

# ‘Egypt’ and Emancipation: An Exploration of Political Partisanship in Wartime Illinois

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Traditionally, the midterm elections of 1862 have served as little more than a footnote in histories of the Civil War era. The dramatic presidential elections of 1860 and 1864 have understandably garnered significant scholarly attention, given the centrality of Abraham Lincoln in both the popular and academic imagination. Nevertheless, the congressional and statewide races of 1862 offer valuable insights into the political mindset of Northerners after a year and a half of war.<sup>1</sup> This period marked a profound change in the nature of the Union cause. Having begun the war with the intent to restore the Union to the antebellum status quo, President Lincoln chose to dramatically raise the stakes of the conflict in September 1862 by embracing the abolition of slavery in the rebelling Confederate States. Labeling emancipation a matter of military necessity, Lincoln justified this radical action through his powers as Commander-in-Chief granted in Article II, section two of the United States Constitution. However, this action was not without controversy. Indeed, the Republican Party’s fragile coalition of radical, moderate, and conservative elements faltered, and in places collapsed completely, as a result. Lincoln’s home state of Illinois provides keen insights into the political convulsion that followed the release of the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation.

This paper seeks to offer a comprehensive review of the politics of Illinois in this critical election year. Specifically, I will examine why the Republican

Party, triumphant in Illinois in 1860, failed to carry the critical battleground districts of central Illinois in 1862. Building on the work of other scholars, I will argue that the Republican Party misconstrued the priorities and predilections of Illinois’ “swing” voters in 1862, producing an electoral catastrophe that energized the anti-war Democrats, or Copperheads. This mischaracterization centered around a shift in the state’s racial politics as the Lincoln administration flirted with, and finally committed to, a policy of emancipation.

While the Republicans successfully campaigned against the adoption of a pro-Democratic state constitution in June 1862, the evolution of Republican war aims in the summer and fall of that same year outpaced alterations to the party’s message. When the Republican government committed to a policy of emancipation in September, Illinois’s Democrats pounced and exploited the deeply rooted racial animosity of “moderate” voters to their advantage.

Although the rhetoric of white supremacy had served as a tool for the Democratic Party throughout the 1850s, the radical and untested policy of emancipation offered legitimacy to their critique of “Black Republicanism” in the minds of many voters. Republicans had previously attracted moderate voters by framing their anti-slavery positions as an essential counter to the aristocratic and disloyal Southern “Slave Power,” which sought to subvert the Constitution and undermine opportunities for the white yeomanry. However, in 1862 Republican organs throughout the state failed to offer a convincing conservative argument for eman-

<sup>1</sup> See James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 591-611.

cipation.<sup>2</sup> As a result, in conjunction with the Union military setbacks in the summer and fall of 1862, these agitated racial prejudices of “swing” voters delivered the Democrats a convincing victory.

### **Literature Review**

Within the narrow topic of the elections of 1862 in Illinois, Bruce Tap and Bruce S. Allardice each offer comprehensive explanations for the Republican defeat in these midterms.<sup>3</sup> Both scholars conclude that the Democrats benefited from widespread dissatisfaction with Republican war policies, especially those that voters perceived as “racially subversive.” Relying on the more distant scholarship of Jacques Voegeli, both authors advance the argument that, in addition to military setbacks, the lower Midwest’s racist response to the Second Confiscation Act and the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation propelled Democrats to victory in 1862.<sup>4</sup> Tap attributes the Democratic congressional pickups in Illinois to an ill-timed order by Secretary of War Edwin Stanton issued on September 18, 1862, which temporarily resettled hundreds of ex-slave “contrabands” in southern and central Illinois. Analyzed in conjunction with Lincoln’s preliminary Emancipation Proclamation issued four days later, the swing voters of central Illinois believed that the Republicans intended

to “Africanize” Illinois while waging a radical war of emancipation rather than a conservative war to preserve the Federal Union.<sup>5</sup> Allardice concurs with Tap but also emphasizes that the disenfranchisement, via military service, of large numbers of Republican voters and activists contributed equally to the Republican defeat. The following analysis will focus primarily on the political messages broadcast by Illinois Republicans leading up to the elections of 1862. To what extent did the Republican leadership recognize the political damage done by the administration’s emancipation policy? What measures, if any, did they take to retain the support of moderate voters?

### **The Republican Coalition and Partisan Realignment in Illinois**

Two of the most notable accounts of the rise of the Republican Party, Eric Foner’s *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men* and Richard H. Sewell’s *Ballots for Freedom*, reveal that the Republican coalition built in the wake of the Kansas-Nebraska Act united disparate interest groups under the broad banner of antislavery.<sup>6</sup> Ranging in outlook from the moralizing Conscience Whig Charles Sumner of Massachusetts to the fierce Jacksonian Democrat Francis P. Blair of Maryland, the new party rallied around their shared opposition to the Southern “Slave Power,” which limited opportunity for Western settlers and degraded the labor of white working men. Drawn from the anti-slavery elements within the old Second Party System, as well as former Free-Soilers and Independent Democrats, the Republicans

2 This return to the “Founders” argument is articulated in Abraham Lincoln’s “Cooper Union” speech, delivered on February 27, 1860. Plank 8 of the 1860 Republican National Platform, adopted May 17 in Chicago, echoes this perspective. See [www.abrahamlincolnonline.org](http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org). See also Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, “Republican Party Platform of 1860,” *The American Presidency Project*, The University of California, Santa Barbara, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29620>.

3 Bruce Tap, “Race, Rhetoric, and Emancipation: The Election of 1862 in Illinois,” *Civil War History* 39, no. 2 (1993), pp. 101-125; Bruce S. Allardice, “‘Illinois is Rotten with Traitors:’ The Republican Defeat in the 1862 State Election,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 104, no. 1/2 (2011), pp. 97-114.

4 See Jacques Voegeli, “The Northwest and the Race Issue, 1861-1862,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 50, no. 2 (1963), pp. 235-251.

5 Tap, “Race, Rhetoric, and Emancipation,” 102.

6 Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); Richard H. Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United States 1837-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976). William Lloyd Garrison, best known as the editor for the abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator*, was a leader of the American Anti-Slavery Society, which demanded immediate universal emancipation and denounced the U.S. Constitution as an immoral compact with the sin of slavery.

established themselves as a viable opposition to the Democratic Party by the Presidential Election of 1856. While divisions remained within the Party as to the role of the Federal Government in finance and commerce, as neither the ex-Whigs nor the anti-slavery Jacksonians fully abandoned their former identities within this new alliance, both factions prioritized anti-slavery policies over other domestic issues. As Sewell convincingly argues, the Republican Party viewed itself in moral terms. Although not as radical as Garrisonian abolitionists, the coalition saw slavery as an evil that violated the natural rights of both blacks and whites.<sup>7</sup> Confident that their Northern system of free labor offered the best path forward for civilization, the new party framed “their anti-slavery program as one part of a world-wide movement from absolutism to democracy, aristocracy to equality, backwardness to modernity.”<sup>8</sup>

However, this common opposition to the extension and expansion of chattel slavery by no means equated to universal support for black rights. While many, perhaps a majority, of Republicans in New England supported the principle of racial coexistence and extended political and social rights to African Americans, many Midwesterners embraced the free-soil platform of the Republican Party because they hoped to exclude all black people, both enslaved and free, from the rapidly developing Western frontier.<sup>9</sup> No state outside of the Northeast allowed black men to vote and most free states actively discriminated against African Americans: barring them from militia service and the public schools. Four states (Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, and Oregon) went so far as to bar all black people from their territory.<sup>10</sup> While not crafted by Republicans, these laws remained on the books even when the Republicans took control of statehouses and governor’s

mansions.<sup>11</sup> While most of these western Republicans, such as Abraham Lincoln, hoped that slavery, would eventually die a natural death where it was already established, they also believed that colonization would work hand-in-hand with gradual emancipation, ridding the country of the dual “burdens” of slavery and racial heterogeneity.<sup>12</sup>

The Democratic Party had dominated Illinois since its inception in the 1820s. While the Whigs maintained a respectable presence in central Illinois, both the statehouse and the congressional delegation remained firmly Democratic until after the Compromise of 1850.<sup>13</sup> The first hints of a political realignment came in 1852 when an *ad hoc* coalition of political abolitionists, Free Soilers, and anti-slavery Democrats backed liberal Whigs in northern Illinois, winning several new congressional districts granted to the North following the 1850 Census.<sup>14</sup> After the introduction of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854, this alliance became permanent and gave birth to the Republican Party in Illinois. In its first major electoral contest, the Presidential Election of 1856, the Republican John C. Fremont won only 40% of the vote in Illinois, defeated by Democrat James C. Buchanan’s plurality of 44% thanks to the spoiler Know-Nothing Millard Fillmore, who drew 15% of the vote.<sup>15</sup> Over the next four years, the Republicans aggressively courted these conservative but anti-Democratic Fillmore voters while remaining committed to their anti-slavery platform.<sup>16</sup>

7 Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 293-294.

8 Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 72.

9 Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 322.

10 Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 261.

11 For a discussion of Republican attempts to dismantle racist statutes see Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 286-287. See also Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 330-330.

12 Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 268-269.

13 Matthew Pinsker, “Not Always Such a Whig: Abraham Lincoln’s Partisan Realignment in the 1850s,” *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 29, no. 2 (2008), 31.

14 Pinsker, “Not Always Such a Whig,” 31.

15 Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, The University of California, Santa Barbara. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/showelection.php?year=1856>.

16 Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 202-204.

By 1860, the state had divided itself between a Republican-leaning North, settled mainly by New England Yankees and anti-slavery Germans, and a Democratic-leaning South, nicknamed “Little Egypt,” populated by settlers from the slave states of Kentucky and Virginia. Central Illinois contained mixes of both sentiments, as well blocks of the conservative ex-Whigs who had voted for Fillmore in 1856. As a result, this area, especially the east central counties of Champaign, Iroquois, Ford, Douglas and Vermilion, remained hotly contested by both parties.<sup>17</sup> In the presidential election that same year, Abraham Lincoln, facing off against fellow Illinoisan Stephen Douglas, secured his home state’s support in the Electoral College by a narrow margin of just under 12,000 votes.<sup>18</sup> Republicans also achieved a majority in the state legislature and elected the anti-slavery statesman Richard Yates to the governorship.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the state returned a split congressional delegation, favoring the Democrats 5-4. Despite this partisan divide, Douglas’s endorsement of Lincoln’s call for volunteers following the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter signaled bipartisan support for the war against secession.<sup>20</sup>

### ***Prelude to Partisanship: The Local Elections of 1861***

Douglas’s unexpected death on June 3, 1861 and the Union defeat at First Bull Run in July began to erode the political consensus that had prevailed in April. In November, Illinois voters selected representatives for a convention to revise the Illinois State Constitution. While both parties agreed that the state’s 1848

Constitution required alterations, the Democrats viewed the convention as a partisan vehicle to reestablish dominance in the once solidly Democratic state.<sup>21</sup> The *Urbana Weekly Democrat* called its readers to action, reminding them that “this question [of constitutional reform] is one of great magnitude, and the Democrats of the whole state should not be caught napping... for the issues are to them of the great local importance.”<sup>22</sup> As a result, prospective Democratic delegates campaigned fiercely on economic issues, such as bank reform and railroad regulation, which the Republicans neglected in their war-centered appeals to the public.<sup>23</sup> Swept up in the excitement and terror of civil war, the Republicans naively assumed that the public’s dedication to the Union cause would overcome partisan divisions. Indeed, many of the state’s Republican newspapers gave only minimal coverage to the constitutional convention campaign.<sup>24</sup> Those which did devote full columns to the election, such as the state’s leading publication, the *Chicago Tribune* and *The Alton Telegraph*, Madison County’s Republican organ, focused their attention on races for their local offices and a statewide banking referendum rather than the selection of delegates.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps the best example of Republican complacency is recorded in *The Belvidere Standard*, which printed the following reflection on November 5, Election Day:

“The Election of to-day will, without question, pass off with little or no excitement, unless it prevail among the candidates themselves... The all engrossing issue of the war, sprung

17 Drew E. VandeCreek, “Politics in Illinois and the Union During the Civil War,” *Illinois During the Civil War*. Northern Illinois University Libraries: Digital Collections and Collaborative Projects.

18 Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, The University of California, Santa Barbara, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/showelection.php?year=1860>.

19 Allardice, “Illinois is Rotten with Traitors,” 97.

20 “Senator Douglas’s Speech,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 26, 1861.

21 Allardice, “Illinois is Rotten with Traitors,” 99.

22 Quoted in Oliver M. Dickerson, “The Illinois Constitutional Convention of 1862,” *University of Illinois: The University Studies* 1, no. 9 (1905), 6.

23 Tap, “Race, Rhetoric, and Emancipation,” 103.

24 See late October and early November issues of *Illinois State Journal* (Springfield, Ill.), *Bloomington Daily Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Ill.), *Mattoon Independent Gazette* (Mattoon, Ill.), and *Woodstock Sentinel* (Woodstock, Ill.)

25 “Vote Against It,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 5, 1861; “The Banking Law,” *The Alton Telegraph*, November 1, 1861.

upon us by the slave power, has had the effect to cause party lines to disappear as if by common consent, as things of no present use.”<sup>26</sup>

Republican eyes were instead turned towards national affairs, such as President Lincoln’s decision to relieve former Republican presidential candidate John C. Frémont of his command in Missouri. Major General Frémont had defied the Lincoln administration’s policy towards slavery and had unilaterally issued an edict of emancipation in a key border state.<sup>27</sup> Fremont’s downfall amid this scuffle over emancipation policy on the eve of the local elections of 1861 proved grimly prophetic of the Republican Party’s own emancipation debacle the following year.

### ***The Proposed Illinois State Constitution of 1862***

Republicans recognized the folly of their political negligence as soon as the State Constitutional Convention gathered at Springfield on January 7, 1862. The final tally of delegates produced by this low-turnout election included 45 Democrats, 20 Republicans, and 10 Union Democrats.<sup>28</sup> Within hours of convening, the Democratic majority elected voted a group of vocal conservatives from “Little Egypt” to serve as the convention’s officers.<sup>29</sup> Before even beginning their official business, delegates to the convention clashed

over the oath that would swear them in as representatives of the people of Illinois. The Democrats refused to pledge loyalty to the Illinois State Constitution of 1848, insisting that they had come to Springfield to alter this document and as such had no obligation to maintain its provisions.<sup>30</sup> However, the Republicans realized that by claiming sovereign authority as a convention, beholden to neither the State Constitution nor the State Legislature, the Democrats could potentially subvert the constitutional process and adopt a new constitution unilaterally, given that the provision that required a popular referendum for such a document resided in the Constitution of 1848.<sup>31</sup> Ultimately, the Democrats succeeded in adopting their oath but also accepted a resolution promising to submit the work of their convention to a popular vote by the citizens of Illinois. This inauspicious start triggered alarm bells among Republican partisans. On its front page *The Chicago Tribune* denounced the scheming of Democratic delegates under the headline “A Grave Public Danger” and warned its readers that the Democratic takeover was “Lecompton over again.”<sup>32</sup>

In its final draft, the text of the proposed constitution advanced much of the longstanding agenda of the Democratic Party in Illinois. First, the constitution shortened the governor’s term to two years, meaning that if the constitution was approved by the voters in June, Republican Governor Richard Yates would be up for reelection in November, rather than serving the full four year term mandated by the 1848 constitution.<sup>33</sup> The document also reapportioned Illinois’ congressio-

26 “The Election,” *The Belvidere Standard*, November 5, 1861.

27 “General Fremont Removed! Great Excitement,” *Bloomington Daily Pantagraph*, November 6, 1861.

28 Dickerson, “Illinois Constitutional Convention,” 7-8; Throughout the Civil War, the Republican Party officially ran as the “Union Party” in hopes of securing the support of pro-war Democrats. Thus the 10 delegates who identified as Union Democrats identified with the war policies of the administration but for the most part retained their Jacksonian ideals in matters of domestic policy.

29 President: William A. Hacker of Union County, Secretary: William M. Springer of Logan County, Assistant Secretary: John Merritt of Marion County. See Dickerson, “Illinois Constitutional Convention,” 9-10.

30 Dickerson, “Illinois Constitutional Convention,” 10.

31 Dickerson, “Illinois Constitutional Convention,” 11.

32 “A Grave Public Danger,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 9, 1862; The Lecompton Constitution was a proposed state constitution adopted by a pro-slavery convention in Kansas in 1857.

33 Dickerson, “Illinois Constitutional Convention,” 28.

nal districts in a manner that increased the influence of solidly Democratic “Little Egypt” at the expense of the Republican-leaning northern counties.<sup>34</sup> In addition to this partisan gerrymandering, the proposed constitution prohibited the distribution of paper money in the state, invalidated all existing bank charters, and prohibited the further establishment of banks in Illinois. Echoing Andrew Jackson’s suspicions of banks and concentrated wealth, one Democratic delegate, Julius Manning of Peoria, denounced banking as “the great labyrinth of inequity” and banks as “soulless corporations” intent on corrupting men through the temptation of wealth.<sup>35</sup> Viewed as consistent with classical Jacksonian Democracy, the measure would also monetarily weaken the many Republicans invested in financial institutions.<sup>36</sup>

Over the course of the convention itself, the Democrats had also become increasingly critical of Governor Yates, claiming that he had asserted powers beyond those ascribed to him by law. Like President Lincoln, Yates was born in Kentucky and migrated to Illinois in his youth where he became involved in politics as a Whig. Elected to Congress for the first time in 1850, Yates was the only Illinois Representative to oppose the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854. Losing his seat as a result of this controversial vote, Yates threw his support behind the emerging Republican Party, securing him a spot at the top of the state ticket in 1860.<sup>37</sup> Partisan jabs made during the general meetings of the convention insinuated that Yates had misdirected funds designated for the Illinois volunteers from the state’s war fund.<sup>38</sup> These attacks culminated in a resolution that

“instructed” the governor to suspend his activities as chief executive until the convention could fully investigate his actions. Yates summarily rejected this power grab and the incident propelled an outcry in the Republican press.<sup>39</sup> *The Chicago Tribune* called the order “an act of gross usurpation on the part of the Egyptian majority,” linking the Democrats to their antebellum political allies in the Confederate South: “Such conduct partakes too much of the swagger and assumption of the slaveholder... Similar consequential airs were put on by conventions in Secessia.”<sup>40</sup>

Democratic delegates also sought to capitalize on white Illinoisans’ racial anxieties, increased since the beginning of the War, by adopting three distinct racial provisions. The first barred African Americans and those of mixed racial backgrounds from settling in the state, the second denied these same groups the suffrage and the right to hold public office, and the third granted the state legislature all necessary powers to enforce the first two provisions.<sup>41</sup> These anti-black measures served as a sort of appendix to the new constitution and were to be voted on separately.<sup>42</sup> In addition, the convention determined it possessed the authority to take up the proposed “Corwin Amendment” to the U.S. Constitution, which explicitly shielded slavery from congressional interference, and ratified it despite Republican outrage.<sup>43</sup> Passed by Congress in March 1861 in the hopes of wooing seceded states back into the Union, the measure now only interfered with the Federal Government’s ability to conduct war against the secessionists. These actions further galvanized the Republican press and offered them a clear strategy to combat the pro-

34 Dickerson, “Illinois Constitutional Convention,” 17.

35 “Proceedings of the State Constitutional Convention,” *Illinois State Journal*, February 5, 1862.

36 Dickerson, “Illinois Constitutional Convention,” 26-27.

37 Logan Uriah Revis, *The Life and Public Services of Richard Yates* (St. Louis: J.H. Chambers & Company, 1881) 7-17.

38 Dickerson, “Illinois Constitutional Convention,” 12.

39 Dickerson, “Illinois Constitutional Convention,” 13.

40 *Chicago Tribune*, February 13, 1862.

41 Dickerson, “Illinois Constitutional Convention,” 13.

42 Allardice, “Illinois is Rotten with Traitors,” 101.

43 Dickerson, “Illinois Constitutional Convention,” 14.

posed constitution at the ballot box. By framing the referendum on the proposed constitution as a test of loyalty to the Union, the Republicans hoped to convince even conservative Democrats to vote “no.”

### *The Constitutional Referendum of June 1862*

While Republicans had overlooked the 1861 election as a formality rendered inconsequential by the ongoing war, the referendum on the proposed state constitution, set for June 17, 1862, received the full attention of party activists who sought to portray Democrats as duplicitous regionalists. Quickly labeling the constitution the “Egyptian Swindle,” Republicans appealed to regional as well as partisan sensibilities in the areas of northern and central Illinois where they drew most of their support. Eager to point to the thinly veiled Democratic gerrymandering, one Republican editor in Bloomington asked his readership explicitly: “Do you wish to avoid the yoke of Egyptian domination? . . . Do you wish to prevent this northern portion of the State [sic.] having the minority of representatives in the legislature, in consequence of unjust apportionment? Then vote against the bogus constitution.”<sup>44</sup>

The questionable loyalties of the Democratic authors also emerged as a key selling point for anti-constitution advocates. As the Democratic Party split between pro-war and anti-war factions, the Republicans actively courted “War Democrats” by framing the Democratic leadership as pro-Confederate. Receiving an update from their “correspondent in Egypt,” the *Chicago Tribune* reported that “the men in Southern [sic.] Illinois who are most pre-eminently [sic.] active in working for the success of the constitution are traitors at heart— as hostile to the government as Jeff Davis or

Beauregard.”<sup>45</sup> Such claims were not entirely unfounded; several of the Democrats who helped to draft the constitution, including John A. Logan and William A. Richardson, had expressed sympathy for the cause of secession in the winter of 1860-1861, before the firing on Fort Sumter made such a position politically untenable.<sup>46</sup> Rumors swirled that the Knights of the Golden Circle had directed this “secessionist document” and intended to withdraw Illinois from the Union once the Democrats secured their gerrymandered majority in the state legislature. While such provocative claims exaggerated the intentions of the Democrats, the party had become increasingly fierce in its opposition to the Lincoln administration’s war policies throughout the first months of 1862. The Democrats framed themselves as patriotic conservatives, battling against both secessionists and abolitionists, who posed equally serious threats to the U.S. Constitution and the future of the republic.<sup>47</sup> Lincoln’s suspension of habeas corpus and his confiscation of Confederate property— especially Southerners’ human property—struck committed Democrats as radical if not tyrannical.

In the midst of an increasingly bloody war, Republicans labeled these charges treasonous, as the line between loyal dissent and treacherous subversion blurred. Those most opposed to the Lincoln administration were also the most ardent supporters of the proposed Constitution, a correlation which compelled the Republican *Mattoon Independent Gazette* to remark: “Why is it that every rebel sympathizer in Illinois is open mouthed for the adoption of the new constitution? Show us a secessionist, and we will show you an advocate of the infamous thing.”<sup>48</sup> If the document appealed

45 *Chicago Tribune*, June 2, 1862.

46 Tap, “Race, Rhetoric, and Emancipation,” 103.

47 “Negromania,” *The Ottawa Free Trader*, June 14, 1862.

48 *Mattoon Independent Gazette*, June 14, 1862.

44 “Turn Out! Turn Out!,” *Bloomington Daily Pantagraph*, June 10, 1862.

to traitors, was it not in and of itself treasonous? In Republican eyes, in the midst of a rebellion against the Federal Government, the country no longer divided itself between Republicans and Democrats, but between loyal men and those who would betray the Union. As one Union officer from Madison County wrote in a letter to Senator Lyman Trumbull, throughout his travels in downstate Illinois he was “disgusted with the signs of secession proclivities,” and noted that “all the traitors are Democrats.” Nevertheless, not all Democrats were traitors as seen by the many serving “in the army, or serving [the] blessed cause in some useful way.”<sup>49</sup> These sentiments echoed the fanciful desire expressed by some Republicans that loyal Democrats drop their political opposition for the duration of the conflict. Embracing their temporary name as the “Union Party,” Republicans called on all loyal Democrats to vote against the Constitution as part of their united effort to defeat the secessionists.<sup>50</sup>

As Democrats emphasized the racial threats posed by radical abolitionists, Republicans in highly competitive central Illinois distanced themselves from such rhetoric. While the *Chicago Tribune* dismissed the separate anti-black ballot provisions as a partisan ploy, part of the Democratic effort to compel working men to vote against their own interests, the Republican *Illinois State Journal* of Springfield urged voters to support these measures.<sup>51</sup> On the surface this position seems contradictory. The separate provisions would not become the law of the land without the adoption of the proposed constitution, and the *State Journal* cam-

paigned fiercely against the new constitution as a whole, citing the dubious loyalty of its advocates. However, by announcing support for the anti-black provisions, the local Republicans sought to bolster their credentials among racist swing voters. While such voters had little sympathy for the “Slave Power” and even less for the secessionists, they balked at the idea that people of color should live side by side with them as social and political equals. This sentiment is best captured in the editorial penned the week after the election in the *State Journal*:

“According to their [the Democrats’] talk they were the only white man’s party... The vote shows, as the Republican despise the persistent efforts of slavery secession Democracy to trample the unoffending and innocent negro into still lower degradation, that when a vote is made upon the question of placing him upon a political and social level with white men, there are no two opinions about it.”<sup>52</sup>

Yet there were two opinions about the issue. Further north, many Republicans identified with more radical leaders, including Congressman Owen Lovejoy, who rejected the premise of the provisions, a stance gleefully exploited by Democratic organs.<sup>53</sup> While the breadth of their coalition had brought the Republican Party to power in the first place, these contrary positions revealed the palpable differences between Republicans on issues of race, and they also sowed doubt into the minds of independent voters: which position reflected the “real” Republican agenda?

In the final vote on June 16, out of the 266,000 ballots cast, the Republicans and their Unionist allies

49 George T. Allen to Trumbull, *Lyman Trumbull Papers, 1855-1894*. [Washington, D. C.: Photoduplication Service, Library of Congress, 1968.]

50 *The Alton Telegraph*, June 13, 1862.

51 “The Nigger Hobby,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 24, 1862; “Union Ticket,” *Illinois State Journal*, June 17, 1862.

52 “The Way it Runs,” *Illinois State Journal*, June 24, 1862.

53 “Republicanism Unadulterated,” *The Ottawa Free Trader*, June 14, 1862.



defeated the proposed constitution by a comfortable margin of 16,000 votes (a margin of 6%).<sup>54</sup> The controversial congressional apportionment and bank propositions of the document, which received separate position on the ballot, were also defeated, though only by 7,000 and 4,000 votes respectively (margins of 2.6% and 1.5%). Ominously for progressive Republicans, the three “negro” provisions of the constitution each passed by more than 100,000 votes (a margin of more than 38%).<sup>55</sup> Despite the defeat of the proposed constitution, the Democrats employed the divided Republican position on race to castigate those “tender-footed democrats who voted against the New Constitution... [and ask them] how they like[d] their new associates, who by their most solemn pledge... declared the negro entitled to the same privileges and as good as a white man.”<sup>56</sup> Republicans, meanwhile, believed that they had convinced the electorate of the Democratic leadership’s treachery. In the midst of a war to save the Union, the country now divided itself between those loyal to the Constitution and the lackeys of secession. Confident that this referendum served as a prelude to the upcoming midterms, *The Alton Telegraph* promised its readers that just as the Republican Party “buried the secession constitution on Tuesday she will bury the secession party in November. [The referendum] was truly a victory of gigantic proportions.”<sup>57</sup> Unfortunately for the Republicans, the military setbacks of the Union

Army throughout the summer and early autumn of 1862 in conjunction with the Lincoln administration’s embrace of emancipation drove scores of conservative voters back into the Democratic fold by November of that year.

### ***Military Misfortunes and the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation***

While successful campaigns throughout the first half of 1862 suggested that Federal forces were within one major victory of restoring the Union to the antebellum status quo, the setbacks of the summer and early fall revealed that war was far from over. In the West, Ulysses S. Grant’s February victories at Fort Henry and Fort Donelson boosted Northern morale to a level not seen since the previous summer’s disaster at Bull Run. In the East, George B. McClellan’s Army of the Potomac entered their spring campaign on the Virginia Peninsula well trained and in high spirits. While the engagement at Pittsburgh Landing proved costly for Grant’s forces, the death of Albert Sidney Johnston and the Confederate retreat to Corinth hinted to that the Confederacy would soon be cut in half, a suspicion further substantiated by David Farragut’s capture of New Orleans at the end of April.

However, a score of setbacks followed when McClellan’s forces on the Virginia Peninsula and were pushed back from the outskirts of Richmond in the Seven Days Battles. Confederate General Robert E. Lee took advantage of the Union retreat to launch his own campaign northward, humiliating the Union Army of Virginia at the Battle of Second Bull Run just as Confederate Braxton Bragg invaded the key border state of Kentucky. The once promising year of 1862 devolved into a panicked frenzy as Confederates advanced into the Union territory in Maryland and Kentucky. While both invasions were stymied at the Battles of Antietam and Chaplin Hills respectively, both strategic victories

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54 This turnout slightly exceeds that of the subsequent midterm (266,155 vs. 256,076 total ballots). This drop in turnout can be explained, at least in part by the fact that Illinois raised 58 volunteer infantry regiments between June and November. Soldiers serving outside of their home districts were ineligible to vote in Illinois. For a detailed analysis of the effects of enlistment on the midterm’s outcome see Allardice, “Illinois is Rotten with Traitors,” 110.

55 Dickerson, “Illinois Constitutional Convention,” 24.

56 *Salem Weekly Advocate*, June 19, 1862.

57 “The New Constitution,” *The Alton Telegraph*, June 27, 1862.

came at a high cost for Union forces and did little to boost the morale of an increasingly war-weary Northern citizenry. Although far from decisive, the repulse of Confederate forces at Antietam gave President Lincoln a chance to implement the emancipation policy he had considered since July. Born in the wake of McClellan's retreat from Richmond, the drafting of the Emancipation Proclamation marked a concrete shift in Lincoln's war aims. While Lincoln had ignored calls for emancipation by abolitionists and radical Republicans throughout the first year of the war out of deference to the border states, the threat of foreign intervention on behalf of the Confederacy loomed large in the President's mind as spring turned to summer in 1862. Unable to secure a military victory, which would restore the Union to the antebellum status quo, Lincoln employed his power as Commander-in-Chief to turn the war for the Union into a war for emancipation.

Building on the legal foundation of the Second Confiscation Act, a law which gave Union officials the power to free the slaves of disloyal citizens should they come into contact with the Union Army, the Emancipation Proclamation legally freed all slaves in the rebeling states. While the proclamation excluded the border states and some select territories already under Union control, the policy would legally, though not practically, free millions of slaves throughout the Confederacy. Lincoln chose to issue the Preliminary Proclamation, first presented to his cabinet after the collapse of the Peninsula Campaign, in the aftermath of Antietam, the single deadliest day of the War, to demonstrate the Government's willingness to raise the stakes of the conflict and subjugate the South in order to preserve the Union.<sup>58</sup> Many conservative Unionists, however, were horrified by the prospect of military emancipation. In

addition to numerous questions of Constitutional authority, the measure killed any chance of a negotiated settlement with the South.<sup>59</sup> From this perspective, Lincoln had therefore done as much to kill the antebellum Union—the Union they were fighting to maintain—as had the secessionists. In Illinois, a state still fuming with racial anxiety from its constitutional debate, the announcement of these new emancipation war goals put Republicans on the defensive with conservative voters. Indeed, this development allowed Democrats to propagate racial hysteria as never before.

### *Emancipation and the 1862 Midterms*

The release of the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation also coincided with two local political events, which primed conservatives for an anti-emancipation backlash in Illinois. On September 10, the Democratic Party held its statewide convention in Springfield. After the decisive defeat of the proposed state constitution, few prominent Democrats expected a favorable result in the November midterms.<sup>60</sup> The convention debated whether to adopt a more explicitly pro-war stance as it selected its nominee for Illinois's newly created "at-large" congressional seat, but ultimately chose James C. Allen of the party's "peace" faction over the more militant Colonel T. Lyle Dickey of the 4th Illinois Volunteer Cavalry.<sup>61</sup> Frustrated by the summer's military setbacks, the Democrats committed themselves explicitly to opposing the Lincoln administration's war policies at the ballot box. Taking aim at the Second Confiscation Act, Congressman William A. Richardson offered the convention a rousing closing address full of bitterly racist rhetoric. The Republicans,

59 McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 558.

60 Allardice, "Illinois is Rotten with Traitors," 102.

61 Tap, "Race, Rhetoric, and Emancipation," 108.

58 McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 558.

according to Richardson, were fundamentally radical and “no radical man ever improved in anything” because “radicalism on upon a single idea is a distraction.” Richardson claimed that the Republicans fought the war with “but one idea and but one friend and that is the nigger.”<sup>62</sup> Rather than caring for Union troops or providing relief for bereaved Northern families, the Federal Government under Lincoln offered shelter, provisions, and work to black contrabands.

This anti-black rhetoric gained legitimacy in eyes of many voters as Secretary of War Edwin Stanton ordered hundreds of black refugees northward into Illinois on September 18, 1862.<sup>63</sup> These contrabands had been camped at Cairo, Illinois and had become a logistical liability for the Union commander, Brigadier General James M. Tuttle. Stanton had hoped that the contrabands could assist shorthanded farmers with the fall harvest throughout Southern Illinois, however, such a strategy did not sit well with racial conservatives. The *Joliet Signal* warned that as a result, the “State will soon be crowded with negroes who will be compelled to work for half price or starve; and thus white men and women will have to work for the same reduced pay or find work elsewhere.”<sup>64</sup> Leading Democrats also objected to the Federal Government’s flagrant violation of the Illinois statute, which prohibited blacks from entering the State. The subsequent announcement of the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation on September 22 galvanized the Democrats who continued to emphasize the dangerous radicalism of the “Black Republicans.” Leading Democratic organs quickly incorporated Lincoln’s executive action on emancipation into a narrative

of federal overreach, which subverted the same Constitution for which Union soldiers had fought and died for the past year and a half. According to the *Ottawa Free Trader*, the Emancipation Proclamation was a betrayal of those men fighting to preserve the Union because “The Union as it was, if this proclamation is enforced is gone forever... This [proclamation] involves the annihilation of the south, and is the converse proposition to the restoration of the Union.”<sup>65</sup> Combined with Lincoln’s suspension of habeas corpus and the Government’s suppression of dissent throughout the North, the Proclamation played into the Democratic narrative that the Republicans were moving the country towards despotism. The vicious Republican attacks on Congressman Clement Vallandigham of Ohio particularly troubled Democrats.<sup>66</sup>

Furthermore, the emancipation of the slaves throughout all Confederate territories would further subvert the social order of white supremacy already threatened by Stanton’s executive order. Downstate or “Egyptian” publications such as the *Salem Weekly Advocate* warned its readers that “Thousands, perhaps tens of thousands [of contrabands] are crowding up the border free states... disturbing all our social relations and treating the complete overthrow of white labor.”<sup>67</sup> The social and political threats posed by the administration matched, if not outweighed, the threat posed by secession in the eyes of conservatives.<sup>68</sup> Employing the

62 “Patriotic Democratic Speech,” *Quincy Herald*, September 16, 1862.

63 Tap, “Race, Rhetoric, and Emancipation,” 109.

64 “More Negroes Coming,” *Joliet Signal*. September 30, 1862.

65 “The Emancipation Proclamation,” *Ottawa Free Trader*, Sept. 27, 1862

66 “Which is the Traitor,” *The Quincy Herald*, September 18, 1862. Vallandigham, perhaps the fiercest Peace Democrat or “Copperhead” in public office during the Civil War, unilaterally called for an unconditional armistice with Confederate forces. He was deported by a military tribunal in 1863 and spent time behind Confederate lines and in Canada before secretly returning to the Ohio in mid-1864.

67 *Salem Weekly Advocate*, October 2, 1862.

68 “Which is the Traitor,” *The Quincy Herald*, September 18, 1862.

populist language of their hero Andrew Jackson, the Democratic Party leadership called on “the people [to rise] in their might, and proclaim at the ballot box, in November, their condemnation of the unconstitutional acts of the administration.”<sup>69</sup>

As the Democrats united around a unified message of Federal overreach and white supremacy heading into the midterms, the Republicans of Illinois sought to explain the necessity of emancipation to voters. Throughout fiercely racist central Illinois, Republican publications focused on the practical and punitive aspects of emancipation for Southerners rather than the liberation of human chattels. In Bloomington, the local Republican press emphasized the geopolitical implications of the Proclamation, noting that it nullified all “talk of foreign intervention, for not a nation in Christendom will interfere to save slavery from its doom.”<sup>70</sup> *The Alton Telegraph* described slaves as the “great support” of the Confederacy, which when brought down would topple the rebellion. The publication was also quick to label opponents of the Emancipation Proclamation as treacherous, denouncing those weak-willed Democrats who “cry out against all measures calculated to cripple the enemy.”<sup>71</sup> Countering the Democrats’ fear that emancipation would topple the social hierarchy and potentially trigger a bloody uprising, these Republicans pointed to the fact that nearly all slaves remained deep in the South and thus the consequences and “the responsibility in such an event [a slave uprising] will be placed at the door of the sufferers themselves—the real abolitionists—the authors of the rebellion—the slave aristocrats themselves.”<sup>72</sup>

In the Republican account, black empowerment was an unfortunate side effect of emancipation but a development more than compensated for by the collapse of the dreaded “Slave Power” and the defeat of the rebellion. In Springfield, Republicans reminded their compatriots, “A people waging a causeless and unholy war against a mild and just Government have forfeited the right to protection by that Government.”<sup>73</sup> Those committed to the Union cause should feel no sympathy for the Confederate traitors. No fate, not even a bloody slave rebellion, was too terrible for them. As such, the editor of the *Illinois State Journal* called on “[T]rue patriots of every name [to] rally around the President” and support his proclamation as they remained steadfast in their determination that “the Union shall be preserved and the laws enforced.”<sup>74</sup> This rhetoric, while decidedly in favor of the Emancipation Proclamation, barely touched on the humanitarian consequences of freeing slaves throughout the Confederacy. Indeed, the *State Journal* warned its readers against those “extremists” who would complain that the proclamation did not do enough “immediately” to remedy the condition of the slave.<sup>75</sup>

Farther north, by contrast, radical Republicans devoted more attention to this human element, engaging in the emancipationist rhetoric denounced by Democrats. Indeed, the *Chicago Tribune* viewed the event with religious reverence:

“So splendid a vision has hardly shone upon the world since the day of the Messiah. From the date of this proclamation begins to the history

69 *Salem Weekly Advocate*, October 2, 1862.

70 *The Bloomington Pantagraph*, September 26, 1862.

71 “Why They Don’t Like It,” *The Alton Telegraph*, October 3, 1862.

72 “Why They Don’t Like It,” *The Alton Telegraph*, October 3, 1862.

73 “The Bolt Fallen,” *Illinois State Journal*, September 24, 1862.

74 “The Bolt Fallen,” *Illinois State Journal*, September 24, 1862.

75 “The Bolt Fallen,” *Illinois State Journal*, September 24, 1862.

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...<sup>76</sup>

To those, like Representative Owen Lovejoy, who were long committed to the abolition of slavery, the nation faced not only a rebellious army but in slavery a “divine Nemesis who has woven the threads of retribution into the web of national life.”<sup>77</sup> As such, the nation needed seek divine assistance by fulfilling the will of God because so long as slavery existed the Union would remain unworthy of God’s help. Divine assistance, in Lovejoy’s eyes, would only come when the nation repented and “proclaimed liberty to the enslaved of the land.”<sup>78</sup> In another solidly Republican region, the *Woodstock Sentinel* published a poem titled “The Negro on the Fence,” which berated their opponents for illogical racism.<sup>79</sup> The verse offered a fable: a distressed wagoner stuck at the bottom of a hill is offered help by a passing black man, but the wagoner refuses on the basis of the man’s color. Subsequently, as his homestead is plundered and his family killed, the wagoner remains “conserved” at the bottom of the hill while the Good Samaritan remains sitting on a nearby fence. The story reflected favorably on black efforts to assist the Union cause and warned racial conservatives not to scorn ex-slaves’ help in subduing the rebellion.

While authentic to each region’s racial outlook, these mixed messages complicated the Republican effort to rebuild the coalition of radicals, moderates, and

conservatives that had secured the state for Lincoln in 1860. Although swing voters had supported the Republican-backed anti-constitution campaign in June, the new racial questions raised by prolonged war and the policy of emancipation alarmed many conservatives. Even in June less than one third of voters had opposed the proposition excluding blacks from the State, and less than 15% opposed the proposition depriving blacks of political rights.<sup>80</sup> The heightened tensions produced by Stanton’s executive order and the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation put even the *Chicago Tribune* on the defensive as it reminded its readership that once the Emancipation Proclamation had taken effect in the South, any recently arrived blacks would “return to their homes and take with them nine tenths of the free colored population of the North.”<sup>81</sup> Republicans throughout the State faced the difficult challenge of defending the Lincoln administration’s radical social policy while assuring voters that this policy would not upset the status quo in Illinois. While previous calls to limit the growth of slavery or gradually phase out the institution could be clothed in the language of conservatism and hearken back to the founders via the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, military emancipation had no such precedent.<sup>82</sup>

Recognizing the Republican predicament, Democrats drove towards the center to pick up conservative Republican voters. Hopelessly outnumbered in the Fifth Congressional District, Democratic Party leaders

76 *Chicago Tribune*, September 23, 1862

77 Quoted in William F. Moore and Jane Ann Moore, *Collaborators for Emancipation: Abraham Lincoln and Owen Lovejoy* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 126.

78 Moore and Moore, *Collaborators for Emancipation*, 127.

79 “The Negro on the Fence,” *Woodstock Sentinel*, October 1, 1862.

80 Dickerson, “Illinois Constitutional Convention,” 24.

81 *Chicago Tribune*, September 23, 1862

82 One of the most important acts of the Confederation Congress, the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 organized the territory for the future states of Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, and (northeastern) Minnesota. The legislation, built on an early proposal penned by Thomas Jefferson, expressly prohibited the expansion of slavery into the territory. This precedent became a key Republican talking point in their antebellum efforts to block the expansion of slavery westward into Federal Territories.

recruited a conservative Republican, Colonel Thomas J. Henderson, to run against abolitionist Owen Lovejoy. Widely respected throughout the district and as an opponent of emancipation, Henderson was formally nominated by both the Democrats and the conservative wing of the District's Republican Party. Although the district's major Republican publications stood by Lovejoy, Democrats hoped to draw enough conservative Republican votes at the general election to defeat Lovejoy.<sup>83</sup> Democrats in key central Illinois districts, such as Peoria and Springfield, rebranded themselves as "no-party men," or "anti-abolitionists" to draw the votes of conservative ex-Whigs still hostile to the Democratic Party.<sup>84</sup> Meanwhile, Republicans continued to vacillate between radical and conservative endorsements of the Emancipation Proclamation, allowing the Democratic press the unpopular question of black rights.<sup>85</sup>

As the national anti-emancipation backlash swept Democrats to power in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana in those states' October elections, Illinois Republicans frantically campaigned on a loyalty platform. Republican partisans resurrected the Revolutionary-era epithet of "Tory" to associate their opponents with the aristocratic "Slave Power."<sup>86</sup> The Democratic nominee for State Treasurer, Alexander Starne, came under particular scrutiny when a neighbor testified, under oath, that Starne had expressed a willingness to fight for Confederate forces.<sup>87</sup> Republican editors hoped to

prevent a racist backlash to emancipation by rallying around the flag. Headlines such as "Union for the sake of the Union" and "Down with Traitors" pitched the election as a battle as real as Antietam with the forces of a "traitorous conspiracy" plotting against the Union facing off against loyal men.<sup>88</sup> Rather than directly refuting the constitutional arguments made against the Emancipation Proclamation, Republicans questioned: "What manner of men are those so clamorous for traitors' rights?" They ultimately concluded that such men "must either be the friends and allies of traitors, bound to them by natural affinities and affections, or they must be their hired advocates and attorneys."<sup>89</sup> Democrats who defended the rights of Confederate traitors must either themselves be closet secessionists, or even worse, the mercenaries of secession: defending treason to turn a profit. In their attempt to frame the election as a contest between patriots and traitors, the Republican press went even so far as to eulogize the late Stephen Douglas, claiming him as an example of propriety and loyalty in the face of rebellion and quoting extensively from his final calls for unity in an effort to secure Democratic votes for the *Union* ticket.<sup>90</sup>

Despite these fierce attempts to frame the contest under these terms of loyalty, in the final days preceding the November 4 election, hints of desperation escaped leading Republican organs. With clear Democratic triumphs throughout neighboring states in the lower Midwest, Republican editors in both northern and central Illinois attempted to minimize the impact of emancipation on their state. On October 29, the *Chi-*

83 William F. Moore and Jane Ann Moore, eds., *His Brother's Blood: Speeches and Writings of Owen Lovejoy 1838-1864* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 351-352.

84 "Danger Ahead," *Woodstock Sentinel*, October 22, 1862.

85 "Ask the Question" and "Vote the White Man's Ticket," *The Quincy Herald*, October 31, 1862.

86 "The Elections," *Woodstock Sentinel*, October 22, 1862; "Another War Democrat Proscribed," *Chicago Tribune*, November 1, 1862.

87 "Starne Endorses the Witness Against Him," *Illinois State Journal*, October 30, 1862; "Beauties of the Tory Candidate for State Treasurer," *Chicago Tribune*, October 31, 1862.

88 *Illinois State Journal*, October 28, 1862.

89 "The Constitution and the Proclamation—Traitors' Rights," *Illinois State Journal*, October 28, 1862.

90 "Shall the Government be Sustained," *The Alton Telegraph*, October 31, 1862; "The Democratic Doctrine: Senator Douglas on the Suppression of the Rebellion," *Illinois State Journal*, October 28, 1862.

*Chicago Tribune* printed a letter from the national superintendent of contrabands who claimed that “not one in a hundred [ex-slaves] can be persuaded to go North.” Far from seeking new lives in the North, the commissioner claimed that newly freed slaves were eager to offer “diligent and laborious toil in all the servile departments of the government” as Union forces occupied the South.<sup>91</sup> In essence, this letter argued that emancipation merely transferred the service of African-American laborers from the Confederate enemy to the U.S. Government. The policy would not result in any meaningful shift in northern demographics or social dynamics. Springfield’s *State Journal* also sought to minimize the social impacts of emancipation and argued that any real “negro immigration” to Illinois was in fact a result of the Democrats, who like their Southern brethren would prefer to employ black servants rather than perform their own labor.<sup>92</sup> Yet these same daily editors recognized that these emphases might prove too little too late, and in the days before the election also warned that a Democratic victory might well occur on account of fraud, or due to the absence of so many loyal men under arms.<sup>93</sup>

The November 4 vote proved a stinging rebuke for the Republicans in Illinois. The Democrats won 9 of the 14 congressional seats, including the at-large contest, as well as a decisive majority in the state legislature.<sup>94</sup> As expected, the Republicans performed well

in the northern portion of the state, and Owen Lovejoy defeated his conservative challenger. However, the results throughout central Illinois were discouraging. When comparing the votes for congressman at-large in 1862 to the results of the 1860 presidential election, the Republicans lost 13 counties they had won in 1860.<sup>95</sup> Democratic candidates secured the key seventh and eighth districts of central Illinois by 6.4% and 3.7% respectively. Democrat James C. Allen defeated Republican Ebon C. Ingersoll for the at-large congressional seat by a margin of 6.5%.<sup>96</sup> Despite improving upon their 1860 performance in June’s referendum, the Republicans of Illinois were devastated by the midterm results.<sup>97</sup> While the Republicans may have suffered from the lack of absentee balloting by soldiers, as contemporaries indicated and Allardice convincingly argues, the decisive Democratic victory in the at-large race indicates that Republicans lost the conservative support they had garnered in 1860, when Lincoln won by 3%.

### *Effects of the 1862 Midterms*

To the delight of some and the horror of others, the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation redefined the Civil War. President Lincoln’s decision to free slaves in all of the rebelling states altered the nature of the conflict, instead of fighting for the restoration of the antebellum status quo, Union soldiers now fought a war of liberation. The radical nature of this action altered political dynamics throughout the Northern states, but especially in lower Midwestern states such as Illinois. While in 1860 and indeed even in June of 1862, Republicans cobbled together a coalition of radical abolitionists, moderate free-soilers, and conservative ex-Whigs

91 “The Contrabands Not a Burden on the Government,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 29, 1862.

92 “Negro Immigration,” *Illinois State Journal*, November 3, 1862.

93 “An Infamous Attempt to Promote Fraudulent Voting,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 3, 1862; “Look Out for Fraudulent Tickets,” *Illinois State Journal*, November 3, 1862; “Watch against Fraud,” *Bloomington Pantagraph*, November 4, 1862; “Beware of Split and Spurious Tickets,” *Bloomington Pantagraph*, November 4, 1862; “Loyal Citizens and the Loyal Army,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 3, 1862.

94 Tap, “Race, Rhetoric, and Emancipation,” 120.

95 “The Illinois Election,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 22, 1862. See also Appendix 2.

96 Tap, “Race, Rhetoric, and Emancipation,” Appendix B.

97 See Appendix for breakdown by county.

to defeat their Democratic opponents, the bloody summer of 1862 and the racial implications of confiscation and emancipation alienated conservative voters. This paper has shown that while the Republicans sought to frame the contest in terms of loyalty, of Unionists versus Secessionists, the party's divided reactions to emancipation—more radical in northern Illinois and more moderate in central Illinois—offered Democrats the political ammunition they lacked in June. Claiming the political center for themselves, Illinois Democrats framed abolitionists like Owen Lovejoy as the real face of the Republican Party. According to these Democrats, by issuing the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, the Republicans had destroyed any hope for restoration of the Union “as it was” in order to advance their radical social agenda. Such sentiments did not sit well with conservative voters already concerned by perceived executive overreach. Furthermore, the social implications of freedom for millions of African American slaves alarmed these same, deeply racist, voters.

This defeat in Illinois, taken together with the military rout at Fredericksburg in December, marked a dark moment for the Lincoln administration and the redefined Union cause. Although the Republicans retained control of the House of Representatives thanks to their coalition with the independent “Unionists,” the Democrats had made significant gains in the lower Midwest and Mid-Atlantic.<sup>98</sup> While the national repercussions of these congressional races remain contested, these outcomes undoubtedly strengthened the resolve of “Peace” Democrats in several states, emboldening the so-called “Copperheads” in the first half of 1863.<sup>99</sup>

In fact, in Illinois, some anti-war agitators even turned to violence, forming armed mobs and “bushwhacking” pro-Union men and their families in February, March, and April of 1863.<sup>100</sup> President Lincoln, deeply troubled by these developments in his home state, referred to this anti-war resistance as “the fire in the rear” and feared the consequences of such protests as much as the progress of the Confederate Army.

Indeed, until the major Union victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg in July 1863, it seemed possible that Peace Democrats throughout the North might persuade the public to abandon the fight. All too often, at least in popular memory, the contingent moments of the Civil War are reduced to actions on the battlefield: General Stonewall Jackson's death as a result of friendly fire, Colonel Chamberlain's defense of Little Round Top, or Admiral Farragut's tenacity at Mobile Bay. But the winter and spring of 1863 was a period of political contingency—a moment when the Union war effort nearly crumpled in on itself. Examining the political dynamics that proceeded such moments, especially in the most volatile localities, provides context for what often seems alien to both the scholars and citizens of our own time.

98 These results were especially significant in Ohio, Indiana, and Pennsylvania.

99 James McPherson nevertheless notes the Republicans had actually experienced the smallest net loss of congressional seats in an off-year election since 1842. Furthermore, McPherson argues that the Lincoln

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administration did not adjust its policy position following the elections. See McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 561-562. For a concise account detailing the activity of anti-war Democrats during the Civil War see Jennifer L. Weber, “Lincoln's Critics: The Copperheads,” *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 32, no. 1, (2011), 33-47.

100 James T. Barnes and Patience P. Barnes, “Was Illinois Governor Richard Yates Intimidated by the Copperheads During the Civil War?” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 107, no. 3-4, (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 321-345.