the turn of the century, 82 percent of black males worked in semi- or unskilled jobs, compared to 39


\textsuperscript{15} James Loewen, \textit{Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism} (New York: New Press, 2005), 61, 137-63, 159-61. Loewen estimates that Illinois had nearly five hundred towns that were nearly all white due to formal and informal exclusion policies.

percent of white males. Of the 900 employees at a watch manufacturer in the city, the only black worker was a janitor.\textsuperscript{17}

Equality under the law did not always translate to equality in practice. The civil liberties gained by blacks in the postwar years did not dismantle the varied and intersecting forms of systemic racism that continue to sustain white supremacy. Yet the failures of Reconstruction should not diminish its triumphs. While the repeal of the black laws was insufficient to secure equal protection under the law, it was a necessary step to begin that process in Illinois. The elimination of discriminatory legislation in Illinois was an unforeseen consequence of the Civil War. The rights blacks gained at the close of the war were scarcely imaginable only a few years earlier. They had real and profound consequences. Being black in Illinois was no longer a crime. The law ceased to mark blacks as foreigners and conceded their entitlement to the soil of the Prairie State. Whites could no longer wield the law as an ever-present threat against black lives and livelihoods. General Logan’s personal transformation on black rights may not have been typical, but the racial assumptions held by the majority of white Illinoisans were shaken during the course of the war. Some whites embraced the expanding sphere of civil rights as a reflection of their own evolving attitudes on race, while others were dragged reluctantly into a future not of their choosing. All, however, had to accept that there were some rights that did not belong only to them. No political party would ever again campaign on the promise of keeping blacks out of Illinois.

These victories were incomplete but not insignificant. Revisionist historians of the Reconstruction era often lament the Republican retreat from egalitarianism that

\textsuperscript{17} Blocker, \textit{Little More Freedom}, 78.
momentarily foreshadowed a radical restructuring of the racial order in American society. In Illinois, the problem was not that Republicans backpedaled on their commitment to equality under the law, but rather that they believed the measures they championed were enough.
Appendix A:

Illinois County Map
### Appendix B:

**County Origins of Illinois Civil War Military Units**

#### Infantry Units

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<tr>
<th>Regiment</th>
<th>County Origins</th>
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<td>Adams, Clark, DeKalb, Henderson, Knox, LaSalle (three-month volunteers only), Madison, Morgan, Randolph (plus one company from out of state)</td>
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<td>Carroll, Jersey, Macoupin, Madison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>145th</td>
<td>Cass, DeWitt, Jackson, Johnson, Logan, Macon, McLean, Morgan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>146th</td>
<td>Bureau, Carroll, Lake, McLean, Peoria, Stephenson, Tazewell, Winnebago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>147th</td>
<td>Cook, DeKalb, Kankakee, Kendall, Lake, LaSalle, Stephenson, Whiteside (plus one company from state at large)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>148th</td>
<td>Adams, Bureau, Fulton, Henry, Pike, Tazewell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>149th</td>
<td>Brown, Douglas, Sangamon, St. Clair, Vermilion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150th</td>
<td>Edgar, Iroquois, Madison, McLean, Randolph, Vermilion (plus one company from state at large)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>151st</td>
<td>Adams, Bureau, Fulton, Henry, Lee, McDonough, Peoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>152nd</td>
<td>Clark, Crawford, Edwards, Lee, Macon, Macoupin, Marion, McLean, Menard, Sangamon, Tazewell (plus one company from state at large)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>153rd</td>
<td>Bureau, Cook, Kane, Lake, McHenry, Winnebago (plus two companies from state at large)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>154th</td>
<td>Champaign, Douglas, Effingham, Lawrence, Madison, Morgan, Randolph, Washington (plus two companies from state at large)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>155&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Crawford, Hamilton, Jasper, Logan, Morgan, Peoria, Randolph, Richland, Rock Island (plus one company from state at large)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>156&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Cook, DeKalb, DuPage, Kane, Kankakee, Kendall, Whiteside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sturgis Rifles</td>
<td>Cook</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Cavalry Units**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Adams, Coles, Gallatin, Knox, Marion, Marshall, McDonough, McLean, Montgomery, Peoria, Pike, Saline, Sangamon, Warren, White, Winnebago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Adams, Champaign, Douglas, Hancock, Jersey, Logan, Macon, Madison, Mason, McDonough, Ogle, Piatt, Pike, St. Clair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Adams, Bond, Brown, Cass, Christian, Fulton, Livingston, Macoupin, McLean, Saline, Tazewell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Cook, Kankakee, Kendall, LaSalle, Logan, McLean, Putnam, Rock Island, Vermilion, Will, Woodford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Clinton, Coles, Crawford, Cumberland, Effingham, McLean, Moultrie, Pike, Randolph, Shelby, Washington, Wayne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Alexander, Edwards, Hamilton, Jackson, Johnson, Massac, Morgan, Perry, Pope, Richland, Saline, Scott, Union, Williamson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Carroll, Christian, Edgar, Fayette, Fulton, Gallatin, Knox, Lee, Macon, McDonough, Ogle, Randolph, Saline, Shelby, Warren, White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Cook, DeKalb, DuPage, Franklin, Gallatin, Kane, LaSalle, McHenry, Pike, Whiteside, Winnebago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Boone, Bureau, Cook, Henry, Iroquois, Rock Island (plus two independent companies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Brown, Champaign, Coles, Cook, Kankakee, Madison, Menard, Sangamon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Fulton, Henderson, Knox, McDonough, Peoria, Tazewell, Warren</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Cook, DuPage, Greene, Hancock, Jersey, Kankakee, Ogle, Warren, Winnebago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Cook, Jackson, Kane, Kendall, Pope Washington, Will (plus two companies from state at large)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>DeKalb, Fayette, Gallatin, Johnson, Knox, Logan, Peoria, Rock Island, Stephenson, White</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
15th
Alexander, Clinton, Franklin, Fulton, Jackson, Kane, LaSalle, Massac, Perry, Pope, Winnebago

16th
Cook, Hancock, Kane, Sangamon, St. Clair (plus two companies from out of state)

17th
Cook, DeKalb, DuPage, Jo Daviess, Lake, Livingston, McHenry, Ogle, Winnebago (plus one company from state at large)

Artillery Units

1st
Alexander, Cook, DeKalb, Lake, LaSalle, Lee, Ogle, Pope, Winnebago (plus two batteries from state at large)

2nd
Adams, Alexander, Clark, Coles, Cook, DeKalb, Johnson, Macon, Morgan, Ogle, Peoria, Winnebago (plus three batteries from state at large)

Independent Artillery

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chicago Board of Trade Independent Battery Light Artillery</td>
<td>Cook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago Mercantile Independent Battery Light Artillery</td>
<td>Cook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Cogswell’s Battery Light Artillery</td>
<td>LaSalle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colvin’s Independent Battery Light Artillery</td>
<td>Pope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henshaw’s Independent Battery Light Artillery</td>
<td>LaSalle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renwick’s Elgin Independent Battery Light Artillery</td>
<td>Kane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Springfield Independent Light Artillery</td>
<td>Marshall, Sangamon, St. Clair</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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   Humphrey H. Hood Papers
   John C. Dinsmore Papers
   Joseph T. Eccles Papers
   Letters to Theoda S. Fulton
   Levi Ross Papers
   O. M. Hatch Papers
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   Payne Family Papers
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Ronn Palm Collection
Rudolph Haerle Collection
Vreeland-Warden Papers

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