

**“A quick and feverish circulation”:
Newspaper Perceptions of Slavery, Emancipation, and Blacks
during the American Civil War, 1860-1863**

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For Joe, Mary Lou, and Pat, and also for Pops.

Cover illustrations

Portion of map by Johnson and Ward. *Johnson's Michigan and Wisconsin*. In: atlas by Alvin J. Johnson. New York: Johnson and Ward, 1862. Courtesy of the Stephen S. Clark Library at the University of Michigan.

Background/watermark: portions of “The Proclamation of Freedom” and other articles, *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune*, Detroit, MI. January 5, 1863. Courtesy of the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan, photograph by Bryan LaPointe.

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A newspaper...is the only way of being able to place the same thought at the same moment into a thousand minds.

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 1840

Some one in speaking of newspapers and illustrating their great importance has said, if we would fully appreciate their value, let us suppose that they were all stopped for one week! This would indeed, illustrate the idea; what a horrible thought, to be a whole week without a newspaper. The politician could get along very well without his breakfast, but not without his morning paper; the business man would not seriously mind the failure of one who owed him a few hundreds, but he would not know how to get along through the day without reading the papers; the farmer would drive half a dozen miles to the next post-town before he would miss his Saturday weekly; and the girls at home might do without a new bonnet in the fall, but not without the papers that cheer their evenings and gives them so much to think and talk about.

Detroit Daily Advertiser, February 5, 1858

...the newspapers render one desperate, ready to cut one's own throat. They represent everything in our country as deplorable.

Mary Boykin Chesnut, February 24, 1862

Introduction: “A state bordering upon frenzy”¹

On January 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, declaring that nearly three million slaves in the Confederacy and in the areas outside Union control “are and henceforth shall be free.” The proclamation dramatically changed the nature of the Civil War, the relations of the federal government to slavery, and the direction of American history. Lincoln argued that the proclamation was a military necessity justified under his powers as commander in chief, creating a new connection between decreeing an ideal of liberty and the increasing powers of the nation’s government during the war. Most importantly, the Emancipation Proclamation united the goals of saving the Union and abolition, working towards a northern victory that would ultimately transform the South and redefine the place of blacks in the United States.²

This initiative of striking a blow at slavery after nearly two years of Civil War was, however, not without precedent. The Republican-controlled Congress and President Lincoln’s administration had already passed laws and declarations aiming to curtail the power of slavery in the seceded South, hoping to weaken the Confederate States of America in the war. Lincoln’s 1863 Emancipation Proclamation was built on certain sections of the July 1862 Second Confiscation Act, which automatically freed rebel-owned slaves who came within Union army lines in the South. This act, in turn, represented a more extensive emancipation law than its predecessor, the First Confiscation Act. Congress passed this preceding act in August 1861, which provided for the general confiscation of any property used to support the rebellion in the South that came under the Union army’s control. Moreover, this August 1861 Act built upon the complications that arose from numerous Union generals who had to deal with runaway slaves

¹ “The Great Question,” *Detroit Free Press*, Detroit, MI. April 6, 1858.

² Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), 240-45.

coming to their forts. The 1860 election of Abraham Lincoln had even generated discussion about the future of slavery, given the fact that a Republican, who disliked slavery and advocated against slavery's expansion westward, had become president. Since the buildup and the start of the Civil War then, questions of emancipation, its consequences, and the place of blacks in the United States were very much alive.³

These numerous initiatives of weakening slavery demonstrate that emancipation was a process, not a specific moment. Many American historians have emphasized this in recent important works of scholarship.⁴ Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation served as a significant step in the larger development of the many federal laws and proposals that came before it. National discussion of the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation therefore represented a smaller sample of the overarching reactions and views of the entire process of emancipation before and during the Civil War. Nowhere was this larger national discussion more prominent than in the principal media source of the antebellum period: the newspaper. This important historical resource especially highlights the various responses to the many federal initiatives involving emancipation and its implications for the United States.

In many secondary historical works about slavery, emancipation, and blacks in the United States during the Civil War, an analysis of newspapers usually is not the central focus. Influential nationwide newspapers are occasionally quoted and examined, but they are mainly used only to exhibit a particular position to something at that specific instance in time. In this sense, newspapers serve as a useful window into which a larger event can be highlighted. While this is

³ However, this is not to say that the efforts of abolitionists were not important. This thesis specifically deals with the measures related to emancipation and slavery taken by federal officials, actions that were in fact heavily influenced by the abolition movement. For more on the significance of abolitionists, see Manisha Sinha, "Allies for Emancipation?: Lincoln and Black Abolitionists," in Eric Foner, ed., *Our Lincoln: New Perspectives on Lincoln and His World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), 167-196.

⁴ For example, see works by Eric Foner, James Oakes, and Ira Berlin, especially his *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Harvard University Press, 2004).

undoubtedly a common practice in historical scholarship, this thesis attempts to go beyond the idea that newspapers only represent a medium through which historians can understand past events. As a fairly influential public media organ of information, newspapers published articles that conveyed their own perceptions on important issues and thus constitute a critical source of gauging how those perceptions changed over time, especially during the Civil War. Newspapers then contain their own unique stories and complex dynamics of the underlying issues of slavery, emancipation, and blacks in the United States. One goal of this analysis is to highlight the ways in which these complex newspaper perceptions of national events were portrayed on a local level.

Michigan was one state that harbored many differing opinions to the process of emancipation, and four local newspapers specifically exemplify the large variety of reaction that was evoked before and during the Civil War. This thesis will examine the development of the viewpoints of the *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune*, a strong Republican newspaper; the *Detroit Free Press*, a staunch supporter of the Democratic party; the *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, and the *Ann Arbor Journal*, two Republican-leaning newspapers.⁵ One objective of this analysis is to examine the complexity of the reactions and of their presentation in these local newspapers. For this reason, these four publications were chosen because they especially reveal the diversity of opinions in southeast Michigan.⁶

⁵ It should be noted that the *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune* was known as the *Detroit Daily Advertiser* up until 1862, when the former name replaces it. I have kept to this distinction between the two names throughout the thesis. Likewise, the *Jackson Weekly Citizen* was called the *American Citizen* up until about 1862, when the former name replaces it. Due to discrepancies between these two names through the online database America's Historical Newspapers, I consistently use the *Jackson Weekly Citizen* as the general name for the Jackson newspaper, regardless of the name under which it was published.

⁶ Most copies of three of these four newspapers (the *Detroit Free Press*, *Ann Arbor Journal*, and *Jackson Weekly Citizen*) are available online. Some articles of the *Jackson Weekly Citizen* and all of the *Detroit Daily Advertiser* are conveniently located at the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan, and the general location for each specific article consulted may be found in the bibliography.

These newspapers' discussions of slavery's demise and the coming of emancipation during the Civil War also hinted at their opinions of black people. The four local newspapers would directly report on issues concerning slaves and emancipation, and in the process of examining these publications' coverage of these issues, it is possible to discern how they perceived blacks (free and enslaved) in the United States. These four newspapers' assessments of events related to slavery and emancipation during the Civil War demonstrate how they believed blacks might play a major role in the conflict. In discussing the conflicting ideas of free and slave labor in the country before the Civil War, the *Detroit Free Press* claimed that the discussions surrounding slavery and emancipation were "momentous" simply because they involved African Americans. The future of slavery and blacks' place in American society was a "great question...which for the moment fully occupies the public mind and excites the ordinarily dormant passions to a state bordering upon frenzy."⁷ The events of the Civil War regarding slavery were important to these newspaper publications, but the fact that those events dealt with emancipation and blacks in the United States made them even more pressing; they would "for ever mark a period in [the country's] history."⁸

That frenzy of newspaper discussions concerning slavery, emancipation, and blacks in the United States manifested itself most passionately right before and during the first couple years of the Civil War. The local southeast Michigan newspapers' presentations of their reactions to four key moments between 1860 and 1863, related to the Civil War and to issues concerning blacks, will be consulted. The thesis will begin with Abraham Lincoln's nomination and win of the presidency in 1860, and general viewpoints of him and his "black" Republican party, as

⁷ "The Great Question," *Detroit Free Press*, April 6, 1858.

⁸ Ibid.

Democrats and Democratic newspapers put it, will be considered.⁹ Then, the compromise efforts of Congress, the beginning of military confrontations between the Union and the Confederacy at Fort Sumter in April 1861 and subsequent antislavery measures taken by the federal government are examined as important events. While not necessarily producing any extensive discussions about blacks, how the four newspapers analyzed the start of the Civil War at Fort Sumter highlights how they believed slavery and the presence of blacks in the United States contributed to that conflict. The approval of the First Confiscation Act and the actions of Union generals dealing with runaway slaves later that summer of 1861 also allowed them to exhibit more detailed views on federal undertakings related to slavery and blacks, thus revealing the complex nature of their opinions' trajectories throughout the war. The third event examined will be the approval of the Second Confiscation Act of July 1862, which allowed for the emancipation of Confederates' slaves who came under Union army control.¹⁰ The thesis will finish by analyzing the newspapers' coverage of President Lincoln's 1863 Emancipation Proclamation.

In order to understand the four local southeast Michigan newspapers' positions to all of these events related to slavery, emancipation, and African Americans, some key terms require clarification. The three Republican newspapers often exhibited antislavery sentiments, meaning that they opposed slavery's expansion into the western territories but did not call for interfering with slavery where it legally existed in the South. At times, however, they did discuss abolitionist ideas of completely destroying slavery in the Southern states. During Lincoln's election campaign in the fall of 1860, the *Ann Arbor Journal* appeared to believe that his election would free the United States from slavery. But its support for abolition waned with the progression of the Civil War. The *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune* and the *Jackson Weekly*

⁹ See, for example, "The Black Republican Candidates..." *Detroit Free Press*, May 27, 1860.

¹⁰ James Oakes, *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013), 224-55; Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 215-18, 220.

Citizen, by contrast, did not openly consider abolition during Lincoln's candidacy, yet they eventually did call for sweeping emancipation measures that would help bring about slavery's demise in the South later during the war. These discussions of antislavery and abolitionist attitudes were also underscored by considerations of equality between whites and blacks in the United States. All of the four newspapers at some point discussed the possibility of racial equality in the aftermath of slavery: that is, the potential that blacks and whites would enjoy the same social and political privileges in a postwar society. Some newspapers, especially the *Detroit Free Press* and the *Ann Arbor Journal*, believed that such an idea was absurd. Since racial equality was impossible to achieve in the United States, they at times also argued for the colonization of blacks, or "the government-promoted settlement of black Americans in Africa or some other location" (as historian Eric Foner pointedly defines it).¹¹ All four of these issues and ideas – antislavery sentiment, abolitionist tendencies, the prospect of racial equality, and colonization – were discussed by the four local southeast Michigan newspapers in their observations and reactions of events related to slavery, emancipation, and blacks during the Civil War.

One must also understand certain defining characteristics of nineteenth century newspapers before venturing to analyze their contents. Newspapers served as an indispensable resource for citizens to follow national, statewide, and local news, and they were critically important in giving detailed stories and reports during the Civil War. Moreover, as Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville observed in his 1835-40 analysis of the United States, *Democracy in America*, "without newspapers, there would be hardly any communal action."¹² The immense

¹¹ Eric Foner, "Lincoln and Colonization," in Eric Foner, ed., *Our Lincoln: New Perspectives on Lincoln and His World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), 136. This essay is an insightful study of Lincoln's administration's promotion of colonization during the Civil War.

¹² Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 601.

increase in newspaper publication throughout the antebellum period, and the fact that subscriptions increased as well, reinforced the idea that newspapers were seen as an influential force in American society. It was with the unprecedented growth of publications that news essentially became a widespread commodity.¹³ In 1840 there were about 1,400 newspapers and an annual circulation of around 186 million; by 1860 it had skyrocketed to about 3,725 papers and an annual circulation of nearly 888 million.¹⁴ De Tocqueville commented on this seemingly ubiquitous nature of the newspaper: “A newspaper is an adviser one need not seek out because it appears voluntarily every day to comment briefly upon community business without deflecting your attention from your own... The belief that they just guarantee freedom would diminish their importance; they sustain civilization.”¹⁵ And an 1858 article from the *Detroit Daily Advertiser* (the precursor to the *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune*) claimed that the newspaper “is, beyond a doubt, the strongest lever that civilization has ever produced.”¹⁶ Thus, it was widely believed that newspapers occupied a position of power in the United States. They were deemed to be an integral part of American life and a defining feature of the country’s sense of civilization.¹⁷

Another feature of nineteenth century newspapers is their partisan nature. Many newspapers of the mid-1800s would only present articles and opinions that supported a certain political party or reform movement. De Tocqueville noted this partisan characteristic while in the United States: “A newspaper survives only if it echoes a doctrine or opinion common to a large number of men. Thus a newspaper always represents an association of which its regular readers make up the membership... the seed of such an association must exist in men’s minds to ensure

¹³ Lorman A. Ratner and Dwight L. Teeter, *Fanatics and Fire-eaters: Newspapers and the Coming of the Civil War* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 9.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 600-01.

¹⁶ “Newspapers,” *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, Detroit, MI. February 5, 1858.

¹⁷ Ratner and Teeter, *Fanatics and Fire-eaters: Newspapers and the Coming of the Civil War*, 28.

the survival of a newspaper.”¹⁸ Each newspaper would occasionally post articles from other newspapers that exemplified their opinions on certain issues. As historians Lorman Ratner and Dwight Teeter have suggested, during the antebellum period “a newspaper that was truly independent politically was a rarity and generally did not stay in business long.”¹⁹ All four of the consulted newspapers serve as examples of this politicized press. In Detroit, both the Republican and Democratic parties had supportive newspapers that had considerable differences amongst themselves. While the *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune* strongly endorsed the Republican party, one of its counterparts, the *Detroit Free Press*, was a staunch supporter of the Democratic party in the northern states. The *Jackson Weekly Citizen* and the *Ann Arbor Journal* also tended to be Republican-leaning, but both newspapers at times disagreed with some of the Republicans’ policies.

The choice to examine the complexity of three Republican-leaning newspapers and one Democratic newspaper in southeast Michigan is meant to not simply show the diversity of opinion in the region during the Civil War. An examination of the Republican newspapers also exhibits the contradictory elements at play in their devotion to the antislavery cause and in their observations of issues related to slavery and blacks. The *Jackson Weekly Citizen* and the *Ann Arbor Journal*, for example, had expressed their commitment to measures limiting slavery’s expansion in late 1860 into 1861, yet became dismayed during the passage of the Second Confiscation Act of 1862 and the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 because of their revolutionary consequences for slavery and the future of blacks in the United States.²⁰ The *Ann Arbor Journal* would even publish fairly derogatory articles about blacks when Lincoln’s

¹⁸ De Tocqueville, 603.

¹⁹ Ratner and Teeter, *Fanatics and Fire-eaters*, 21.

²⁰ This will be covered in the third and fourth chapters.

Emancipation Proclamation was issued, claiming that all of it was an awful mistake and that it would have disastrous repercussions for the war. This major shift in opinion in these Republican newspapers serves as an example of how it was not entirely uncommon for these strongly antislavery publications to exhibit discontent towards or even hatred of blacks during the war.²¹ This study is therefore an attempt to show how even Republican papers, in a consistently Republican-leaning region in terms of politics and antislavery sentiment (especially with the growth in the Underground Railroad in southeast Michigan), could contain pejorative viewpoints towards blacks and their future place in American society.

Using these defining facets of newspapers during the Civil War, this thesis offers a rich examination of a wide variety of articles from these four local southeast Michigan newspapers. As Brayton Harris points out in the preface to his *Blue & Gray in Black & White*, only a few historians have dealt with journalism's role in the Civil War.²² Even though recent historical scholarship contains brief examinations of the most prominent national papers, this analysis puts forward a local southeast Michigan perspective with four of its newspapers and analyzes the development of their opinions over time. While not exclusively an analysis of these newspapers' histories in the early 1860s, the chapters that follow necessarily cover a lot of terrain, from Lincoln's presidency to the effects of legislation passed in the U.S. Congress, and from the destruction of slavery and prospects of emancipation to the ways in which the newspapers portrayed and reacted to them. This thesis highlights the complex interactions between newspaper coverage and the specific events and people presented in their publications, all in an

²¹ Eric Foner, personal correspondence; September 14, 2013. In an email, Professor Foner wrote that "it was quite possible in that period to be genuinely antislavery and also harbor deeply racist views of blacks, which might make one skeptical about immediate emancipation." See also Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 261-300.

²² Brayton Harris, *Blue & Gray in Black & White: Newspapers in the Civil War* (Washington: Brassey's, 1999), ix.

effort to trace the evolution of these four papers' beliefs that the destruction of slavery, emancipation, and blacks had an integral part in the American Civil War.

A couple months after Civil War began, the *Jackson Weekly Citizen* published an article presenting the prospects of emancipation being an outcome of the conflict. According to the paper, it was “the great, *first*, and only cause of the rebellion.”²³ President Lincoln’s Republican administration in Washington D. C. had to address the issue, and the “popular sentiment” of the American people was “rapidly developing and unfolding” in terms of seriously discussing the end of slavery, emancipation, and blacks’ place in the United States. The goal of this analysis is not simply to chronicle the various opinions of these four southeast Michigan newspapers, but rather to examine the ways in which this “unfolding” of reaction and opinion occurred. This thesis is also an attempt to demonstrate just how complex these newspapers’ reactions and ideas were and how “the pulse” of the public, aroused by these events and issues, exhibited “a quick and feverish circulation.”²⁴

²³ “The Emancipation of Slavery...,” *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, Jackson, MI. October 10, 1861.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

1

“THE WORLD MOVES!”:¹ The 1860 Election of Abraham Lincoln

A September 1, 1859 article from the *Jackson Weekly Citizen* declared, “*the contest of 1860 is to be a contest of Principles.*”² Perhaps the most important principle at play in the 1860 presidential election was the future of slavery. Given the emphatic reactions all over the country to both the Supreme Court’s decision in the 1857 *Dred Scott* case (ruling that blacks were not U.S. citizens and that the Constitution guaranteed the right to property in slaves) and to the militant abolitionist John Brown’s raid at Harpers Ferry in 1859, there was a considerable amount of discussion in the press concerning slavery’s fate.³ The rise of the new Republican party, which had emerged as a result of Democrat Stephen A. Douglas’ momentous Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 (effectively repealing the 1821 Missouri Compromise by allowing the possible expansion of slavery into the territories), further reinforced the importance of the slavery issue.⁴ Adamantly opposed to the extension of slavery any further from where it already

¹ Headlines, *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, Detroit, MI. November 7, 1860

² “Who Shall be our Leader?,” *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, Jackson, MI. September 1, 1859.

³ Scott R. Nelson and Carol Sheriff, *A People at War: Civilians and Soldiers in America’s Civil War, 1854-1877* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 41-5.

⁴ The secondary literature on the growing issues related to slavery and politics in the antebellum period is, of course, vast. See, for example, Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), 63-131; Nelson and Sheriff, *A People at War*, 31-2, 38-49; Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), 218-53, 521-767; John Ashworth, *The Republic in Crisis, 1848-1861* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); David Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1976); Bruce Levine, *Half Slave and Half Free: The Roots of Civil War* (New York: Hill and Wing, 2005); and an excellent work of the federal government’s relationship with slavery from the days of the American Revolution to Lincoln’s 1860 election is Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government’s Relations to Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

existed (but not willing to interfere with it where it did exist in the South), this antislavery stance of Republicans helped in part to prompt not only a discussion about slavery's future, but also the future of blacks and their place in American society.

The Republicans' attempts to draw more supporters to its ranks by 1860 derived from their party's core principles. Arguing that the institution of slavery, so strong as it was in the Southern states, was destructive in a political, economic, and moral sense, Republicans were hopeful that their consistent emphasis on the slavery issue would result in electoral success.⁵ After a close defeat in the 1856 presidential election to Democrat James Buchanan, Republican John C. Frémont had carried all but five of the sixteen free states. Throughout local and midterm elections, Republicans experienced more victories. By 1860, Republican governors controlled every Northern state except Pennsylvania and Indiana.⁶ Republicans became hopeful that they could win the presidential election of 1860, and by doing so, continue efforts at limiting slavery's influence in the United States.

In order to ensure such a victory to gain the presidency, the party's convention of May 1860 in Chicago decided not to nominate the most well known Republican in the nation, William Seward of New York. He was seen as a radical on the slavery issue, and Republicans were worried about having the party image damaged with rumors that their victory would result in slave insurrections similar to John Brown's attempt to do so a year earlier.⁷ A moderate Republican was the ideal candidate, and Abraham Lincoln of Illinois became this viable alternative to Seward. An exemplar of his party's values (such as hard work and social mobility) and of the less radical cohort of Republicans (in the sense that, for instance, he did not support

⁵ Ashworth, *The Republic in Crisis*, 160-1.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Lorman A. Ratner and Dwight L. Teeter, *Fanatics and Fire-eaters: Newspapers and the Coming of the Civil War* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 71-84.

the repeal of the Fugitive Slave law or of the interstate slave trade), Lincoln gained some national recognition thanks to his 1858 debates in Illinois with Stephen A. Douglas for Douglas' U.S. Senate seat.⁸ On May 18, 1860, Lincoln won his party's nomination for president of the United States.

The 1860 presidential election fielded four candidates. As Lincoln became the Republican candidate in Chicago, the Democrats' two separate conventions in Charleston and Baltimore could not reconcile the differences that were internally fracturing their party. Northern Democrats nominated Stephen A. Douglas while southerners, more bent on promoting slavery's expansion into the territories, chose John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky.⁹ The Constitutional Unionists, selecting John Bell of Tennessee as candidate, constituted a third alternative yet hastily formed party and pledged to preserve national unity by remaining loyal to the Constitution.

This eclectic mix of candidates did not necessarily mean that all four of them would be evenly matched throughout the nation. Lincoln mainly faced Douglas in the Northern and Midwestern states as Bell went against Breckinridge in the South. Without even being on the ballot in the slave states, Lincoln only gathered about 40 percent of the national popular vote (although his near 1,866,000 votes was the most that any presidential candidate had ever received). However, with his commanding lead in the North, Lincoln gained the necessary electoral votes to secure victory.¹⁰

With Lincoln's sound win of the presidency in November of 1860, numerous state legislatures in the South began holding referenda on whether or not secession was necessary.

⁸ Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 136; Ashworth, *The Republic in Crisis*, 167-8.

⁹ Nelson and Sheriff, *A People at War*, 47-8.

¹⁰ Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 143-4.

Southerners for secession simply believed that having a Republican president was impermissible. If a new president committed to the Republican party's antislavery proposal of opposing slavery's expansion westward would now have control over the federal government, Southerners argued that their peculiar institution in holding slaves as property had no chance to survive; compromise was not possible, and the Southern states would need to form their own nation to avoid Republicans' initiatives.¹¹ Indeed, some historians argue that the majority of Republicans expressed belief in being able to weaken slavery when Lincoln became president. The Republican electoral victory in the fall of 1860 appeared to naturally imply a desire for the destruction of slavery. By the time of Lincoln's inauguration in March 1861, nearly all Republicans thought that secession would result in war, and war would result in emancipation.¹²

Discussion of emancipation and the significance of black slaves, however, ensued well before Lincoln took the oath of office in March 1861. Each southeast Michigan newspaper presented in this analysis discussed Lincoln's chances of winning the presidency, his policies, and his personality all in terms of his ties with the Republican party, and consequently, with their position on restricting slavery's expansion. The fact that these newspapers framed the debate for the 1860 election in exhibiting their views on slavery further reinforces the importance of slavery in dividing the nation. It is with the coverage of the Republican candidate Abraham Lincoln that a discussion mentioning blacks and their place in the United States is brought to the fore in these

¹¹ Nelson and Sheriff, *A People at War*, 49; Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 156-7.

¹² Oakes, *Freedom National*, 50-2. James Oakes' recent magnificent, yet controversial, book *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013) is groundbreaking. Oakes asserts that the purpose of the Civil War, according to Republicans, was always to weaken slavery. There was not necessarily a shift in the Lincoln administration's policies from guaranteeing the preservation of the Union to suddenly attacking slavery; Republicans vehemently believed that the two issues of Union and emancipation – liberty and union – remained inextricably entwined throughout the war (see Oakes, *Freedom National*, xxiii-iv). The newspapers consulted in this thesis commented heavily on the laws and happenings related to slavery's demise during the war, and they consistently believed that slavery and blacks were central issues that would determine the progress of the war (something which will be touched upon in chapters 2 and 3). This thesis therefore considers and reflects the importance of Oakes' argument, while it offers a local perspective of southeast Michigan newspapers' opinions on the trajectory of the war's antislavery measures and their consequences for blacks in the United States.

four newspapers. The 1860 election can be seen as a beginning for these publications' ideas, for the consequential Civil War between North and South would produce unforeseen effects on slavery and emancipation. Examining the ways in which the four southeast Michigan newspapers covered Lincoln and the 1860 election thus marks a start to the development of their opinions regarding policies about slavery and blacks during the war that resulted with the coming of emancipation.

As historian John Ashworth has explained, "in terms of new ideas and new policies, the campaign [of 1860] was devoid of interest; in terms of dramatic outcomes, none has ever matched it before or since."¹³ Lincoln's candidacy and eventual electoral victory prompted immense public discussion. Whether analyzing Lincoln directly or the prospects of secession and the future of slavery indirectly through newspaper coverage, a crisis seemed to be upon the nation. That crisis was fueled by political confrontations between the free and slave states, and therefore rooted in the presence of slavery in the country and the public perception, through newspapers, of how blacks in bondage would be dealt with should the institution die. Referring to this confrontation between the Northern and Southern states as an "irrepressible conflict," this idea of New York Republican William Seward (from an 1858 Rochester speech) that the slave and free states were radically different civilizations appeared to have become a reality to Americans.¹⁴ Lively discussion of slavery's future and emancipation energized the press, and as the *Ann Arbor Journal* stated, "the irrepressible conflict is upon us."¹⁵

¹³ Ashworth, *The Republic in Crisis*, 169.

¹⁴ Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 102.

¹⁵ "Secession and Disunion," *Ann Arbor Journal*, Ann Arbor, MI. December 26, 1860.

“The man for the times and the occasion”¹⁶

The *Detroit Daily Advertiser* (the predecessor to the *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune*), heartily endorsed Lincoln as the Republican candidate for the presidency. The Republican Detroit newspaper closely followed the updates of the Republican Convention happening in Chicago in early May of 1860, having articles and details about the convention’s deliberations almost every day. When the news came that Abraham Lincoln was chosen as the party’s nominee on May 18, the paper concluded that “the wisdom of the choice was generally seen and acknowledged,” even though “it took by surprise a majority of our citizens” given the fact that William Seward was the favorite candidate. The paper expected Seward to win the nomination, but the *Advertiser* declared that it would bow “to [the Fates’] behest, for she is pledged to great principles and to great principles only.”¹⁷ Enthusiastic about the party’s antislavery stance of opposing slavery’s expansion, and without even waiting for the news of the candidate for Vice President, the paper said “extensive preparations were made for celebrating the event in an appropriate manner.”¹⁸ Two brass guns were rolled out onto Campus Martius, speaking “in thunder tones the willing assent of this State to [Lincoln’s] nomination...” signaling the coming of a brutal battle “which will not cease till victory perches on our banner and the minions of slave despotism are crushed forever to the earth.”¹⁹

Consistently presenting articles through the summer and early fall of 1860 that emulated the positive aspects of Lincoln and his party, the *Advertiser* published a quick November 1 summary of the importance of Republicans winning in the upcoming election. “Why Vote the Republican Ticket?” the paper asked, exclaiming, “BECAUSE they are in favor of free white

¹⁶ “Mr. Lincoln’s Cabinet,” *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, March 6, 1861.

¹⁷ “Our Standard-Bearers – Victory Awaits Them,” *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, May 19, 1860.

¹⁸ “The Nominations Made!,” *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, May 19, 1860.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

instead of slave labor. BECAUSE they are in favor of keeping the curse of slavery where it is. BECAUSE they believe the free Territories were designed for free men and free labor, rather than slave traders and slave labor.”²⁰ Here, the *Advertiser* makes clear its opposition to the expansion of slavery any further from where it already exists legally. But with this article, it is also possible to see some of the newspaper’s beginning racial attitudes immediately before the start of the Civil War with the election of Lincoln. This Republican publication in Detroit endorsed the party mainly for its principles of opposing slavery’s expansion, but this support of antislavery ideas did not necessarily translate to a full embrace of radical abolitionist doctrines, especially in regards to the promotion of racial equality.

Closer to the day of the election, the *Advertiser* decried the “shameless duplicity” of a local Democratic politician, “Mr. Geo. V. N. Lothrop,” for accusing Republicans of being advocates of “negro equality,” when he was a supporter “only ten years ago,” “of *negro suffrage* in this State, and [he] joined in a petition to the Constitutional Convention to that effect.” The paper was displeased with this Democrat’s decision to distance himself from this previously held position “which he *then* treated as an act of justice,” while “falsely charging the Republican party” with espousing such outrageous principles. Yet the writers at the *Advertiser* were quick to point out that they “by no means censure the Phoenix Bank engineer and Pontiac Railroad financier [Mr. Lothrop] for petitioning for negro suffrage, for we are not prepared to say that he was wrong in doing so.”²¹ This desire of the Republican newspaper’s to remain silent on the issue of promoting black suffrage highlights the volatility of even mentioning that issue on the eve of the Civil War. Yet this article serves as a beginning example of how even strongly antislavery publications like the *Advertiser* tended to harbor indifferent and unfavorable

²⁰ “Why Vote the Republican Ticket?,” *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, November 1, 1860.

²¹ “The Record of a Demagogue,” *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, November 5, 1860.

sentiments towards blacks in a Republican region, politically and in terms of its antislavery tendencies.

The triumph of Lincoln on November 6, 1860, according to the *Advertiser*, was quite the momentous event, closely resembling a revolutionary spectacle. Listing every individual state that was won by Lincoln and the Republicans, it was as if “Everybody Goes for Lincoln!...THE WORLD MOVES! A Bloodless Revolution, and Freedom’s Greatest Triumph!”²² The day would “form an era” which would mark “the second independence of the people of the United States...The American people then declared the separation of the Government from the slave power, and decided that hereafter it shall be administered on broad and national principles – that hereafter Freedom must be the rule, and Slavery the exception.”²³ Ironically, the paper went on to state that “the Free People of the nation” had elected “*the representative of their principles*” of antislavery feelings, justice, honesty, and patriotism, while also “despising all threats of revolution, all appeals to their fears...of a panic-stricken minority.” The rhetoric of the election’s coverage was continually put in terms of slavery versus freedom, and the “minority” of politicians from the Southern states was especially viewed as being hysterical in their threats to secede if Lincoln were elected.²⁴

With Lincoln’s electoral victory, Republican newspapers were so jubilant that antislavery politics (that is, policies aimed to curtail slavery’s extension) were to be the main principles of the U.S. government that it was deemed to be an inevitable occurrence. The *Advertiser* certainly did not see this as a surprise; it “had so long looked upon [this result] as a *certainty*, that we take it more as a matter of course, than an event second only in importance to the Declaration of

²² Headlines, *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, November 7, 1860.

²³ “A Great National Triumph!,” *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, November 7, 1860.

²⁴ Oakes, *Freedom National*, 49-83; Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 150-51; for more on secession, see William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, vol. 2: *Secessionists Triumphant, 1854-1861* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Independence, and upon which the future prosperity...of the nation so much depend..." With the discussion of the future of slavery and blacks in the country on the national agenda, the *Advertiser* believed the election made the nation "REDEEMED, DISENTHRALLED, REGENERATED! Let us all shout over the joyful news that we are once more free."²⁵

The *Detroit Daily Advertiser* did, however, exhibit some alarm at the consequences of Lincoln's victory and the ascension of antislavery politics in the election. An article published about a week before South Carolina seceded from the Union on December 20 detailed how "a man was arrested at New Orleans for the crime of *Lincolnism*. He was charged with having stated that if there had been a Lincoln ticket in New Orleans, he would have voted for it...but it was proved on the examination that he had made the statement 'in fun'..." The *Advertiser* claimed that "there is something wrong" when such a charge could be brought upon someone, and that perhaps "it is high time that the North should offer some new compromise to the slave States, when their teachings have produced such dangerous fruits."²⁶ What that "new compromise" might entail was something the *Advertiser* did not further discuss, but the newspaper nevertheless remained mystified by the Southern states' actions towards people who may have supported Lincoln. The election of Lincoln was evidently causing a vast political crisis in the country, and even a strongly Republican publication like the *Advertiser* was weary that a beginning discussion of slavery's and blacks' future in the United States would cause disunion.

These articles of the *Advertiser* related to Lincoln's prospects as a candidate and victory as a Republican president demonstrate the complex dynamics of the paper's opinions on ideas of antislavery sentiments, abolitionism, and racial equality. Nevertheless, the newspaper was firmly dedicated to Lincoln's party's core commitments of opposing slavery's expansion, even in the

²⁵ "A Great National Triumph!" *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, November 7, 1860.

²⁶ "Something Wrong South," *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, December 14, 1860.

face of a coming Civil War. Right after his inauguration as the sixteenth president of the United States, the paper concluded that Lincoln and his Republican administration “cannot fail to prove a success,” and that he truly was “the man for the times and the occasion.”²⁷

“A wet blanket upon the party”²⁸

Along with the Republican *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, the strongly Democratic *Detroit Free Press* offers another example of how diverse the political publications were in such a large antebellum city like Detroit. Ever since the late 1850s, the *Free Press* viewed with disdain the influence of antislavery ideas in politics. The editors of this fairly influential Democratic newspaper in Detroit believed Republicans were vehemently against slavery’s presence in the United States, and that they would attempt to abolish it immediately. The *Free Press* consistently portrayed the Republicans as “black” politicians, a negative connotation that signified Lincoln’s party as a sympathizer of African Americans and black suffrage. These were, according to Democratic politicians and newspapers, the professed principles of abolitionists, and the Republican party reflected those desires: “The fact is clearly evident to every person possessed of common-sense, that the tendencies of black republicanism are identical with those of abolitionism.”²⁹

Despite these observations by Democratic publications and supporters, it is critical to acknowledge the distinction between abolitionism and antislavery sentiment among followers of Lincoln and the Republican party. Republicans’ core principle was to halt slavery’s expansion into western territories, rather than interfere with slavery where it already existed (which was the

²⁷ “Mr. Lincoln’s Cabinet,” *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, March 6, 1861.

²⁸ “How the Defeat is Taken,” *Detroit Free Press*, Detroit, MI, May 25, 1860.

²⁹ “Black Republicanism and Abolitionism,” *Detroit Free Press*, July 8, 1857.

general desire of most abolitionists).³⁰ Abraham Lincoln never associated himself with the abolitionist cause, but his fervent dislike of slavery and his decision to join the new Republican party in the late 1850s shows why those opposed to slavery's expansion supported the Republicans.³¹ Most Republicans, including Lincoln, did not support the immediate abolition of slavery. They were, however, Free Soil advocates (that is, supportive of the principles of the older Free Soil party which served as a precursor party of the Republicans), articulating the idea that slavery must not extend an inch beyond its current boundaries.³² The Republicans were very mindful of the abolitionists' ideas and their provocative presence in politics. Lincoln's party even managed to utilize and adopt the growing energy of abolitionism in the late 1850s to emphasize the importance of guaranteeing free land in the western territories.³³ As the same *Detroit Free Press* article condemning the connection between abolitionism and the Republicans stated, "at some not very distant period in the future, black republicanism will occupy precisely the same position now held by abolitionism...Abolitionism is the parent of black republicanism; and the child is 'a chip of the old block.'"34

Nevertheless, the *Free Press* consistently deplored Republicans as abolitionists and that, because of this, they would not gain significant support in Michigan. In an effort to negatively portray Republicans as the politicians who favored blacks, the *Free Press* published numerous

³⁰ Paul D. Escott, "What Shall We Do with the Negro?" *Lincoln, White Racism, and Civil War America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 16.

³¹ Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 24-32.

³² Lincoln's developing opinions concerning slavery and emancipation are not specifically addressed in this thesis, but they were consulted for overall historical context of his presidency and the emancipationist policies eventually adopted by his administration. For an excellent secondary source on Lincoln's evolving ideas about slavery and political abilities engaging the institution, see Eric Foner's *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery*. A good source on Lincoln's relationship with abolitionists is James Oakes, *The Radical and the Republican: Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, and the Triumph of Antislavery Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007); see also Manisha Sinha, "Allies for Emancipation?: Lincoln and Black Abolitionists," in Eric Foner, ed., *Our Lincoln: New Perspectives on Lincoln and His World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), 167-196.

³³ Nelson and Sheriff, *A People at War*, 46.

³⁴ "Black Republicanism and Abolitionism," *Detroit Free Press*, July 8, 1857.

articles condemning Lincoln as a sympathizer of blacks and promoter of “negro equality.”³⁵ An August 1860 editorial article pressed that “the history of the legislation of the black republican party everywhere is evidence of their regard for the negro at the expense of the white man.”³⁶ States controlled by Republicans had passed laws protecting blacks and promulgating commitments hoping to bring about black suffrage. “The tendency of all this,” claimed the *Free Press*, “is dangerous...the North will become, what Canada is, an asylum for a semi-barbarous race...”³⁷ In general, “the black republican party is all the time approaching nearer to negro equality.”³⁸ What Republicans seemed to be doing in promoting racial equality, according to Democratic newspapers like the *Free Press*, was ridiculous. The black’s “natural condition is that in which we find him in Ethiopia; his highest condition of civilization is that in which we find him in our own southern States. It is impossible for the two races to live together, in anything like equal numbers, in any other relation than master and servant...”³⁹

The *Free Press* also believed that Republicans would suffer in the upcoming presidential election simply because Abraham Lincoln was chosen as the candidate. Its editors claimed that he aroused no enthusiasm for the party’s antislavery principles. Lincoln’s characteristics proved that he truly was “the black Republican candidate,” and, including a portion of an Albany *Argus* article, he was nothing more than “a slang-whanging stump-speaker, of a class with which every party teems, and of which all parties are ashamed.”⁴⁰ When the Democratic newspaper heard of Lincoln’s nomination in Chicago on May 19, an article detailed the “sorry attempt” of somebody

³⁵ For more on Lincoln’s views pertaining to race and citizenship rights of blacks, see James Oakes, “Natural Rights, Citizenship Rights, States’ Rights, and Black Rights: Another Look at Lincoln and Race,” in Eric Foner, ed., *Our Lincoln: New Perspectives on Lincoln and His World*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), 109-34.

³⁶ “The Black Republicans Prefer Negroes to Aliens,” *Detroit Free Press*, August 26, 1860.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ “Approaching Negro Equality,” *Detroit Free Press*, September 20, 1860.

³⁹ “Negro Civilization,” *Detroit Free Press*, January 15, 1860.

⁴⁰ “The Black Republican Candidates...,” *Detroit Free Press*, May 27, 1860.

trying to begin jubilant demonstrations “over the nomination.” Yet “it was a desperate undertaking, amounting to just about enough noise and smoke to show how very disappointed the black republicans are.” Additionally commenting on the same gun salute ceremony that the *Detroit Daily Advertiser* covered at Campus Martius, the *Free Press* had a very different interpretation of the spectacle: “a score of anxious black republicans...[were] expecting to hear some speeches or to see something in the shape of a demonstration of enthusiasm. But not a speech was heard, and when the guns were stopped the anxious watchers retired, looking very much ashamed of themselves.”⁴¹ Lincoln served as a disappointment for the Republicans since William Seward of New York was the obvious favorite for the party nomination. Republican supporters in Michigan would support Lincoln, of course, but “they accept it in very much the same spirit as the convicted criminal accepts his sentence, it being a matter of necessity that cannot be helped.” The news of the nomination in Michigan “fell like a wet blanket upon the party; it arouses no enthusiasm and excites no rejoicing. The masses do not respond to it...[Lincoln] is greatly inferior, in every way...”⁴²

Given its opinions that Lincoln was a bad Republican candidate and that his victory would mean racial and political equality between whites and blacks in the United States, the *Free Press* warned that these traits of Lincoln would lead the Southern states to secede, thus triggering Civil War. Lincoln’s possible win in the election proved to be extremely dangerous for the country: “the present condition of things is not to be sneered at. It is too serious. The fact that we have often heard threats of a dissolution of the Union may lull some into a false security...those who do not think it serious may be startled by the events if Lincoln is elected President.”⁴³ When

⁴¹ “Solemn Rejoicing,” *Detroit Free Press*, May 19, 1860.

⁴² “How the Defeat is Taken,” *Detroit Free Press*, May 25, 1860.

⁴³ “The Danger of Revolution in the South if Lincoln Should be Elected,” *Detroit Free Press*, October 19, 1860.

Lincoln succeeded in electoral victory, the *Free Press* again commented on the gravity of the situation. “A celebration in [Detroit] is announced of the recent black republican victory. Nero fiddled while Rome was burning. The black republicans celebrate while the Confederacy is going to pieces.”⁴⁴ Deeply upset that the Northern states had brought disunion to the whole country, the *Free Press* also expressed some degree of sympathy with the South, something that was commonplace among Democratic newspapers on the eve of the war:⁴⁵ “...neither the white nor black race would be any the worse off for the event...is it not better...that there should be one or two, or a half dozen, more slave States than that this American Union should be destroyed?”⁴⁶

It is with these articles and observations of Lincoln and his Republican party that the influential Democratic *Detroit Free Press* interpreted the election of Lincoln in possibly promoting the betterment of blacks’ future in the United States.

“Lincoln is so good”⁴⁷

The town of Jackson, Michigan was similar to Detroit in that there was a strong presence of pro-Republican publications. One of them, the *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, was rather fond of Lincoln and his advocacy of opposing slavery’s expansion for the 1860 election. A December 1859 article included extracts from a speech of Illinois Republican Isaac N. Arnold, claiming that “the triumph of the Republican party next year, will not only be the triumph of freedom and the Constitution, but it will restore prosperity to our embarrassed and suffering country.”⁴⁸ Because

⁴⁴ “Celebration of Lincoln’s Election,” *Detroit Free Press*, November 13, 1860.

⁴⁵ Ratner and Teeter, *Fanatics and Fire-eaters*, 94.

⁴⁶ “The Impending Danger—How It May Be Averted,” *Detroit Free Press*, December 29, 1860.

⁴⁷ “Campaign Song,” *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, August 9, 1860.

⁴⁸ “What are the issues of 1860?,” *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, December 8, 1859.

the *Weekly Citizen* became a strong advocate for opposing slavery's expansion in the late 1850s, the newspaper ardently called for the election of Republicans everywhere, so as to advance the cause of antislavery ideas pertaining to limiting slavery's westward expansion in the territories of the United States. To the newspaper, "there is much good in Abraham's bosom,"⁴⁹ and his election would mean that slavery would eventually be weakened, thereby vigorously improving the Union. The *Weekly Citizen*'s adamant desire and activism for preventing slavery's expansion translated into its subsequent support for Lincoln's presidential campaign in 1860.

The Jackson Republican paper tended to display its support for Lincoln by bashing one of his main opponents, Democrat Stephen Douglas. Numerous articles were published throughout 1859 and 1860 continually decrying the injustices of "Douglasism" and its Democratic influence in Michigan. The *Weekly Citizen* accused Douglas of "deliberate deception and falsehood" when he appeared to support federal policies that did not comply with his doctrine of popular sovereignty (where residents of the territories could decide themselves if slavery would be legal there). Douglas' duplicity truly showed how he was the only man in the North "who has stood before Northern Abolitionists and defended domestic slavery as an *humane and beneficial institution* to both the white and black race."⁵⁰ The newspaper also went so far as reversing the logic of Southern slaveholders' and subsequent Democrat supporters' claims that slavery was not a wrong: "Having once assumed that the negro has no natural rights, and that he is only a chattel – a thing, and not a person, there is no point of rest upon any principle of humanity for the slave power." The *Weekly Citizen* thus supported Lincoln and his party's principles since "every day

⁴⁹ "Several papers..." *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, February 23, 1860.

⁵⁰ "What are the Issues?," *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, August 9, 1860.

gives practical development to the despotism which has been established under our free constitution subversive of the freedom and rights of the negro and his descendants.”⁵¹

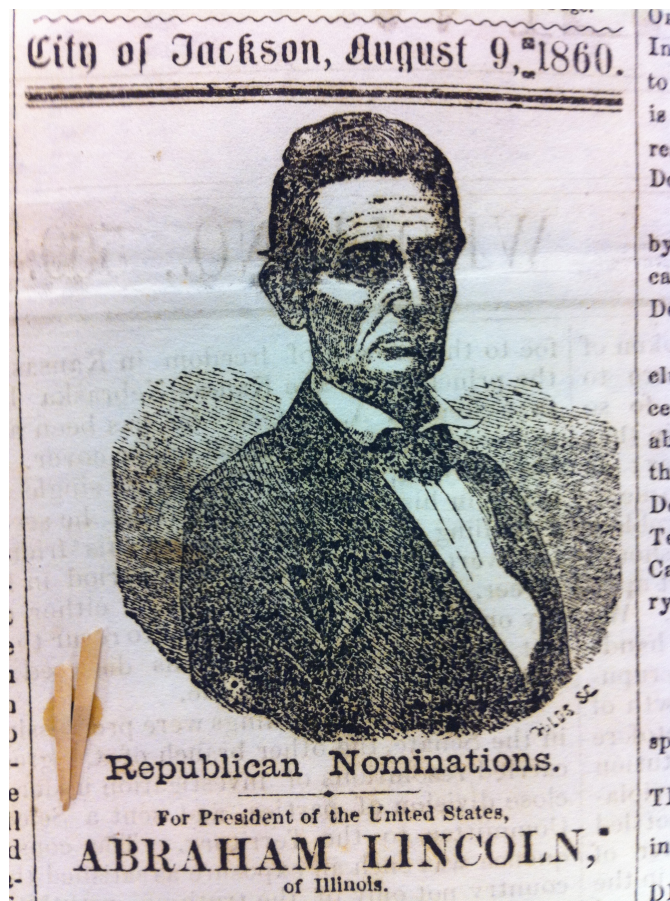
Historians have found that poetry in newspaper publications served as an informative role just like regular newspaper articles.⁵² Poems were meant to rally readers around their candidate of choice, in this case Lincoln, by making a clear connection between the politician and his principles. Many publications of the adamantly Republican paper in Jackson also portrayed their endorsement of Lincoln and dislike of Douglas in provocative poems. Explaining how the “Democrats were losing ground,” one campaign poem emphatically declared that “Republicans are all going in, / ...And as sure as fate, Lincoln will win, / ...We know that Lincoln is so good, / ...He’s always ready at freedom’s call, / The Democrats are afraid of his maul, / They know they’ll get licked out this fall, / ...”⁵³ Similar to the other Republican newspapers, the *Weekly Citizen* always had Lincoln as the symbol of freedom and the fight against slavery, further reinforcing the importance of the slavery issue in newspapers throughout his election and into the start of the Civil War. Similarly, another poem discussed how the Union was like a wagon, and with Lincoln and Republicans driving it, “right” was “on [their] side...to let the nation ride.” The American people were “running on the Union course, / And Lincoln holds the strings, / The Union is our wagon, / And it isn’t any sham, / For it’s crowded with the people, / And the driver’s Abraham...”⁵⁴ It is with these articles and poems from the *Jackson Weekly Citizen* promoted the candidacy of Lincoln. The strong Republican Jackson paper welcomed the major electoral victory of Lincoln and other Republicans, and the publication believed this introduction of antislavery politics was a good thing meant to strengthen the Union.

⁵¹ “The Negro has no Rights,” *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, August 18, 1859.

⁵² Brayton Harris, *Blue & Gray in Black & White: Newspapers in the Civil War* (Washington: Brassey’s, 1999), 267.

⁵³ “Campaign Song,” *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, August 9, 1860.

⁵⁴ “The Republican Wagon,” *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, August 9, 1860.



A pictorial representation of Lincoln in the *Jackson Weekly Citizen* (published as the *American Citizen*) from the summer of 1860. Courtesy of the Bentley Historical Library, photograph by Bryan LaPointe.

“The strongest candidate”⁵⁵

Of the four local Michigan newspapers, the *Ann Arbor Journal* was perhaps the most distinctly supportive of Lincoln’s candidacy in the 1860 presidential race. The ardent Republican paper consistently endorsed antislavery politics of restricting slavery’s westward expansion and became fully vested in Lincoln’s chances for electoral victory. After covering the lengthy details of the Republican party’s convention in Chicago throughout May of 1860, the paper finally

⁵⁵ “The Chicago Convention and Republican Nominations,” *Ann Arbor Journal*, May 23, 1860.

rejoiced on the 23rd that it was “with great pleasure” that Lincoln was “canvassing the merits, fitness and popular strength of all the candidates...we are well satisfied that the nomination of Mr. Lincoln, taking every thing into consideration, is the very best man that could have been made.”⁵⁶ The *Journal* also had no qualms that Seward was not selected as the Republican nominee, showing a stark contrast from the Republican *Daily Advertiser* in Detroit. Lincoln “will command all, or nearly all the advantages which Gov. Seward, of New York, or Gov. Chase, of Ohio [another prominent Republican politician at this time who was expected to become the party’s candidate for president], would have had, without any of the disadvantages.”⁵⁷

Throughout the ensuing months of the election campaign, the Ann Arbor Republican publication continually portrayed Lincoln as an exceptionally honest man and politician, and his sound principles of opposing slavery’s expansion would bring him victory in the election. Lincoln “is a self educated and self made man. *His career and the massive strength of some of his speeches show that he is one of natures great men.*”⁵⁸ Articles and editorials were not the only forms of expression used by the *Ann Arbor Journal* to indicate its fervent support for Lincoln. Poetry on the front page of its publications also conveyed the newspaper’s desire for Lincoln’s win. One poem commented on the connection between Lincoln’s victory and restored liberty for the whole country: “Hurrah for the choice of the nation! / Our chieftain so brave and so true; / We’ll go for the great Reformation - / For *Lincoln* and *Liberty* too! ... They’ll find what by felling and mauling, / Our rail maker statesman can do; / For the people are everywhere calling, / For *Lincoln* and *Liberty* too.”⁵⁹ Another poem exclaimed that Republicans ought to rally for the coming battle, since “Lo’ wounded Liberty lies bleeding! / ...Its lingering ray is last

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ “Lincoln and Liberty,” *Ann Arbor Journal*, June 6, 1860.

receding! / Arouse arouse, ye brave! / Speed forth the People's choice: / 'Free Homes for free, but no more slaves,' / ...Hail Freemen hail your gallant hero! / His dauntless arm your rights will save / ...Hurrah for Lincoln, from the Prairies!"⁶⁰ Like the *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, it was certainly not uncommon to see this type of rallying poetry among Republican publications.

The *Ann Arbor Journal* also appeared to be rallying around Lincoln and his fellow Republicans because the paper deemed that the cause of ending slavery was connected to the aspiration of strengthening the United States. The October 31 edition of the *Journal* had an article that gave advice to the voters of the local area, claiming that this election would "decide the political destiny of this country." It continued, "let us wipe out the disgrace which has so long rested upon us; so that the sun when it rises on the 7th of November, shall look upon a land redeemed, freed from the domination of slavery..." Here, it appears that the *Journal* believed that Lincoln and other Republicans' election victories would imply a certain freedom from slavery. Whether or not that idea of being "freed" reflected the total abolition of slavery is something the *Journal* never specified. Nonetheless, the triumph of Republicans would usher in the triumph of liberty. "...As victory rises from the hosts of Republicans, let our watchword be 'LIBERTY AND UNION, NOW AND FOREVER, ONE AND INSEPARABLE.'"⁶¹ This "watchword" adopted by the *Journal* was a famous phrase from a speech of Daniel Webster's in his well-known 1830 debate with Robert Hayne in the Senate, in which he argued that it was more desirable to fight for a sense of American nationalism rather than the contentious strife of sectionalism, reflecting the Republicans' and their supportive newspapers' principle that freedom was national and slavery merely sectional.⁶²

⁶⁰ "The Rally," *Ann Arbor Journal*, June 13, 1860.

⁶¹ "The Price of Liberty," *Ann Arbor Journal*, October 31, 1860.

⁶² Jon Meacham, *American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House* (New York: Random House, 2008), 129.

Additionally, the day after the election, the paper was extremely pleased with the election results, acknowledging that it seemed like the United States would be “redeemed” from its “disgrace” with Lincoln’s win:⁶³ “ABRAHAM LINCOLN, THE CHAMPION OF LIBERTY ELECTED PRESIDENT! REPUBLICANISM TRIUMPHANT...Hurrah for ‘Old Abe’ the Champion of Freedom, free homes, free Speech and free Territories.”⁶⁴ The triumph of Republicanism meant that antislavery policies were on the federal government’s agenda, and that in turn continued the discussion of slavery’s future in newspapers, especially in southeast Michigan. The *Ann Arbor Journal*’s activism for the Republican party and Lincoln’s candidacy extended into 1861 with the start of Civil War.

As these numerous articles from the four local southeast Michigan newspapers demonstrate, the varying reactions to Lincoln becoming the Republican candidate in the 1860 election illustrate how the issue of slavery was the central point of contention in the country. This chapter shows not only how each newspaper presented their opinions of Lincoln and his Republican party, but also how every publication portrayed the candidate through his party’s position on the issues of antislavery sentiment, the abolition of slavery, and the possibility of racial equality. After the formation of the Confederate States of America by the Deep South states in February of 1861, Lincoln’s inauguration in March, and efforts by Congress to initiate compromise between the Union and Confederacy, these four local newspapers would again revisit and react to the growing issue of slavery’s demise that, according to them, would eventually come about if military confrontation occurred. These newspapers may have believed that “the world moved” with Lincoln’s revolutionary electoral victory, but the outbreak of war in

⁶³ “The Price of Liberty,” *Ann Arbor Journal*, October 31, 1860.

⁶⁴ Headlines, *Ann Arbor Journal*, November 7, 1860.

April 1861 would completely change their outlook on slavery and the future of blacks in the United States.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Headlines, *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, November 7, 1860.

2

“The war-cloud is gathering”:¹ The Corwin Amendment, Fort Sumter, and the Start of Civil War

With Lincoln set to assume the presidency by taking the oath of office on March 4, 1861, the United States had literally become a divided nation. South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas had declared their independence from the Union and created the Confederate States of America in February 1861. If Lincoln’s triumph in the November election illustrated how the “irrepressible conflict” between the North and South had become a reality, the events that unfolded through the winter hinted at the gathering of “the war-cloud,” as the *Detroit Free Press* speculated at the beginning of 1861.² The coming of war in April 1861 not only illustrated how deep the rupture was between the Union and Confederacy, but also how significant slavery and blacks were in the ensuing conflict. All four of the local southeast Michigan newspapers reacted to the start of war by discussing the future of slavery, the prospects of emancipation, and why black slaves would prove to be crucial actors in this armed struggle that was (according to these publications) all about slavery.

The seven Deep South states’ decision to leave the Union energized the general public and the media. Newspapers all across the country, including the four local southeast Michigan

¹ “The March of Events,” *Detroit Free Press*, Detroit, MI. January 1, 1861

² Ibid.; There are plenty of secondary books on the complex series of events that happened between Lincoln’s election in November 1860 and his inauguration in March 1861 (also leading up to the start of war in April). Some particularly good ones consulted in this thesis are Harold Holzer, *Lincoln President-Elect: Abraham Lincoln and the Great Secession Winter, 1860-1861* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008); Kenneth M. Stampp, *And the War Came: The North and the Secession Crisis, 1860-1861* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1950); and Richard N. Current, *Lincoln and the First Shot* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1963).

publications presented in this thesis, discussed the origins and consequences of disunion and whether secession was even legal. Most northerners, Democrats and Republicans, denied the idea that a state had the right to secede.³ In his annual message to Congress in December 1860, even Democratic President James Buchanan deemed secession illogical and essentially illegal. But Buchanan further clouded the issue, declaring that both Congress and the president had no power under the Constitution to force a state into submission that had withdrawn or was attempting to withdraw from the Union. In effect, secession was wrong, but neither he as president nor members of Congress could do anything to stop it.⁴

Regardless of what Buchanan said in his annual message, Congressmen scrambled throughout the winter of 1860-61 to broker a compromise. Numerous proposals were put forth, the most popular being a series of constitutional amendments and congressional resolutions from Kentucky Congressman John J. Crittenden. The Crittenden Compromise would have prohibited Congress from abolishing slavery where it already existed, extended the old Missouri Compromise line to allow for the admission of new slave states south of it, banned federal regulation of the interstate slave trade, and called for a more strict enforcement of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act and the repeal of many personal liberty laws in the North. Rejected by both chambers of Congress, many Republicans refused to endorse the Crittenden plan since it practically embodied everything they were opposed to when it came to the issue of slavery.⁵ Other Congressional proposals were also considered, especially with the amendment put forth by Ohioan Thomas Corwin in March 1861. The Corwin Amendment stated that no constitutional

³ Stamp, *And the War Came*, 111-13; Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), 147.

⁴ Holzer, *Lincoln President-Elect*, 129-33.

⁵ James Oakes, *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013), 73, 128-31; John Ashworth, *The Republic in Crisis, 1848-1861* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 178-80.

amendment could be passed that would give Congress “the power to abolish or interfere, within any State, with the domestic institutions thereof, including that of persons held to labor or servitude by the laws of said State.”⁶ While only some Republicans voted for it, both houses of Congress approved this new Thirteenth Amendment. The sole compromise measure adopted by Congress, it was never approved by the necessary three-fourths of the states for it to be added to the Constitution.⁷ Yet the Corwin Amendment was seen at the time as a measure that could possibly prevent the Upper South states from seceding, thereby weakening the newly formed Confederacy.⁸

Throughout this crisis and Congressional efforts to resolve it, Lincoln was bombarded with pleas to devise a policy to quell the progression of disunion. Although he stated that he was flexible on issues such as the return of fugitive slaves to the South, Lincoln refused to compromise on his party’s core principle of opposing any extension of slavery westward. Making this clear in his inaugural address of March 4, 1861, Lincoln also mentioned he was not opposed to the Corwin amendment which had passed in Congress, since he believed it simply restated implied Constitutional law.⁹ Similarly, the *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, the *Detroit Free Press*, and the *Ann Arbor Journal* all conveyed their thoughts on the Corwin Amendment in early March of 1861, and their discussions of its significance further demonstrate the development of their opinions on the federal initiatives dealing with slavery even on the eve of

⁶ The text of the adopted Thirteenth (Corwin) Amendment was included in the article, “The Proposed Constitutional Amendment,” *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, Detroit, MI. March 9, 1861.

⁷ Ibid.; Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 156-57.

⁸ A lot of historians have tended to neglect the compromise efforts of the months preceding Lincoln’s inauguration. There appears to be no secondary book that explicitly explores the first congressionally passed Thirteenth Amendment. Whether or not the Corwin Amendment was viewed as meaningless, as many historians speculate, there was no consensus among Republicans at the time for how to prevent the spread of disunion. For more, see Russell McClintock, *Lincoln and the Decision for War: The Northern Response to Secession* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 133-164.

⁹ Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 158.

war. This chapter not only explores each papers' commentary on Lincoln and the attempts at compromise (such as the Corwin Amendment), but it also emphasizes how they began to exhibit thoughts on the federal government's efforts to weaken slavery with the beginning of war in April 1861 prompted by the secession crisis.

When the seven Deep South states seceded, the Confederate government took possession of most of the federal forts within its territory, with the exception of Fort Pickens near Pensacola, Florida, Forts Taylor and Jefferson located in the Florida Keys, and Fort Sumter in South Carolina's Charleston Harbor. Given its proximity to Confederate guns and the fact that a Union ship, *The Star of the West* was fired upon in January 1861 when it tried entering the harbor, public attention was heavily fixed on Sumter and thus became symbolic as a possible source of hostilities.¹⁰ That symbolism became a reality once Major Robert Anderson, the Union officer at Sumter, sent a message to Lincoln in March 1861 detailing how he and his men were in dire need of provisions and reinforcements if the fort was to remain in Union hands. After intense deliberation with his divided cabinet, Lincoln chose to send Anderson a provision ship, not arms. The decision was viewed as an act of provocation by the seceded Southern states, and Confederate president Jefferson Davis called for the bombardment of Sumter on April 12, 1861. Armed confrontation had begun, sparking Civil War.¹¹

With the surrender of Union troops to the South in Charleston Harbor, the "irrepressible conflict" between the free and slave states that newspapers and many Republicans had long hinted at became an armed confrontation. Immediately after the fall of Fort Sumter, Lincoln called on the states for 75,000 volunteers. This call to arms caused four more slave states (Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Arkansas) to secede from the Union. The secession of

¹⁰ Ibid., 161; Stampp, *And the War Came*, 96; Ashworth, *The Republic in Crisis*, 187.

¹¹ The details of how war came about at Fort Sumter are well told in Kenneth M. Stampp, *And the War Came: The North and the Secession Crisis, 1860-1861* and Richard N. Current, *Lincoln and the First Shot*.

the Upper South and its joining into the Confederacy, the new nation that decreed slavery and black inferiority as its cornerstone (according to its Vice President, Alexander H. Stephens), appeared to convince Americans that antislavery policies would bring about the destruction of slavery and emancipation, and thus defeat the Confederates.¹² Consequently, Lincoln began receiving numerous letters and pieces of advice from members of his cabinet and others sympathetic to the Republican party, calling for him to bring about emancipation. Although he insisted that the war was primarily meant to preserve the Union, Lincoln's advisors and many newspapers across the country emphasized that patriotism for the country was linked to preserving liberty through the war, therefore meaning the abolition of slavery and the freeing of the slaves.¹³

Indeed, within a month of Fort Sumter's surrender, governmental officials and Union generals began making decisions concerning slavery's demise. In late May, as a consequence of numerous fugitive slaves coming to Fortress Monroe in Virginia, General Benjamin F. Butler declared that they were contraband of war and therefore would not return to their masters as slaves. With more and more fugitive slaves coming into Union army lines, Lincoln signed the First Confiscation Act on August 8, 1861, which emancipated slaves that were used in support of the Confederacy. And in late August, General John C. Frémont ordered the emancipation of Confederate owners' slaves while in charge of Union forces in Missouri.¹⁴ This chapter is an attempt to present a variety of the local southeast Michigan newspapers' general opinions related to these antislavery initiatives during the war, especially in the aftermath of Fort Sumter's surrender.

¹² Oakes, *Freedom National*, 79; Paul D. Escott, "What Shall We Do with the Negro?" *Lincoln, White Racism, and Civil War America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 9.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 80-82; Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 163-65.

¹⁴ For more details on General Butler, the First Confiscation Act, and General Frémont, see Oakes, *Freedom National*, 95-99, 106-44, 156-59; Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 176-77.

With the attack on Fort Sumter and the start of war, all four of the local southeast Michigan newspapers in this thesis discussed in some degree how slavery was the cause of the conflict. While all of the newspapers proclaimed their strong devotion to the United States government with the beginning of Civil War, the Republican-leaning publications also began exhibiting their desires for the end of slavery and how blacks' presence in the country would affect the institution's demise. In the process of examining these newspapers' reactions to Fort Sumter and to the beginning antislavery initiatives of the federal government, it is also possible to see how blacks were perceived by these publications.

“It seems more like a wild dream”¹⁵

The Republican *Detroit Daily Advertiser* had heartily endorsed Lincoln and his administration throughout the winter of 1860-61, claiming that they were certainly going to be “a success,” given how “dark...the political prospects of the nation may seem at present.”¹⁶ The Corwin Amendment represented one federal effort to ameliorate that “dark” political situation. Reporting on the passage of this new Thirteenth Amendment that would prohibit Congress from interfering with slavery in the Southern states, the *Advertiser* included the Senate vote on the amendment and commented on the fact that twelve Republicans voted against it. These Republicans “contended that those who have been engaged in attempts to disrupt the Union did not ask for this amendment, and would not, therefore, be favorably affected by it.” While the paper appreciated “the motives” of these Republicans who opposed the measure, it saw had “no objection to the character of the amendment.” It continued,

¹⁵ “Civil War!,” *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, April 15, 1861.

¹⁶ “Mr. Lincoln’s Cabinet,” *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, March 6, 1861.

It is very generally understood that it is proposed so to amend the Constitution as forever to prohibit Congress from abolishing slavery in any of the States under any possible circumstances. But this is not the proposition. It is simply that no amendment shall ever be made to it *giving* Congress this power. All the power the Constitution now possesses (if any) is to remain undisturbed. No *new* prohibition is to be incorporated into it. If Congress has that power under it now – which, of course, no Republican claims – it will equally possess it should two-thirds of the States approve this amendment. It will, therefore, be perfectly harmless.¹⁷

With this, the *Advertiser* deemed the Corwin Amendment meaningless because it simply reiterated what everyone already believed: that Congress could not interfere with slavery where it already legally existed. There was, therefore, “no serious harm in engrafting this opinion upon the constitution.” At the same time, however, the *Advertiser* claimed it would “be quite willing to see it adopted” if it would “contribute anything towards satisfying the South.” The amendment could be seen as a concession to quell the spread of disunion: “As the North has never proposed to interfere with slavery in the States, the South has no right to ask this amendment. We would only give it in the hope of allaying all doubt there.”¹⁸

Whether or not the Corwin Amendment could forestall war was not considered by the *Advertiser*, especially with the beginning of armed conflict that eventually occurred a month later. The *Advertiser* proved to be stupefied by the start of war at Fort Sumter in April 1861. The American people, according to the editors, had been “the happiest, most contented, and most prosperous on the face of the earth” before the bombardment of Union soldiers in Charleston Harbor. Yet the paper then thought “that a civil war is absolutely raging at this moment in the United States...is a fact almost too astounding to be believed...”¹⁹ The main headlines for most of the week after Fort Sumter’s surrender included praise for the patriotism that seemed to be everywhere, calling for rallying around the American flag: “FERVENT ENTHUSIASM FOR

¹⁷ “The Proposed Constitutional Amendment,” *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, March 9, 1861.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ “Civil War!,” *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, April 15, 1861.

THE STARS AND STRIPES! Undivided Determination to Stand by the Union!”²⁰ However, despite this patriotic fervor, the *Daily Advertiser* quickly blamed the South and its love for slavery as the primary cause of the war.

That armed confrontation had begun because of the Confederacy’s determination to sustain slavery was unbelievable to the Republican Detroit newspaper: “It seems more like a wild dream, than a reality, that this republic...has been plunged into the horrors of a fratricidal war by a small faction of the people, for no higher or nobler purpose, than to strengthen and perpetuate an institution accursed of God and abhorred by men.”²¹ The attack on Fort Sumter, which illustrated how “this government is struggling for its existence,” had convinced the paper that the ensuing war “requires the earnest and determined support of every Northern man” not simply to fight for the Union, but also to attack the proslavery principles of the South and those who seemed to defend them. The *Advertiser* was quick to note that it was not going to denounce “that paper” which served as “the example of the slave organ” (most likely referring to the *Detroit Free Press*), but that it would “hold their principles alone responsible for” the conflict. “Upon them alone...rest the infamy of breaking up this once powerful and prosperous nation, and then of inaugurating a bloody strife between the dissevered parts.”²²

Because the sympathizers of slavery had dissolved the Union “for a cause so disgraceful,” the *Advertiser* saw the coming war as an opportunity to seek revenge on those responsible throughout the country. Seceding from the United States in the attempt to strengthen slavery was, as President Buchanan and many others had insisted, essentially illegal, so the Republican publication accordingly viewed the Southern secessionists as criminals guilty of

²⁰ “The Crisis in Detroit!,” *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, April 16, 1861.

²¹ “Civil War!,” *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, April 15, 1861.

²² Ibid.

attacking freedom: “The people and world will hold the traitors who have been guilty of these stupendous crimes to a fearful responsibility for their conspiracy against freedom and humanity. They will be hereafter treated in history and held by mankind as outlaws and desperadoes...”²³

The fact that the proponents of slavery, North and South, had brought about this crisis made the *Advertiser* equally inclined to have physical vengeance against them in the coming war. “Every drop of blood shed in the unnatural strife will be brought into judgment against them.”²³

What form that vengeance might take and how it would come about was something the *Detroit Daily Advertiser* began considering in the aftermath of Fort Sumter’s surrender and the beginning of war in the summer of 1861. Like numerous other Republican newspapers and politicians across the country, the *Advertiser* was heavily inspired by the ideas of former President and Congressman John Quincy Adams concerning the emancipation of slaves during wartime. Back in the early 1830s with the rise of abolitionist sentiment throughout the country, while Congress was debating the gag rule (the tabling of antislavery measures brought forth by abolitionists), Adams argued how the federal government could emancipate slaves during wartime or a time of rebellion. Initially indicating that Congress had the constitutional power to do so, Adams later claimed that the commander in chief of the armies (that is, the president) could bring about this emancipation. The outbreak of war at Fort Sumter in April 1861 prompted some Republicans and abolitionists to prod Lincoln to consider Adams’ emancipation ideas. Some politicians went so far as reciting Adams’ speeches in the chambers of Congress to illustrate their desire that the war was principally about slavery, and that only when slavery was destroyed could the Union defeat the Confederacy.²⁴

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Oakes, *Freedom National*, 35-41; Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 164.

Republican newspapers throughout the North did the same thing. The *Detroit Daily Advertiser* drew upon Adams' arguments and included excerpts from his speeches in the effort to portray the antislavery element in the ensuing war. In late September 1861 as a response to General Frémont's efforts to emancipate slaves of rebels in Missouri, the Republican publication in Detroit featured a long article admiring Adams' history. Claiming that he was "entitled to as much respect as that of any other statesman of his age or country," the former president and secretary of state Adams was "a man of profound learning, of vast research and brilliant talents," making him "one of the most experienced and skillful diplomatists the country has ever produced." Given these strengths, the paper concluded that his views "upon whatever subject" were "entitled to all the consideration [they have] received." The *Advertiser* continued, saying that since Frémont's "proclaiming freedom to the slaves of rebels only [was] creating so much discussion," Adams' views about abolishing slavery in the time of war would be "especially interesting at this time."²⁵

No commentary was needed from the *Advertiser* to convey the significance of Adams' ideas. The paper included large portions of an 1842 speech of Adams', illustrating how powerful his thoughts were in highlighting the possibility of emancipation. "...when a country is invaded...[...] military authority takes, for the time, the place of all municipal institutions, *slavery among the rest* ; and that, under that state of things, not *only the President of the United States, but the commander of the army, has the power to order the universal emancipation of the slaves.*"²⁶ The message was clear: with the Southern states in secession, the Union army and Lincoln as president had the constitutional authority to declare the slaves in rebel territory free. Fort Sumter's surrender in April 1861 had proven that an armed rebellion was occurring between

²⁵ "Power of War to Abolish Slavery," *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, September 24, 1861.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

the United States and the Confederacy, stemming from slavery, and that given the antislavery initiatives taken by policymakers in Washington, D.C. and by Union generals, attacking slavery was the only way to win the conflict.

With this discussion of emancipation, the *Advertiser* also commented on the effects of antislavery policies on blacks in the South near Union army lines. One article hailed the decision of some forty “negro boys” to follow Union troops through the Kentucky town of Cynthiana. The blacks were “*hollering for Jeff. Davis and Beauregard*” (a Confederate general) and proclaiming that they were “DOUN ON” Unionism. The *Advertiser* believed that with these actions, blacks in the South understood that the fight was about slavery and that they could become free: the “shrewd” blacks

see that their only chance for freedom is in “hollering for Jeff. Davis,” and fighting for the “Confederacy.” Then, under the law of Congress, they are to be confiscated, and may ultimately be declared *free*. The cunning little rascals of Cynthiana, as well as slaves generally, know the consequences of being “doun on Unionism,” much better than we supposed.²⁷

Because they comprehended that either by working for the Confederacy and then being confiscated by Union armies meant that they would be emancipated, the slaves of the South were cunning, intelligent, and “shrewd.” It appears that the *Advertiser* also began considering the possibility that blacks could be soldiers at this time in late 1861, given that they understood that the conflict revolved around slavery’s demise. In an article poking fun at the *Detroit Free Press* for feeling uneasy about using blacks as soldiers, the *Advertiser* declared, “the negro will be the death of the *Free Press* yet.” The Democratic publication in Detroit seemed to have “the most frightful spasms” when the idea of black soldiers was brought up. But, for the *Advertiser*, “General [Andrew] Jackson took a different view...he did not hesitate to arm slaves in the last

²⁷ “Shrewd Negroes,” *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, September 24, 1861.

war with England.” For this, the Republican *Advertiser* could only condemn its “negro-hating, but slave-worshipping neighbor,” the *Free Press*.²⁸

It was with the outbreak of war at Fort Sumter in April 1861 and subsequent antislavery initiatives taken by the federal government that the Republican *Detroit Daily Advertiser* began exhibiting thoughts on blacks in the United States.

“A reign of terror as the world has never witnessed”²⁹

Like its Detroit counterpart, the *Detroit Free Press* could not help but comment on the congressionally passed Corwin Amendment in early March 1861. News on Congress’s consideration of the amendment was greeted with major skepticism from the *Free Press*, declaring the measure practically useless. It seemed as if “the proposition will give little satisfaction to the South, because the proposition is inadequate as a remedy for their grievances.” Not only was the amendment considered defective in satisfying the South, but the Democratic Detroit newspaper also went on to slander the politics surrounding the Corwin compromise proposals.

The proposition is of little consequence one way or the other, except that the action upon it has revealed the fact that sixty-five republican members of the House are unwilling to give a constitutional guarantee that slavery in the States shall not hereafter be interfered with by amendments of the constitution, - from which we must draw the inference that they look forward to interference through the overwhelming power of the North to amend the constitution.³⁰

Coming from the Democratic *Free Press*, it is not surprising to see the newspaper accusing Republicans of wishing to eventually interfere with slavery in the South since they did not approve of the Corwin Amendment. An article a week later claimed that it was “irresistible” to

²⁸ “Negro Soldiers,” *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, December 3, 1861.

²⁹ “Secession is Civil War,” *Detroit Free Press*, May 1, 1861.

³⁰ “The Proposed Amendment,” *Detroit Free Press*, March 3, 1861.

infer that Republicans desired to “amend the constitution” in order to “interfere with and abolish slavery in the States.”³¹ The *Free Press* was bent on portraying Republicans as abolitionists eager to meddle with slavery where it already existed legally, and the fact that many Republicans in the House voted against the amendment (according to the paper) exemplified their abolitionist tendencies.

While it complained about the vote and the efficacy of the Corwin Amendment, the *Free Press* later endorsed the compromise measure. This change in position of the Detroit newspaper appears to have been influenced by local state politics and the fact that the publication believed the secession crisis was becoming increasingly serious now that Lincoln had been inaugurated as president. The *Free Press* asserted that the new amendment ought to be considered in the state legislature before the end of its session; the paper asked, “Will the Legislature at Lansing adjourn without acting upon the constitutional amendment proposed by Congress?” The publication went on to state that “although the amendment is not all that we have hoped for and believed to be essential to the adjustment of pending difficulties, yet so far as it goes we are satisfied with it.” No matter what the *Free Press* said about the amendment before, the state legislature needed to discuss the compromise measure because it would place “the State in a more enviable attitude,” and also because the publication thought “prompt action [was] absolutely necessary.”³² Yet, prompt action was never taken on the Corwin Amendment since the necessary three-fourths of the states did not approve it to officially amend the Constitution.

Discussion of the compromise efforts coincided with those of war prompted by Fort Sumter’s surrender in April 1861. With the Confederate bombardment of Fort Sumter, the Democratic *Detroit Free Press* vehemently expressed its desire to defend and protect the United

³¹ “The Recent Action of Congress on the Political Crisis,” *Detroit Free Press*, March 10, 1861.

³² “The Proposed Amendment of the Federal Constitution,” *Detroit Free Press*, March 12, 1861.

States. Although it was fairly confused with the complex series of events that led to the beginning of war between the North and South, stating, “so rapidly do the scenes shift...that we are bewildered when we sit down to the work of discussing the apparent situation of things,” the publication was committed to the Union cause.³³ As a paper tied to the Democratic party, it declared, “the democratic party are not willing to see the flag of the Union trailed in the dust.”³⁴ “Every shot at Fort Sumpter was aimed at the constitution we revere...*the first allegiance of every one is to support and maintain that constitution in its integrity*...Our love of country...extends from ocean to ocean.”³⁵ The *Free Press* was determined that secession and the Southerners responsible for it would unfortunately mean war. But the editors believed that that war would be just, for it was “a struggle to maintain law and order against anarchy,” possibly bringing about “a reign of terror as the world has never witnessed.”³⁶

Similar to the *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, these patriotic calls for national unity, however, did not silence the partisan nature of the Democratic Detroit newspaper. There were some *Free Press* articles published in the late spring 1861 appearing to sympathize with the Southern people. “We war not with [the South] as a people. We have no feelings of hatred, no wrongs to complain of, which have alienated our feelings of friendship.”³⁷ These attempts of the *Free Press* to reach out to the seceded states may also have stemmed from their desire to not support the Lincoln administration. The publication wanted to make clear that they would defend the country, but not the government or the antislavery politics of its Republican leaders: “We protest against the disposition manifested at all public gatherings by a certain class of speakers,

³³ “The War Spirit,” *Detroit Free Press*, April 14, 1861.

³⁴ “A Protest,” *Detroit Free Press*, April 24, 1861.

³⁵ “Our First Allegiance Due to the United States,” *Detroit Free Press*, May 2, 1861.

³⁶ “Secession is Civil War,” *Detroit Free Press*, May 1, 1861.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

who...cram black republicanism down the throats of all the people...the democratic party does not endorse the administration of ABRAHAM LINCOLN more now than formerly.” If the *Free Press* had any belief whatsoever in Lincoln’s presidency, it was that he and his party had practically caused the crisis in the first place: “...in thus standing by and protecting that flag we by no means, nor does the democratic party...consider for a moment that this war is without cause on [the administration of Mr. Lincoln’s] part.”³⁸

No matter how much disapproval the *Free Press* showed towards Lincoln and his administration, the Democratic publication did discuss the possibility that antislavery policies would take effect during the war after Fort Sumter’s surrender in April 1861. The *Free Press* considered it unbelievable that other newspapers and Union supporters were incessantly speculating that emancipation was of importance in the Civil War. “It is to us one of the most remarkable features of this contest, that men will not sink their opinions upon the subject of slavery and the practicability of emancipation, even temporarily, to fight for the existence of the government.”³⁹ That the conflict between the Union and Confederacy that began at Fort Sumter would bring about emancipation was unimportant and nearly impossible to the *Free Press*. About a month after the first major battle of the war at Bull Run, the paper thought that recognition of the Confederate State of America was a better option than bringing about emancipation. “It seems to us too clear for argument...between the two, immediate, unconditional emancipation or recognition of the Southern Confederacy, we should be compelled to take the latter.”⁴⁰ Indeed, the Democratic *Free Press* consistently ridiculed antislavery sentiment and Republican newspapers for claiming that slavery was the cause of the war. That

³⁸ “A Protest,” *Detroit Free Press*, April 24, 1861; Ratner and Teeter, *Fanatics and Fire-eaters*, 112.

³⁹ “Union Men and Abolition,” *Detroit Free Press*, September 1, 1861.

⁴⁰ “Emancipation or Defeat,” *Detroit Free Press*, August 29, 1861.

logic was purely “sophism, but really only abolition nonsense.” The publication instead deemed that agitation of the slavery issue was the reason for current hostilities: “...if there had existed no abolitionism at the North there would have been no secession and no war.”⁴¹

Despite its insistence that slavery was not the issue of the war, perhaps the most surprising observation of the *Free Press*'s news coverage in the spring of 1861 was its indirect recognition of slavery's importance in prompting the conflict. Even before armed confrontation began at Fort Sumter in April, the Democratic paper blamed antislavery rhetoric around the country to have a negative influence on politics. The election of Republicans in the fall of 1860 had spelled doom for the nation, and their antislavery policies were the reason for the crisis. “There has never been any thing so bad...as this anti-slavery crusade...It has excited the people of the two sections to deadly enmity against each other...And finally it has broken up the Union.”⁴²

Not only were antislavery advocates to blame for disunion, but certain *Free Press* articles implied that the mere presence of slavery in the southern United States prompted major differences between North and South in the first place. In order that “the American people should comprehend the meaning of the rebellion” that produced military confrontation at Fort Sumter in April 1861, the *Free Press* went through an analysis of power and despotic government in the northern and seceded states. The article from June then went on to discuss the origins of these conflicting opinions, concluding, “The peculiar aspect of the slavery question...has, from the formation of the government, had the effect of rendering great masses of the nation conservative of the existing state of things, and has now localized the different sentiments in a struggle,

⁴¹ “The Cause of the War---Emancipation,” *Detroit Free Press*, October 26, 1861.

⁴² “The Republican Party as a Governing Party,” *Detroit Free Press*, March 27, 1861.

which, in some form or another, was inevitable to the nation.”⁴³ No matter what the dispute was between the northern and southern states since the federal government was established after the American Revolution, the origins of any conflicted interests could somehow be stemmed back to slavery’s presence in the United States.

How the ensuing war might have an effect on destroying slavery and affecting blacks in the country was an aspect the *Free Press* began speculating about in the summer of 1861. Perhaps one of the most surprising declarations by the Democratic Detroit paper was that Southern slaves should be taken from Confederates in accordance with the newly passed Confiscation Act.⁴⁴ Whether or not that meant emancipation, however, was not an important concern to the *Free Press*. The start of armed conflict between the Union and the Confederacy at Fort Sumter had ushered in, according to the editors of the *Free Press*, “the eve of the decision of a question which, for all time, will mark a period in [the nation’s] history.” While this article from June 1861 remains unclear as to what the question was, it hinted that the war might not only witness the end of slavery, but also the end of racial conflict between whites and blacks. The *Free Press* insisted that for years, “the disparity between the two races...has increased until it has reached the point where no human power can control it...greater and greater...the blacks [would] dwindle into comparative insignificance with the myriads of whites who will claim a voice in wielding the destinies of this great nation, because they are bound to it by the nearest and dearest ties of home.”⁴⁵ Any attempt to prevent this great change (reinforcing the inferiority of blacks) from happening during the war would prove to be “dangerous to the peace and well

⁴³ “The War and Its Object,” *Detroit Free Press*, June 1, 1861.

⁴⁴ Silvana R. Siddali, *From Property to Person: Slavery and the Confiscation Acts, 1861-1862* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 83.

⁴⁵ “What is the Real Question?,” *Detroit Free Press*, June 26, 1861.

being of the country.”⁴⁶ Additionally, the *Free Press* decried the resolutions adopted by a conference of Detroit’s Methodists when they deemed that slavery was the cause of the war and abolition its natural outcome. In an October article, the Democratic Detroit publication claimed that such churches that argue for emancipation ought to “weigh well the effect upon the welfare and happiness” of the nation when making such a declaration. It did not seem to be a good idea, according to the *Free Press*, to advocate for “setting free at once four millions of blacks who are utterly unable to take care of themselves...”⁴⁷

These many newspaper articles demonstrate the ways in which the *Detroit Free Press* reacted to Congress’ compromise efforts, the beginning of armed confrontations after Fort Sumter’s surrender in April 1861, and how the publication included its views on slavery’s role in the conflict. Through indirectly acknowledging the importance of slavery in bringing about the Civil War, the *Free Press* had begun to issue more provocative statements concerning blacks and their place in the United States.

“The great, first, and only cause of the rebellion”⁴⁸

The strongly Republican *Jackson Weekly Citizen* was perhaps the most distinctively supportive of slavery’s principal role in bringing about the beginning of war at Fort Sumter in April 1861. While the other three newspapers in this analysis firmly expressed their patriotic desires to defend the United States government with the start of war, the Republican Jackson publication openly exhibited its thoughts on slavery’s inevitable demise in the ensuing conflict.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ “Churches and Slavery,” *Detroit Free Press*, October 12, 1861.

⁴⁸ “The Emancipation of Slavery...,” *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, Jackson, MI. October 10, 1861.

⁴⁹ It must be noted that it was difficult finding articles on the *Weekly Citizen*’s views of the Corwin Amendment. There appears to be a lapse in the available newspapers during the first couple months of 1861 in the online database America’s Historical Newspapers, from which most of the *Weekly Citizen* articles have been taken. However, given

From the beginning of the military conflicts between the Union and Confederacy in the summer and early fall of 1861, the *Weekly Citizen* vehemently asserted its belief that slavery was the cause of the war and its abolition the ultimate goal. The Jackson publication printed some articles conveying the mobilization for the war in patriotic terms, but that patriotism was consistently underscored by what the editors considered the importance of the contest between slave and free labor. One article hailed the patriotism of those who were born outside the United States. These immigrants understood the effect of this rebellion initiated by Southern secessionists, according to the article, and that effect was “to exclude foreign labor, except from Africa.” The war that began at Fort Sumter in April 1861 had its roots in the presence and the high value of slavery in the South, and as a result, slave labor was more desirable there than the free labor of foreign immigrants. “What is this rebellion but a war on the immigration from Europe? It is slave labor brought in direct antagonism with the capital – the free labor, which the Irishman and German bring to this country.”⁵⁰

The *Weekly Citizen*, however, soon began publishing articles that directly stated its belief that the destruction of slavery would come along with a Union victory. When General Frémont began his military emancipation of rebels’ slaves in Missouri in August 1861, President Lincoln immediately ordered him to modify his initiatives. The general, however, refused to comply, and eventually Lincoln dismissed Frémont from his command. The *Weekly Citizen* presented an article approving of the action that Lincoln took in dealing with Frémont, but it also did not vilify in any way the Union general who had begun a campaign of emancipation on the war front in Missouri. The article hailed Frémont’s efforts at freeing slaves, deeming that he set the right

the fact that this Jackson newspaper tended to be a strongly Republican publication, it is doubtful that this paper did not discuss Congress’ compromise efforts in March 1861. Discussions of slavery and the federal efforts dealing with it were regularly reported on by the *Weekly Citizen*, so coverage of the Corwin Amendment was most likely common around the time of Lincoln’s inauguration.

⁵⁰ “Patriotism of Adopted Citizens,” *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, September 26, 1861.

precedent for the Union war effort. With generals making decisions concerning the freedom of black slaves, the Jackson paper hoped “that a provision will be made for the utter *extinguishment* of slavery; that its extirpation will follow close upon the footsteps of our conquering army.” This idea that emancipation should come hand in hand with the Union armies’ victories in the South seemed to be, according to the article, agreed upon by the entire country:

The people generally would not weep a great deal over the liberation of the slaves of the rebels! They are nearly over the tender point on this *dark* subject. The position we take is this – and we think the whole country are with us on this point – if the emancipation of the slaves of the rebel States is the legitimate result of this war to preserve the Union, or if it should turn out to be necessary to do it, then it should be done without hesitation.⁵¹

The fact that agitation over slave labor and that Union generals were making decisions regarding slavery and runaway slaves, to the *Weekly Citizen*, clearly meant that the slaves and blacks in the country were essential to the conflict’s continuing progression. Emancipation therefore had to be the logical outcome of the war that began at Fort Sumter only a few months ago. Everyone appeared to be talking about slavery’s importance and the subsequent possibility of emancipation, which was “the great, *first*, and only cause of the rebellion.”⁵²

This importance of understanding slavery as the cause and emancipation as a consequence of the present war was no longer a political position; the *Weekly Citizen* believed it had become a fact recognized by all politicians. “The democratic party [those opposed to Lincoln’s election]...are suddenly but thoroughly impressed with the importance of at once smoking out the wolf, by a single and mighty blow upon the shackles of negro slavery, and thus setting the bondmen free.” The potential evil of abolitionism so long worried about by Democrats around the country was no longer a problem: “Those who now demand that slavery

⁵¹ “Gen. Fremont---Action of the President,” *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, September 26, 1861.

⁵² “The Emancipation of Slavery...,” *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, October 10, 1861.

shall be cleaned out, cannot be charged with abolitionism... They are time-honored democrats...”⁵³

The fact that even Democrats were recognizing slavery’s demise and evil in the aftermath of Fort Sumter’s surrender in April 1861 underscored how the war would be a war of reform. The *Weekly Citizen* continually commented on the reformatory character the conflict would take, cleansing the country of its evil commitment to the institution of human bondage. “This civil war is like all other reformations in the moral world...like the upheaving volcanoes in the natural world, it would lay waste and haul down the errors of the present to make room for the truth in the future; that the slave institutions of this country...would be dashed down by this conflict...” The gravity of the situation was such that the Jackson paper concluded slavery’s eventual death was inevitable and unstoppable. “This greatest and most holy reformation ever known to the human race, cannot be [bitten] and bridled by man. It will roll on until slavery is crushed beneath its chariot wheels.”⁵⁴ Another article from early November 1861 describes how the actual battles between the free and slave states were more important than legislating the end of slavery; legislation would naturally come later. “Let us conquer first...No one can help the legitimate result of this war.” The reformation of slaves fleeing for their freedom would work itself out, since “it is not within human power to control the elements of reform. If the necessity of this reformation now in its inception demands emancipation, it will come as sure as the will of the Almighty is executed, whose exponent it really is.”⁵⁵ The desire for emancipation, however, could also come from ordinary American citizens, for “the great elements of reformation are

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ “Trust in Providence, And Keep Your Powder Dry,” *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, November 7, 1861.

deep in our hearts, undefined, but active and certain.”⁵⁶ The *Weekly Citizen* appeared to be saying that the war prompted by the attack on Fort Sumter unleashed everyone’s wish for ridding the country of its greatest evil, slavery. And those who would be most instrumental in bringing about its destruction and emancipation were the slaves and blacks themselves.

Insisting that slavery would meet its fate in “the trial by battle,” the *Weekly Citizen* asserted that slaves and blacks would take the initiative to fight for their freedom in this mighty struggle over human bondage. If the beginning of war at Fort Sumter birthed a reformation to end slavery, inevitably spreading “its sparks among the slaves of the South,” then “no hand of earth can stop the work. The utter upheaving of the great mass must follow,” eventually creating “a more perfect and just social order.”⁵⁷ The Republican Jackson publication argued that the penetration of the South militarily also meant having interactions with runaway slaves and the South’s peculiar institution: “We cannot occupy the thickly negro settled sections of the South and fight our battles there for human rights, without waking up the dull war of the African by the thunder of our artillery.” The slaves understood what the conflict beginning at Fort Sumter in April 1861 was about, and they could therefore serve as a source of guidance for the incoming Union armies about their ultimate purpose in the South. Runaways “will spread the new lesson to be learned by the slave of the object of our mission...” The presence of the slave interacting with Union soldiers and generals would additionally bring about more victories, ones “worth infinitely more” than those in areas where slaves had no impact on the conflict. In this respect, the *Weekly Citizen* wanted, “in truth and fact, to ‘carry the war into Africa!’”⁵⁸ The fact that slaves and blacks could take the initiative to make emancipation a reality highlighted the *Weekly*

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ “The Slave Question,” *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, November 21, 1861.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Citizen's belief that they were major actors in the war. Fort Sumter's surrender and the beginning of the conflict brought slavery's demise to the center of the hostilities; slaves and blacks were competent enough to understand this, and they would thus play an active role in heralding the institution's destruction.

“Of fearful magnitude, and terrific consequences”⁵⁹

Similar to the *Detroit Daily Advertiser* and the *Detroit Free Press*, the *Ann Arbor Journal* had mixed feelings concerning the compromise measures being debated in Congress, including the Corwin Amendment. Reporting on the passage of the amendment in the House, the *Journal* believed that “without sacrificing any sound republican principle, [the compromise resolutions] will have a powerful effect in conciliating the border Slave States.” The desire to prevent the secession of the upper South seemed to be the only reason why the *Journal* endorsed the Corwin Amendment. In terms of bringing the seceded states back into the Union, the Republican Ann Arbor newspaper highly doubted such a possibility: “...as to the [seceding] Cotton States, there is no way to deal with them but blockade their forts, enforce the collection of the national revenues, cut them off from mail accommodations, and let them pay the penalty, and suffer the consequences of their treason and rebellion, until they come to their senses.”⁶⁰

While the *Journal* believed the Corwin Amendment could possibly stop disunion from spreading to the Border States, the publication found that the compromise measure essentially conceded nothing:

The proposed [amendment] to the Constitution surrenders nothing; – neither right, principle nor power; – but simply confirms the Constitutional right of the Slaves States to legislate for themselves upon the subject of slavery; and gives an additional

⁵⁹ “War—the President’s Proclamation and the responses to it,” *Ann Arbor Journal*, Ann Arbor, MI. April 17, 1861.

⁶⁰ “Congress,” *Ann Arbor Journal*, March 6, 1861.

Constitutional pledge or guaranty, that the Constitution shall not be so altered in future as to authorize Congress to abolish or interfere with slavery in the States where it exists by the local law.⁶¹

At the same time, however, the *Journal* claimed that this congressionally passed measure was a good thing for the overall peace of the country; it was the one successful effort that represented a sense of compromise from Republicans. The Republican Ann Arbor newspaper applauded local politicians for having “the good sense, sound policy, and proper spirit to support these measures of conciliation; – so necessary to the peace and harmony of our country, and to the power of the government to enforce the laws and punish traitors.”⁶² With these observations, the *Journal* appeared to believe that war was still avoidable, especially since key upper South states (such as Virginia) were still in the Union. Yet even a month later, the publication reacted to the news of Fort Sumter’s surrender and the subsequent secession of the Border South states as a result of the failed compromise efforts. Recopying an article from the *New York Times*, the *Journal* expressed its misgivings about the sincerity of Republicans’ endorsement of measures like the Corwin Amendment, and that they were wrong to have seemingly embraced President Andrew Jackson’s legacy of opposing compromise.⁶³ The Republican party’s “experience of measures brought forward under that name [of compromise] has not been such as to encourage any great degree of faith, either in the thing itself or in those who advocate it.”⁶⁴

Whether or not Republicans had caused secession to spread by their seemingly lukewarm endorsement of compromise proposals, the *Ann Arbor Journal* still believed the seceded South

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ The article from the *New York Times* claimed that President Jackson was the favorite hero of the Republicans at this time, opposing compromise measures with the South just as Jackson had done with South Carolina during the nullification crisis in 1832. But the article points out that Republicans’ interpretation of Jackson was inaccurate since the two crises were completely different, especially given the fact that many Southerners and their state legislatures seemed to be fully committed to declaring secession.

⁶⁴ “Gen. Jackson on Compromise,” *Ann Arbor Journal*, April 17, 1861.

was to blame for the beginning of war. As soon as word came about military confrontations beginning at Fort Sumter in April 1861, the *Journal* knew that “more important events have occurred in our country than have occurred...within a week, since the adoption of the Constitution of the United States. CIVIL WAR has been commenced by the southern rebels.” The bombardment and eventual surrender of Union forces at Sumter spelled various types of doom for the United States, given how the Southern Confederacy had triumphed and seemed to be planning an assault on Washington, D.C. The gravity of the situation was unparalleled in American history, according to the Ann Arbor paper, that declared, “We are in the threshold of a civil war, of fearful magnitude, and terrific consequences.”⁶⁵

What those terrific consequences might be was something the *Journal* began seriously considering with the start of war after Fort Sumter. The Republican Ann Arbor newspaper generally viewed the conflict as one arising from sentiments for and against disunion, expressing its patriotic desires to defend the federal government for an end to the hostilities. What Fort Sumter’s surrender started was “a war of the free States to sustain the Constitution and the Union, against the rebels and traitors of the South who are determined to sever the Union permanently, and maintain their independence.” Yet given this tame language, the *Journal* still agreed with the other three local Michigan newspapers that slavery had something to do with the secession of the Southern states. Their rebellion was one “stimulated” solely “for the extension and perpetuation of slavery.”⁶⁶ The *Journal* published many articles detailing how the institution of human bondage in blacks created a strong sense of unity among Southerners ever since the establishment of the federal government with the U.S. Constitution; slavery served as “one of the

⁶⁵ “War—the President’s Proclamation and the responses to it,” *Ann Arbor Journal*, April 17, 1861.

⁶⁶ “Progress of Civil War, and Condition of our Country,” *Ann Arbor Journal*, May 1, 1861.

strongest bonds...which ever existed among men.”⁶⁷ Passionate temperaments from Southern politicians revolving around slavery had energized the secession crisis and the beginning of military hostilities at Fort Sumter, and in this sense, “slavery has been the principle cause of the war.”

Because the conflict’s origins resided in slavery’s importance in the South, the *Journal* presented articles expressing its opinions regarding the war’s effects on the institution after war began at Fort Sumter. Commenting on the large influx of runaway slaves coming to Union lines and forts (such as Fortress Monroe, where General Benjamin F. Butler declared them to be contraband of war and thus free from their Southern masters), the Republican Ann Arbor paper discussed the labor benefits brought by these fugitives. “They are contraband property or chattels, and...our Government is not under any legal or moral obligation to return them to their master, or to make any compensation for them.” This, for the *Journal*, was “sound doctrine.” However, the constant presence of fugitives could prove to be a burden to the Union armies. Runaways would naturally need to be fed, furnished with living accommodations, and clothed, becoming “an encumbrance” and “a large expense” for the federal government. The Ann Arbor publication therefore concluded, “this war is not prosecuted as a crusade against slavery, nor for the benefit of fugitive slaves.”⁶⁸ Another article claimed that such a “spectacle of an uprising of 4,000,000 of negroes” escaping to Union army lines was something no one seemed to be “prepared to desire or enjoy.”⁶⁹ The *Journal* additionally commented on General Frémont’s declaration of freeing slaves in Missouri. President Lincoln did the right thing in dismissing Frémont from his command, all because his attempts to emancipate rebels’ slaves did not comply

⁶⁷ “Slavery a Strong Bond of Union Between the People of the Southern States,” *Ann Arbor Journal*, May 22, 1861.

⁶⁸ “Fugitive Slaves Coming to our Armies,” *Ann Arbor Journal*, June 26, 1861.

⁶⁹ “The Negro Population,” *Ann Arbor Journal*, September 11 1861.

with the recently passed Confiscation Act. "...in declaring slaves to be freemen, we regard it as entirely delusive – as holding out false hopes which can never be realized."⁷⁰

Why proclaiming freedom to slaves instilled "false hopes" stemmed from the fact that blacks were not capable of enjoying that freedom and the rights of white Americans. In the Ann Arbor paper's discussion of the war, it considered the presence of two separate races in the United States essential to the conflict's dynamics. According to the *Journal*, even before the assault on Fort Sumter in April 1861, the fighting between the Union and Confederacy was "about the negro." But because the "*tendency of the negro race was toward the tropics*" and that of white Americans to the "*temperate zone*," the two races "are opposite, and nothing but a law of absolute force can bring them together."⁷¹ The initiatives by Union generals and by the federal government to emancipate slaves had been characterizing the present civil war. But since any sort of mixing between blacks and whites was impossible, the *Journal* indirectly mentioned the possibility of colonization, and thus concluded that the war ought to remain a conflict to save the Union and not one to confer freedom on incompetent blacks. Republishing a speech from a notable citizen, the Republican Ann Arbor editors deemed that emancipation might prove to be "a foe more terrible than war," given the fact that "there is little hope of any gradual extinction or absorption of the race, and if it be not done gradually it can scarcely be done at all."⁷² Additionally, reprinting an article from the humor magazine *Vanity Fair*, abolitionists and their consistent pleas for emancipation and dealing with black slaves after Fort Sumter's surrender was laughed off as a "small side-show." Partially vilifying the Radical Republican and abolitionist politician Owen Lovejoy, the article announced, "the unfortunate Nigger...has made

⁷⁰ "Power to Forfeit Property – And to Emancipate Slaves," *Ann Arbor Journal*, September 18, 1861.

⁷¹ "Progress of the United States: *Final Destiny of Its Races*," *Ann Arbor Journal*, March 27, 1861.

⁷² "The Negro Population," *Ann Arbor Journal*, September 11 1861.

disturbance enough in this country already. The Rebellion, of which he is the remote origin in a great degree, is a very serious fact.”⁷³

These articles of the *Ann Arbor Journal* highlight its complex reactions to events related to emancipation during the opening months of the Civil War after Fort Sumter’s surrender. Although exhibiting its antislavery ideals from its support of Lincoln and his party and from the beginning of the war, the *Journal* would continue to portray blacks and slaves in a negative light given the ways in which the federal government attempted to destroy slavery as a goal to defeat the Confederate States of America.

The compromise efforts of Congress to forestall war (especially with the Corwin Amendment) and the beginning of war at Fort Sumter in April 1861 had unleashed a variety of opinions about the conflict’s origins and directions. Although there were stark differences between each paper’s perceptions of the congressionally passed Thirteenth Amendment, there was a consensus among the four local southeast Michigan newspapers in this thesis that slavery was the cause of hostilities between the Union and Confederacy. While each publication expressed to some degree how black slaves would play an important role in the ensuing conflict, the further prosecution of the war, especially with property confiscation coupled with emancipation, allowed the newspapers to further critique the destruction of slavery and blacks’ importance and place in the United States.

⁷³ “Mr. Lovejoy and his Nigger,” *Ann Arbor Journal*, August 7, 1861.

3

“We *must* conquer *with* it”:¹ The Second Confiscation Act of July 1862

By the spring of 1862, military conflict between the Union and Confederate armies had been raging for almost a year throughout the United States. The first major battle of the war at Manassas Junction (commonly called Bull Run), some miles south of Washington, D.C., in July 1861 resulted in a Union defeat. Republican Congressmen and public officials across the North were perplexed by the Confederate victory, and they consequently believed that a harder war policy had to take shape in order to turn the tide in their favor. What militant northerners and many Republicans began considering was to approve measures in Congress that would attack the institution of slavery through property confiscation in the South in order to create harsher war conditions against the Confederacy.

Within days after the Union’s humiliating defeat at Bull Run, several confiscation bills were presented in Congress and were meticulously examined by congressional committees. One result was the First Confiscation Act, signed into law by President Lincoln on August 8, 1861. While portions of the law remained fairly vague, it provided for the general confiscation of any property that came under Union control that had been used to support the rebellion in the South. And perhaps the most controversial clause of the law, proposed by Radical Republican Senator

¹ “The New Secretary of War,” *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, Jackson, MI. January 29, 1862.

Lyman Trumbull of Illinois (a close colleague of Lincoln's), was the section declaring that all slaves who were used for the war effort would become free.²

The application of this First Confiscation Act to the battlefield near Union army lines, however, was ridden with confusion. For one thing, the law did not make clear who had the explicit authority to declare any items of property under Union control, let alone what exact forms of property were allowed to be confiscated. The provision that freed slaves who contributed to the prosecution of the war did not specify if those slaves came from loyal masters in the District of Columbia or in the slave Border States, further clouding the status of any slave that might demand their freedom. The law depended on the Union army and the actions of the fugitive slaves themselves, rather than those in bondage who could not escape to U.S. federal army encampments. Despite these limitations, the First Confiscation Act marked the first major statute outlining the confiscation of rebel property, including emancipation for slaves who had been employed for the Confederate war effort.³

As portions of chapter two have already discussed, Union generals like Frémont and others attempted to interpret the First Confiscation Act when numerous runaway slaves were infiltrating their army lines. Republican politicians in Congress, bent on weakening slavery, continually sifted through other proposals that outlined guidelines for the explicit emancipation of slaves, even those who did not have the ability to escape their Confederate masters' plantations. It was in December 1861 that Senator Lyman Trumbull again introduced a bill that would free all slaves owned by rebels who came within Union lines, going beyond what the First Confiscation Act provided for. The measure would also give President Lincoln the authorization

² Silvana R. Siddali, *From Property to Person: Slavery and the Confiscation Acts, 1861-1862* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 70-81.

³ *Ibid.*; James Oakes, *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013), 143-44.

to employ blacks in any manner he deemed fit to help suppress the rebellion. This was the so-called Second Confiscation Act, which proved to be a more aggressive and comprehensive law for the emancipation of Southern slaves, albeit a complicated yet sweeping one.⁴

While the Second Confiscation Act slowly labored through both houses of Congress, finally being approved by President Lincoln and becoming law on July 17, 1862, the congressional debates concerning its passage were underscored by months of bloody conflict between the Union and Confederate armies. In February 1862, Union general Ulysses S. Grant gained control of the Tennessee River in the Mississippi Valley with the fall of Confederate Fort Henry. Within a short week after that, Union forces also took over Fort Donelson on the Cumberland River, thereby securing the crucial access to the Mississippi River for the transportation of soldiers and goods. Coupled with these victories was Union general George B. McClellan's Virginia campaign. Slowly penetrating the border of the Confederacy into Virginia, McClellan and his armies fought through the countryside and eventually stationed themselves within miles outside of the Confederate capital of Richmond. To many Republicans and northerners, the war seemed to have finally progressed towards a Union military victory.

The Union triumphs through the winter and spring of 1862 had convinced Republicans in Congress and Lincoln's administration that to secure their victories, the Confederacy had to be attacked directly through the cornerstone of its nationhood, slavery.⁵ Especially with Grant's successes in the West, many more runaway slaves had come into Union lines, further forcing the confiscation and emancipation question before Congress. It was this contentious military situation within which the two Confiscation Acts were passed and took effect on the battlefields between Union and Confederate territory.

⁴ A great recent treatment of the First and Second Confiscation Acts is Silvana R. Siddali's *From Property to Person: Slavery and the Confiscation Acts, 1861-1862*.

⁵ Siddali, *From Property to Person*, 152.

While the First Confiscation Act reinforced the Republicans' aims of weakening slavery during the war, this chapter concerns the four local Michigan newspapers' reactions to and observations of the Second Confiscation Act. The July 1862 Act proved to be more comprehensive yet complicated in its scope than its predecessor since it called for a more general emancipation of runaway slaves, and this was a major reason why the four newspapers in this thesis provided more commentary on the law which freed any Southern slave that had belonged to Confederates and was in territory occupied by the Union army. The antislavery and emancipation principles embodied in the Second Confiscation Act were, especially according to the Republican publications in southeast Michigan, reminders that the war between the Union and Confederacy stemmed from slavery and that the institution's destruction was the way to bring about its end. Indeed, the newspapers presented in this thesis continually referred to the July 1862 Act as "the emancipation bill."⁶ Even during the congressional debates of the bill in January 1862, the *Jackson Weekly Citizen* had declared that the prosecution of the war would only improve if Southern slaves could be used in some capacity: "If we cannot conquer *without* the arm of the slave, we *must* conquer *with* it."⁷

"The rebels will shake in their shoes"⁸

The continued discussion of confiscation and emancipation in Congress through the winter and spring of 1862 was just the policy change that the Republican *Detroit Daily Advertiser* wanted. This Detroit paper frequently reported on the movement of fugitive slaves from rebel lines to Union forts, commenting with alarm on how many contrabands were taking

⁶ On the "mythmaking" behind the scope of emancipation of the Confiscation Acts and the Emancipation Proclamation more generally, see Oakes, *Freedom National*, 329-39.

⁷ "The New Secretary of War," *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, January 29, 1862.

⁸ "It will be seen..." *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune*, Detroit, MI. July 12, 1862.

the opportunity the war had created in affecting the relationship between Southern masters and their slaves. Starting in May 1861, General Benjamin F. Butler had to deal with the unprecedented numbers of runaway slaves at Fortress Monroe. The *Detroit Daily Advertiser* included articles in early 1862 describing how even more slaves were escaping to that major Union fort. “The correspondence of the Philadelphia *Inquirer* says there are five thousand persons of color at Fortress Monroe who were formerly held in bondage to labor. Over two-thirds of them are able-bodied men...” If able-bodied runaways were coming to Union army encampments, the *Daily Advertiser* mused, what better to do than utilize their labor in aiding the war effort? “They are happy and contented, and are rapidly learning many kinds of labor to which they were before unaccustomed.”⁹ And if black contrabands could be used in any capacity on military forts, why not allow them to participate in the military campaigns to defeat the Confederacy?

The *Daily Advertiser* stipulated that confiscating former rebel slaves and employing them in the war effort also justified the prospect of them becoming actual Union soldiers. The July 1862 Second Confiscation Act would eventually include a section authorizing President Lincoln to use people of African descent in any way to suppress the Southern states’ rebellion, especially having them take up arms and fighting. As early as February 1862, the *Daily Advertiser* was discussing this possible use of runaway slaves. The Republican Detroit newspaper cited the example of the Continental Army generals during the American Revolution. “The revolutionary fathers seem to have had no such horror of putting arms into the hands of negroes, as the sympathizers with Southern rebels exhibit.” The actions of black soldiers during the Revolution exemplified that they proved to be able-bodied men fighting “with distinction” for independence

⁹ “Five Thousand Contrabands,” *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, February 10, 1862.

and the country's future. According to the *Daily Advertiser*, there had been "numerous cases of individual heroism on the part of colored men."¹⁰

Later in 1862 closer to the passage of the Second Confiscation Act, the Republican Detroit paper went so far as suggesting that because Southern and Democratic leaders were hesitant to use black slaves in the military conflict, they believed slaves were better than white men. The secessionists treated "Union soldiers as 'poor white trash,' and make the slave the god of their political idolatry." Such logic was "invidious partiality, abuse and degradation of the White Man" and "a disgrace to the nation."¹¹ While the *Daily Advertiser* expressed its desires to use runaway slaves as possible Union soldiers, its disdain for Southerners' idea that slaves were better than whites illustrates the limits of its endorsement of using blacks in the war. Fugitive slaves would fight alongside white Union troops, not necessarily replace them permanently.

Nevertheless, the confiscation of Southerners' property in slaves and their emancipation constituted the only proper way of punishing the Confederacy. This is why the *Daily Advertiser* heartily endorsed the bills concerning confiscation being debated in Congress. In April 1862, the Detroit paper declared that "the confiscation of [the Southern traitor's] personal property – his horses, cattle, sheep, swine, ships, agricultural implements, &c. &c. – for his lifetime" was within the powers of Congress's authority during the war. The United States government "has the right to do" this, and "it is its duty to do, as an act of justice to the loyal people of the nation and a deserved punishment to the traitors."¹² Moreover, passage of the new Confiscation Act was only fitting since the Confederacy had already been demonstrating its military prowess by stealing Union property. The *Daily Advertiser* chided those Northern Democrats who were

¹⁰ "Negroes in the Revolution," *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, February 6, 1862.

¹¹ "Slaves Better Than White Men," *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune*, July 12, 1862.

¹² "Confiscation," *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, April 1, 1862.

“higgling and quarreling about the propriety and justice of confiscating rebel property” when “the rebels themselves [were] sustaining the expense of their war upon the Government, by seizing the property of Union men without scruple.” The decisions of slaves to run to Union lines and forts had forced the issue of confiscation upon the wartime congressional agenda, and if many of them were already being employed and freed, why not pass a new Confiscation Act formerly legalizing the process? The *Daily Advertiser* believed that “there should be no hesitation upon this subject” of confiscation and emancipation because it seemed to be perfectly clear that “the people expect it.”¹³

The eventual passage of the Second Confiscation Act on July 16, 1862 confirmed to the *Detroit Daily Advertiser* that confiscation coupled with emancipation of rebels’ property in slaves had become formal federal policy to successfully prosecute the war. The Republican Detroit paper appeared to have no major objections to the passing of this “emancipation bill,” the name consistently given to the law by the press. The Act also combined the importance of the origins of the war, notably the South’s peculiar institution of human bondage and the significance of the slaves’ actions, with the ultimate result of the conflict, the defeat of the Confederacy through the destruction of slavery. The Second Confiscation Act would spell doom for the Southern states’ institution, and the *Daily Advertiser* cheerfully noted, “the rebels will shake in their shoes as they never shook before.”¹⁴

“Such desperate criminality”¹⁵

¹³ “Confiscation at the South,” *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, May 9, 1862.

¹⁴ “It will be seen...,” *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune*, July 12, 1862.

¹⁵ “The Present Hour,” *Detroit Free Press*, Detroit, MI. July 20, 1862.

In contrast with its Republican counterpart in the city, the Democratic *Detroit Free Press* viewed the Congressional and public conversations about confiscation and emancipation negatively. While the newspaper had expressed some observations that slavery appeared to be one of the causes of the present war (as mentioned in the previous chapter), the *Free Press* in no way believed that confiscation ought to be coupled with emancipation of black slaves. Such an initiative that became a major part of the Union's agenda through Congress's efforts would dramatically change the Union's war policies, consequently losing the war against the Confederacy. The eventual passing of the Second Confiscation Act in July 1862 illustrated "such desperate criminality" among Republicans in Congress and Lincoln's administration, all because it embodied abolitionist principles, defied the Constitution, and inappropriately attempted to give freed black slaves an equal footing in American society.¹⁶

One of the *Free Press's* concerns about the confiscation bills being considered in Congress was that they illustrated the degrading influence of abolitionism in politics. Reporting throughout late 1861 and early 1862 on the numerous runaway slaves who escaped to Union lines at Fortress Monroe, the Democratic Detroit publication included observations from other newspapers that had correspondents at the fort. One from the Philadelphia *Inquirer* discussed how the slaves at the fort "*were just as comfortable*" compared to when they were with their Southern masters, and that their condition was better than that of the Union soldiers. The *Free Press* was outraged about these blacks at the Union encampment, stating they were "the class of people for whom the abolitionists are making such a fuss, and whose attempts to free them have brought the country to its present calamitous condition."¹⁷ The fact that the antislavery ideas of abolitionists and the Republican party had infiltrated the Union military policies of some of its

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ "Blacks at Fortress Monroe," *Detroit Free Press*, April 10, 1862.

generals was unfortunate, but the *Free Press* had to admit that confiscation and emancipation had become a major factor in Congress's agenda. An article from mid-May illustrated the paper's disgust:

The Senate yesterday came to a test vote as to whether the tax bill or the confiscation bill should be taken up, and the latter prevailed by 23 to 19. The nigger was triumphant, and the suffering finances of the country were cast aside to make room. Nothing during the session has so well exemplified the abolition plague that besets the men in Congress.¹⁸

This "abolition plague" that was leading to poor war policy in Union forts regarding blacks also demonstrated Congress's sheer incompetence. The consideration of bills affecting slavery, emancipation, and blacks was the reason why "Congress still dawdles and trifles – wasting much valuable time, committing many harmful follies." Important financial bills were being "crowded one side for confiscation bills and all sorts of other negro contrivances to violate the constitution."¹⁹ If abolitionism's impact on the federal government's war policy was not worse enough, the *Free Press* additionally worried about the constitutionality of confiscation coupled with emancipation.

Any attempt by Republicans in Congress to interfere with the private property of Southern secessionists was undoubtedly unconstitutional, according to the *Free Press*. The majority of Congressional Republicans had begun to advocate "the most ultra unconstitutional measures" in the confiscation of Southerners' property in slaves. This act closely resembled theft because it clearly infringed "upon the constitutional rights and privileges of any of the States or people." While the *Free Press* did not explicitly specify how an act of confiscation coupled with emancipation, even in times of rebellion, violated the Constitution, the paper expressed its beliefs that the Confiscation Acts defied the "white" government of the United States. The Democratic

¹⁸ "The Nigger Ahead," *Detroit Free Press*, May 17, 1862.

¹⁹ "Why They Don't Act," *Detroit Free Press*, May 25, 1862.

Detroit newspaper portrayed the measures as unconstitutional primarily because the country's "institutions were framed for the government of the white race," while Republicans were proposing bills that would "break down the barriers of the constitution, framed to guard the lives, the homes and property of the white race, for the avowed purpose of giving the negro race greater liberty, more extended privileges."²⁰ While slavery was understood to be an evil, the *Free Press* admitted, any law that might be passed by Congress to promote racial equality between whites and blacks was useless. It was with the Second Confiscation Act that the Detroit publication exhibited many observations on the place of blacks in the United States.

The Act passed by Congress on July 17, 1862 that would emancipate slaves who came to Union lines from the seceded states represented a huge shift in federal antislavery policy. Its provisions, including its authorization of President Lincoln to use any blacks in whatever capacity he saw fit to suppress the rebellion, hinted at the possibility of the emancipation of all the slaves in the seceded South. It was for this reason that the *Free Press* expressed its disdain for the measure that seemingly opened the door for blacks to become a legitimate presence in the United States with whites. Discussion of confiscation and emancipation was having the country come "nearer and nearer the question whether the black race shall be admitted to stand upon an equality with the whites." This hope of Republicans through their antislavery initiatives, according to the Democratic paper, "to bring [blacks] up is hopeless...It was never intended that that race, who carries the mark of his servile parentage in his color," should enjoy equal rights and privileges with white Americans. The *Free Press* emphatically insisted that this was "never intended by our forefathers, the founders of the Republic" in the first place.²¹ Yet the Second Confiscation Act proved to be a measure that conferred emancipation on many slaves, and this

²⁰ "What of Our Members of Congress?," *Detroit Free Press*, May 10, 1862.

²¹ "White or Black," *Detroit Free Press*, June 14, 1862.

Detroit newspaper decried the attempts of Republicans to make slavery's destruction the principal policy of the war.

The negative influence of abolitionism, unconstitutional proposals, and bills bringing about freedom and equality to incompetent blacks all illustrated to the *Free Press* how ridiculous Republicans were in making the war a partisan conflict. The Second Confiscation Act was seen as a pure political move. The Democratic Detroit newspaper believed that the passing of the Act demonstrated how Congress had been “dabbling in confiscation, emancipation, and all the other peculiar caprices of the abolitionists” for too long. A law aimed at freeing runaway slaves and using them for the Union war effort smacked of the failures of Lincoln's Republican administration in winning the war against the Confederacy; “such fatuity and imbecility, such desperate criminality, was never witnessed before.” Like it did during the secession crisis, the *Free Press* did not hesitate to compare Lincoln and other Republicans to the disliked Roman Emperor Nero. With the passage of the Second Confiscation Act, “Nero is a thousand times repeated. A whole party play their fiddles over a falling country.”²²

The clause of the Act giving President Lincoln the power to use blacks in any way to support the war effort gave another opportunity for the *Free Press* to prove how the country truly was “falling.” If blacks were to be used as Union soldiers, the Detroit publication knew that the war could not be won. After the Second Confiscation Act was passed, the paper included examples of the failures of many black soldiers in their small regiments that had been formed. Among the numerous reasons given in an article detailing a soldier movement at Port Royal, one explained how the black soldiers were “too treacherous to place on picket or guard duty, and too

²² “The Present Hour,” *Detroit Free Press*, July 20, 1862.

indolent to cultivate the deserted plantations.”²³ The conclusion of the *Free Press* seemed to be clear: blacks were not competent to be soldiers, and the emancipation provisions of the Second Confiscation Act would therefore not help the Union’s war efforts.

These articles of the *Detroit Free Press* demonstrate how serious of an issue blacks being emancipated under the Second Confiscation Act was to the Democratic publication. Republicans’ antislavery initiatives were becoming more and more direct and general towards the slaves of the seceded Southern states, and the newspaper consequently worried about the Union’s war policies. While these articles show the extent to which the *Free Press* discussed blacks and their importance in the Civil War, the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation would unleash an even wider array of perceptions of the “colored race” in the United States.

“The freedom to the slave...it *must* come”²⁴

Ever since January 1862, especially with the confiscation deliberations in Congress and President Lincoln’s new appointment of Edwin M. Stanton to the post of Secretary of War, the Republican *Jackson Weekly Citizen* welcomed a legislative act coupling confiscation and emancipation. The newspaper was jubilant that Lincoln chose to have Stanton lead the War Department because with Stanton’s appointment, the “tenable, just and necessary” aspects of antislavery measures dictating Union war policy would become “common sense.” The nature of the war had turned deadly, and slavery’s power in the Southern seceded states was gradually weakening with the persistence of runaway slaves escaping to Union lines. An act calling for the legal confiscation and emancipation of these fugitives was the only way to destroy the Confederacy. “If rebellion compels us to lay waste the south, and the freedom to the slave, even

²³ “The Negro Experiment: Utter Failure of the Negro Soldier Movement at Port Royal,” *Detroit Free Press*, August 9, 1862.

²⁴ “The New Secretary of War,” *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, January 29, 1862.

amidst the fires of insurrection, is the fruit of the obstinacy and wickedness of the master, it *must* come... Such is the position of Mr. Stanton beyond doubt, and such is the position of the administration.”²⁵

As January gave way to February 1862, the *Weekly Citizen* understood that there were immense consequences of having “the slave leave his master and stand at our door, imploring [the Union] for protection.” Because the war had brought “over 10,000 negroes, formerly slaves, within [Union] lines,” and because of Union generals like Butler and Frémont making decisions to not return them to their masters, it appeared that confiscation of rebels’ property constituted the primary prosecution of defeating the Confederacy: “We do not hesitate to take their property, to enable us to carry on the war...”²⁶ The most wise policy for the Lincoln administration to take would be to not only confiscate Southerners’ possessions, but to use Confederates’ property in slaves to aid the Union military conquest of the South. “If they cannot plant and pick cotton, they can do the heavy work on our fortifications and the army drudgery. This would save much sickness in the army and toil by the soldiers. The army would be more active and efficient.” After all, the laborious tasks Southern slaves had done in bondage were “the work above all others that the slave is educated to.”²⁷

If fugitive slaves possess the skills to adequately perform the “heavy work” of the Union army’s fortifications, the *Weekly Citizen* argued that they could simply become employed as Union soldiers as well. “It is a well established fact that a very large per cent of the slave population would make good soldiers.” The newspaper scoffed those who claimed arming slaves was a bad idea. “Why not” let freed slaves become soldiers? “Is it supposed that this people are

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ “Contraband,” *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, February 5, 1862.

²⁷ Ibid.

destitute of courage? Far from it.” Those who opposed using fugitives as an integral fighting unit of the Union army rightly admitted that they were competent enough to do so. The *Weekly Citizen* pointed out that the slave “has hands to hold a gun, eyes to sight it, feet to follow martial music, a sensitive ear to catch and appropriate the demands upon the soldier, and brain enough to learn his orders, and how to obey them.”²⁸ The Republican Jackson publication expressed these viewpoints amidst the Union army campaigns and victories in the Mississippi Valley, where more runaway slaves were forcing generals there to write to Congress and President Lincoln, wondering just what Union policy was towards the unraveling of slavery in the seceded South. Indeed, Republicans would eventually pass a Militia Act the very same day as the Second Confiscation Act, which overturned a 1792 law limiting enrollment to the U.S. militia to only free whites. This new law thereby legally authorized the employment of freed blacks in the Union war effort.²⁹

Over the next couple of months, the Jackson newspaper continually covered the congressional debates over the proposed confiscation bill precisely because it embodied the inevitable act of freedom for the slaves, which was meant to bring about Union victory. The *Weekly Citizen* especially complained about the “pro-slavery press of this State” (most likely referring to the *Detroit Free Press*), stating that the opposition of those “enemies of Freedom” to any sort of slave emancipation was rooted in “groundless fears.” Addressing the proslavery press’s accusations that freeing and using slaves as soldiers would interfere with the North’s laboring classes, the *Weekly Citizen* found these ideas unfounded. “We think there are few men who can conscientiously oppose Freedom to an extent that will seriously affect the greatest interests of the country.” The Republican Jackson paper then made a fairly surprising statement.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ James McPherson, *The Negro’s Civil War: How American Negroes Felt and Acted during the War for the Union* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965), 165.

Perhaps considering the weakness of a confiscation-emancipation bill, the paper declared, “What the exact relations of the negro to the white race will be, the future alone can reveal. That he ever will rank the white man’s equal, we do not expect, but his elevation we ought to further as much as possible, and we believe the time has now come when the problem will be solved...”³⁰ The fact that even the fairly strong Republican *Weekly Citizen* mentioned the future consequences concerning racial equality of a second confiscation law illustrates the limits of its commitment to emancipation. The Second Confiscation Act being deliberated on in Congress may help to bring about a Union victory, but its effects on blacks potentially becoming prominent members of American society equal with whites ought not to be the main objective of the law.

Nevertheless, the *Weekly Citizen* demonstrated its approval of the act coupling confiscation and emancipation, suggesting that its approval constituted the punishment the Confederacy deserved. In late June, when the act passed the House of Representatives, the newspaper hailed the “decisive vote.” It was at this point that the publication also called the measure “the emancipation bill,” a term used by numerous other Republican newspapers around the country.³¹ The passage of this Second Confiscation Act was understood to be momentous because it was believed that it would emancipate numerous slaves. It was for this reason that the *Weekly Citizen* viewed it as a major change in the Union’s war policy that every Northerner ought to embrace. The Act would guarantee the emancipation of thousands of slaves who had escaped to and who were continually coming to Union forts, and their freedom would be the ultimate punishment for the rebellious Southerners. More than a year of war had changed Northerners and politicians in Washington, D.C., turning their reluctance for mercy into a

³⁰ “Groundless Fears,” *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, May 14, 1862.

³¹ Oakes, *Freedom National*, 239.

“determination to treat traitors as their great crime deserves...The rebellion must be crushed out if it costs every rebel his life and gives to every slave freedom.”³²

With the eventual passage of the Second Confiscation Act on July 17, the *Weekly Citizen* viewed it as a crowning achievement. The paper felt compelled to copy portions of a speech by Republican Senator Charles Sumner describing the act as the triumphant culmination of a variety of antislavery initiatives taken by the federal government:

The present Congress has already done much beyond any other Congress in our history...Measures which for long years seemed attainable only to the most sanguine hopes, have triumphed. Emancipation in the national capital; freedom in all the national Territories;...the prohibition of the return of fugitive slaves by military officers;...and last and best of all – the crowning measure of the session – the bill for the suppression of rebellion, by punishing treason, freeing the slaves and, confiscating the property of rebels. Such are some of the achievements by which the present Congress will be historic.³³

The Republican Jackson newspaper asserted that the Second Confiscation Act ought to be praised by everyone who wanted to crush the Confederacy, for it embodied a bold new federal policy explicitly making confiscation and emancipation the proper means of carrying out the war. The *Weekly Citizen* also republished an article of the *New York Tribune* from early August commending the efforts of Union General Jim Lane of organizing some black men into a Union regiment, doing so perfectly in line with the new Confiscation Act.³⁴ Such initiatives by Union officers and by runaway slaves deciding to acquire their freedom had become so commonplace that emancipation practically “executes itself” and it was now, “to-day the law of the land.”³⁵

³² “The Determination,” *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, July 9, 1862.

³³ “What This Congress Has Done,” *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, July 30, 1862.

³⁴ “Gen. Lane’s Commission,” *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, August 6, 1862.

³⁵ “Executes Itself,” *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, August 7, 1862.

“Wholly irrelevant and untimely”³⁶

Perhaps the most surprising development among the four Michigan newspapers’ reactions to the Second Confiscation Act was that of the *Ann Arbor Journal*. As early as December 1861, the Republican Ann Arbor newspaper expressed concern that other newspapers and Republicans in Washington, D.C. were portraying the war as a struggle to end slavery. While the *Journal* itself had endorsed Lincoln’s election because of his antislavery positions and understood the importance of slavery in the conflict (which was explored in chapters one and two), it did not believe confiscation of slaves served as an appropriate constitutional approach to the war. This problem of slavery and slaves presented “many embarrassing questions as to the proper and best mode of conducting the war.” Copying extracts from a speech of the reverend Henry Ward Beecher, the *Journal* agreed with his sensible remarks: “*We must conduct this war by and through our institutions... We must not by Congressional legislation declare political emancipation.*” The war needed to be prosecuted only according to constitutional laws and precedents, since the Union was “fighting to preserve the constitution, not to overthrow it...”³⁷ Any initiatives to bring about the confiscation of slaves or emancipation were deemed to be unconstitutional, and therefore they would not constitute a legal and sound war policy.

Why would a consistently antislavery and Republican newspaper in Ann Arbor not endorse the federal government’s early initiatives to destroy slavery in the South? The Republican Detroit paper presented in this thesis, the *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, offered an answer: “it is so rare in these days, and especially in Michigan, to find a pro-slavery *Republican*... there is such a man, even in the staunch Republican county of Washtenaw – He conducts the *Ann Arbor Journal*.” The editor of the *Journal*, according to the *Advertiser*,

³⁶ “The Crisis of the War – Appeal to Radicals and Conservatives,” *Ann Arbor Journal*, Ann Arbor, MI. July 16, 1862.

³⁷ “Mode of Conducting the War,” *Ann Arbor Journal*, December 11, 1861.

espoused ideas of “holy horror,” especially the “painful apprehension lest public sentiment should be educated up to the idea that the slaves of rebels must be either liberated or ‘confiscated,’ as one of the most effectual means of putting down the rebellion.”³⁸ Responding with a large, bold title in a headline article, the *Journal* believed that its republicanism would not be “tarnished by attacks from a paper which teems, almost daily, with attacks on the present National Republican Administration.” The *Ann Arbor Journal* wondered whom exactly the *Detroit Daily Advertiser* worshipped among the most prominent abolitionists, either Frémont, Charles Sumner, or Wendell Phillips, “or all three of them?”³⁹ This dialogue between two local newspapers illustrates once again the centrality of the discussions surrounding slavery, emancipation, and confiscation, even among Republican newspapers within the same region.

Regardless of the criticism from other southeast Michigan publications, the *Ann Arbor Journal* continued to vocalize its misgivings about the effectiveness and legality of property confiscation coupled with emancipation in 1862. An article from April gave a summary of the paper’s “true views” on the legal and illegal effects of the war between the Union and the Confederacy. The first proposition given declared that “personal rights, personal liberty, the right and title to property...are all founded upon the laws of nature, and exist anterior to human laws and governments,” and therefore, “no rebellion, no revolution, and no change of government, can affect them...” This idea was then expanded into the second proposition, which applied directly to slavery. “No revolution or change of government can of itself affect the title of the slaveholder to his slave-property, any more than it affects his title to his other property.”⁴⁰ No matter how much the war had weakened slavery in the Confederacy, especially given the amount of runaway

³⁸ “A Voice from the Past,” *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, December 9, 1861.

³⁹ “The Detroit Daily Advertiser,” *Ann Arbor Journal*, December 11, 1861.

⁴⁰ “True View of the Legal Effects of Rebellion,” *Ann Arbor Journal*, April 30, 1862.

slaves escaping to Union army lines, those fugitive slaves were still property of their masters; the *Journal* stipulated that the conflict did not change their property status nor was it meant to encourage emancipation.

Precisely because confiscating and emancipating runaway slaves was legally impermissible, the Republican Ann Arbor paper expressed dismay when Republicans pushed through the Second Confiscation Act and President Lincoln signed it in July 1862. The *Ann Arbor Journal*'s first reaction was that it "will have very little practical effect."⁴¹ All of the discussions surrounding confiscation coupled with emancipation were unnecessary: "the great matter [at] hand is fighting – and fighting only. The questions, what we are going to do with the rebels or with the property of the rebels...is wholly irrelevant and untimely. And yet some of these ulterior matters have been receiving more attention from Congress and from some of our military men..."⁴² The war that had been raging for a year was not meant to produce such congressional emancipation measures as the Second Confiscation Act. Congressional Republicans and Lincoln's administration were defining the conduct of the war with ridiculous antislavery initiatives, yet the *Journal* firmly held that the conflict was not about confiscating and emancipating rebels' property in slaves.

Although the *Ann Arbor Journal* chided the irrelevance of the Second Confiscation Act, the publication's reactions to the law highlight how it considered the legislation a major change in federal war policy. The fact that the United States government had taken such a bold step caused the *Journal* to publish some fairly provocative and scathing articles. A late July article recopied sections of a Massachusetts newspaper, the *Springfield Republican*, detailing how embarrassing it had been to have abolitionists help influence the Lincoln administration's

⁴¹ "Confiscation Bill," *Ann Arbor Journal*, July 16, 1862.

⁴² "The Crisis of the War – Appeal to Radicals and Conservatives," *Ann Arbor Journal*, July 16, 1862.

policies concerning the prosecution of the war. Abolitionists and their main orator Wendell Phillips were especially to blame for “such impudence,” since “in their true light,” they were “enemies to the Constitution and to the Union...Shame on them.”⁴³ Another article from that same weekly publication demonstrated how abolition policy had somehow united the seceded states while threatening to divide the Union.⁴⁴ How the abolition of slavery might affect blacks was also a subject of consideration in many *Journal* articles during these summer months. The newspaper speculated that not a lot would be “materially changed by the emancipation of [the] slaves.” Blacks, free and formerly enslaved, would “remain an inferior and subject race, without political rights or privileges, in a dependent condition...”⁴⁵ An additional August article questioned the efforts of Union brigadier general Phelps to create a battalion of armed black men near New Orleans; the *Journal* article claimed that such activities by Union army officials was nothing more than “negro worship.”⁴⁶

Despite these provocative statements from the *Ann Arbor Journal*, the paper reaffirmed its antislavery stances. The South’s institution of human bondage remained “a great, moral, social and political evil” that “not only wrongs and debases the slave, but tends to degrade labor, and to produce indolence among the free population...” During the late summer of 1862, even after the Second Confiscation Act was approved, the *Journal* still hoped for abolition. Yet that emancipation needed to come from the states, not the federal government. “We are opposed to any interference with [slavery] in the States, by Congress, or by the president...any such attempt would produce a multitude of evils, and end in failure. We regard the preservation of the

⁴³ “The Sublime of Impudence,” *Ann Arbor Journal*, July 30, 1862.

⁴⁴ “Effects of Abolition Policy,” *Ann Arbor Journal*, July 30, 1862.

⁴⁵ “Our Position as to Slavery Defined,” *Ann Arbor Journal*, August 6, 1862.

⁴⁶ “Negro Worship, and Generals Butler and Phelps,” *Ann Arbor Journal*, August 20, 1862.

Constitution and the Union as of more consequence than the abolition of slavery.”⁴⁷ It was with these thoughts that the *Ann Arbor Journal* reacted most vociferously against the confiscation and emancipation measures of the Second Confiscation Act.

Approval of the Second Confiscation Act on July 17, 1862 was viewed as a considerable shift in the Union’s war policy by all four of the local southeast Michigan newspapers. Whether it constituted an appropriate legislative measure or an unnecessary and illegal distraction, the act that provided for the general confiscation of rebels’ runaway slaves had become a major policy initiative of emancipation. This law was consistently referred to as the “emancipation bill,” and it was understood by the press to have significant consequences concerning slavery and blacks. Yet discussions of slavery, emancipation, and blacks in the United States would only intensify more as these four local newspapers reacted to President Lincoln’s decision to issue a proclamation of emancipation.

⁴⁷ “Our Position as to Slavery Defined,” *Ann Arbor Journal*, August 6, 1862.

4

“Like thunder shaking the land”:¹ The Emancipation Proclamation of 1863

In the January 10, 1863 edition of the *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune*, a lengthy poem entitled “The New Year” by L. B. Baker spanned a good portion of the newspaper’s pages.

Thousands wait in anxious silence
For the sound to greet the ear!
Millions gather round the hearthstone,
For the new-born coming year.

Patient waiting – anxious longing,
For the old clock’s midnight ring;
Freedom sits in chains awaiting
For the pend’lum’s gentle swing.

Nature seems to wait so anxious
For the slow but coming hour;
Angels seem to praise the gracious
God of every loving power.

Nations watch the passing moments
As they swiftly glide away,
Knowing that a hideous monster
Sinks beneath the coming day!

Freedom sits within her temple,
Waiting for the dawning hour,
When her flag can wave untrammelled
Over every living power.

Hark! – the clock is gently striking;
Hearts beat quick with hope and cheer;
The Old with quick step is retreating
From the New-born coming Year!

¹ “The Proclamation,” *Ann Arbor Journal*, Ann Arbor, MI. October 15, 1862.

Freedom sings throughout the Nation –
Land of the brave and free –
America has reached the station
Where she struggled long to be.²

The plausibility of a declaration of emancipation was becoming the biggest topic of debate among nearly all Americans in late 1862. As the poem suggested, hearts were indeed beating quickly on the issue of a more general emancipation of the Confederacy's slaves (compared to the provisions of the Second Confiscation Act), but not everyone was exhibiting "hope and cheer." Newspapers across the North expressed their positive or scathing reactions to the implications of a sweeping decision on emancipation taken by the federal government. The four local southeast Michigan publications were a part of this larger national discussion, one completely centered on the possibility of emancipation coming about from a presidential proclamation.

President Lincoln's decision to issue a preliminary proclamation, aiming to free the slaves in the rebel states, was not a random declaration without precedent in federal law. Throughout the Civil War, Republicans in Congress passed many laws that needed to be authorized by a presidential proclamation. The First Confiscation Act of August 1861 required a proclamation by Lincoln to specify the rebellious areas of the South to which the law applied. And when Congress passed the Second Confiscation Act a year later in July 1862, it also needed a presidential proclamation warning the Confederacy about punishment for the continued rebellion, including the confiscation and emancipation of their slaves. It was therefore not surprising for Republicans and newspapers across the country to assume that a more general

² L. B. Baker, "The New Year," *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune*, Detroit, MI. January 10, 1863.

emancipation extending across the South would come from a presidential proclamation.³ In discussions related to an emancipation proclamation with his cabinet in July 1862, Lincoln did in fact cite his authority under the Second Confiscation Act and as president to declare slaves in Confederate territory forever free by the start of 1863.

Even while Republican politicians and newspapers urged Lincoln to issue some sort of sweeping emancipation statement, his cabinet urged him to wait for the opportune moment of a major Union military victory. Otherwise, releasing a proclamation quickly would be seen as a desperate measure. Lincoln's Secretary of State William Seward also believed it would cause Great Britain to side with the Confederacy. Although the military situation was dismal in August 1862 with a second Union defeat at Bull Run, an eventual victory at Antietam in mid-September prompted Lincoln to issue his Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation on September 22. Reiterating his beliefs from the July discussion with his cabinet, this proclamation of Lincoln's gave the Confederacy 100 days (until the beginning of 1863) to stop the armed rebellion or slaves in areas of the South not occupied by Union forces would be declared emancipated.⁴

Lincoln kept that promise on January 1, 1863 with the long-awaited Emancipation Proclamation, which declared all slaves in the Confederate states and outside Union control free. The Union army and navy were instructed to acknowledge and maintain the freedom of these nearly three million slaves who were directly affected by the proclamation, the greatest number of people in bondage ever declared free. There were exemptions, however, especially in the border slave states (those who remained in the Union) of Missouri, Kentucky, Maryland, and Delaware. Lincoln claimed that his action to issue such a sweeping emancipation was legally

³ James Oakes, *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013), 304, 315-16.

⁴ For more on the time between the Preliminary and the January 1 Emancipation Proclamations, see Louis P. Masur, *Lincoln's Hundred Days: The Emancipation Proclamation and the War for the Union* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012).

justified under his powers as commander in chief, all in order to suppress the rebellion. The federal government normally had no constitutional authorization to directly interfere with slavery in the states where it already existed legally, a fact Lincoln and Republicans had long insisted upon in the 1860 elections and throughout the beginning of war. Yet the military situation between the Union and Confederacy had changed everything; the proclamation amounted to a federal interference with a state institution, but it was entirely constitutional on the grounds of “military necessity.”⁵ The Emancipation Proclamation also explained how emancipated slaves would be employed in the United States’ armed services, expanding on the policy initiated by the Second Confiscation Act. Black men could finally enlist in the Union army.⁶

Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 was thus marked as the most significant federal initiative making antislavery policy a revolutionary factor of the war. It called for an immediate military emancipation in areas that the Union army had no control of and addressed slaves directly, not as a form of property to be confiscated, but as persons who had the ability to bring about emancipation themselves.⁷ Newspapers across the nation reacted to these sweeping measures outlined in the Emancipation Proclamation. While the poem of the *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune* implied that emancipation would be a fixed moment with freedom “waiting for the dawning hour” of January 1, 1863, the Emancipation Proclamation rather built on the previous federal laws and initiatives (such as the Second Confiscation Act) aiming to destroy slavery. No matter how the media portrayed the process of emancipation, Lincoln’s 1863 Proclamation was

⁵ The implications of justifying emancipation and other acts of war as “military necessity” are further discussed in John Fabian Witt, *Lincoln’s Code: The Laws of War in American History* (New York: Free Press, 2012).

⁶ There is, of course, a large amount of secondary books addressing the Emancipation Proclamation. See Oakes, *Freedom National*, 340-92; Allen C. Guelzo, *Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004); Louis P. Masur, *Lincoln’s Hundred Days: The Emancipation Proclamation and the War for the Union* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012); and Harold Holzer, *Emancipating Lincoln: The Proclamation in Text, Context, and Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

⁷ Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), 244.

considered a remarkable step by the four local southeast Michigan newspapers. It would usher in vast repercussions for the war raging between the Union and the Confederacy, sparking an intense debate about its consequences for the conflict, the nature of its legality, and its implications with the future of blacks in the United States. All of these issues were addressed by the local southeast Michigan publications, all in expressing their most fervent and provocative perspectives towards slavery, emancipation, and blacks. The Emancipation Proclamation resembled a momentous step, one that affected the country “like thunder shaking the land,” as the *Ann Arbor Journal* pointed out.⁸

“The great charter of Freedom”⁹

Throughout the summer and early fall of 1862, the *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune* remained confident that the emancipation provisions of the Second Confiscation Act were the most effective means by which the Confederacy would be defeated. Confiscation and emancipation of their slaves had long been declared the necessary war policy. News of Lincoln’s Preliminary Proclamation in late September was then viewed as a logical step in federal emancipation policy, given that it “merely recites acts of Congress which it is the duty of the President to enforce.” Yet the main purpose of the proclamation – declaring the slaves in areas still in rebellion on January 1, 1863 – was a new and extraordinarily sweeping measure. The *Advertiser* considered the announcement “one of the most important acts in the history of any government.”¹⁰

⁸ “The Proclamation,” *Ann Arbor Journal*, October 15, 1862.

⁹ “The Proclamation of Freedom,” *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune*, January 5, 1863.

¹⁰ “The President’s Proclamation,” *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune*, September 25, 1862.

The Republican Detroit newspaper agreed, with Lincoln, that it was the perfect time to issue a proclamation of emancipation given the military situation between the Union and the Confederacy. Lincoln had of course issued the order “as a military measure,” believing that “the time has come when this prop of the rebellion should be knocked from under.” Such a vital decision of releasing an extensive emancipation edict was timely because, “with a sublime trust in Providence, and a generous confidence that the people of this land... will sustain [Lincoln] in the performance of any act that is necessary to preserve free institutions, he takes the grave responsibility.” Without the rebellion of the Southern seceded states, “there would have been no need of a proclamation emancipating the slaves of rebels” anyway. The Confederates had no rights under the United States Constitution because they began an armed rebellion, so the *Advertiser* claimed Lincoln’s action was completely constitutional as a proper military decision. Emancipation was for “the safety of the Union” and “the preservation of the Constitution,” and therefore “let all good and loyal men stand by the President!”¹¹

That support for Lincoln and his Preliminary Proclamation continued well into the end of 1862, especially in December with his annual message to Congress. Beginning in its December 5 issue, the *Advertiser* recopied a portion of Lincoln’s message at the top of its main headlines page, calling the excerpt an example of “The New Policy of the War”:

*In giving Freedom to the Slaves, we ensure Freedom to the Free, honorable alike in what we give and what we receive. We shall nobly save or meanly lose the last best hope of earth. Other means may succeed, this could not fail. The way is plain, peaceful, generous, just. A way which if followed, the world will forever applaud, and God must forever bless.*¹²

The *Advertiser* consistently kept this quote at the top of its second page, even well into the summer months of 1863, reminding its readers that emancipation was inextricably tied to the

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² “The New Policy of the War,” *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune*, December 5, 1862.

prosecution of the war against the Confederacy. The Republican Detroit publication then proceeded to give numerous perspectives of other newspapers on the president's message. Quoting the *New York Post*, Lincoln "has the most unquestionable right" to hurl against slavery "the battle-axe" and chop "it into pieces with his military arm." An additional excerpt from the *Cincinnati Times* declared, "the policy of the Administration, therefore, will be directed with a single eye to the abolition of slavery. Such is undoubtedly the President's position...being the purpose of the Administration, the sooner affairs are brought to a crisis, by a sweeping attempt at emancipation, the better."¹³

The *Advertiser* was jubilant when that sweeping attempt at emancipation came on January 1, 1863. "The Proclamation of Emancipation, that was an event of promise" with the preliminary version in September, "is now an event of performance." Finally, "an institution, that under the guarantees of the Constitution, might have survived a century in peaceful security, has been overthrown in its mad attempt to destroy the instrument that sheltered it." The *Advertiser* openly admitted that this was an event it speculated about from the beginning of the war, and so had the rest of the nation: "Before the rebellion fired the first shot at Sumter, men North and South predicted that this would occur." The efforts and "practical sagacity" of "military men," thinkers, public critics, people abroad, and "Christian men and women" had all fortunately "combined to urge the promulgation of the great charter of Freedom."¹⁴

That great charter was viewed positively by the *Advertiser* not only because it made freedom a national goal of the war, but also because it would "become a vital force" in invigorating the spirits of black slaves. The Emancipation Proclamation allowed Lincoln to aim to "banish from the mind of the slave, should such an impression obtain lodgment there, all idea

¹³ "Emancipation and Confiscation: How the Message is Received," *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune*, December 5, 1862.

¹⁴ "The Proclamation of Freedom," *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune*, January 5, 1863.

of a life of license and indolence consequent upon suddenly attaining freedom.” The newly freed slaves were to abstain from committing violence; they ought to “labor for reasonable wages” instead. What the proclamation set forth “need excite no terrors. There is no record in history where the bestowal of freedom upon negro slaves has been marked with excesses,” claimed the *Advertiser*. The Republican Detroit newspaper also lamented the fact that Lincoln’s actions in the emancipation order would be misrepresented: “the blacks will be represented as let loose for riot, carnage and devastation, but let the reasonable citizen recur to the facts [we set forth] and not be blinded by partizan appeal.”¹⁵

To further demonstrate its support for the Emancipation Proclamation, the *Advertiser* additionally included coverage of local celebrations and correspondence from soldiers. A celebratory ceremony in Hillsdale, Michigan produced “highly interesting” observations of how people were reacting to the January 1 proclamation. The faculty and students of Hillsdale College illuminated their main college building with numerous lights, “with a radiance and glory which those who saw it will not soon forget, the word ‘Liberty.’ That word upon the tongue of eloquence has often thrilled us; but it never appeared to us so impressive before – a prophecy of the glory yet to be. The whole scene was one of surpassing beauty and splendor.”¹⁶ The sensation of Lincoln’s proclamation also reached Michigan soldiers in the Union army, and the *Advertiser* included correspondence from Joseph Jones, a chaplain from the 20th Michigan Infantry. The news of the Emancipation Proclamation, to Jones, “was received with the greatest enthusiasm.” With this presidential order, no one could “arrest the progress of free ideas,” not even opposition

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ “The Proclamation Celebration at Hillsdale – Highly Interesting Ceremonies,” *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune*, January 7, 1863.

newspapers. They “will issue their lying prophecies and indulge in their customary execrations, but both alike will fall at the feet of Liberty powerless, as snow flakes upon a granite rock.”¹⁷

These powerful ideas of freedom and liberty from the Emancipation Proclamation were also exemplified through the correspondence of black soldiers, now able to fight in the Union armed forces. Later in the summer of 1863, the *Advertiser* included parts of a letter from Detroit native and black soldier Geo. A. Johnson who was a part of the colored regiment of the Massachusetts 64th. Johnson’s example as a strong Union soldier demonstrated that “the spirit of devotion to country and heroism...exhibits itself as strongly in the black as the white man...and exhibits the fact that they feel as deeply interested in, and are as willing to serve their country, as any other race.”¹⁸

Through its reaction to the Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863, the *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune* maintained its overall support for the abolition of slavery and its consequences in uplifting blacks as an integral part of the general population in the United States.

“A dead letter”¹⁹

Even the Democratic *Detroit Free Press* viewed news of the Preliminary Proclamation’s release on September 22, 1862 as a momentous occasion. “The proclamation of the President...is an act which marks an era not only in America but in the history of the world. It is the beginning of a revolution, which, if carried into full effect, will be second to none recorded in the pages of history.” Yet, the proclamation that would bring emancipation to millions of slaves in the South

¹⁷ “From the 20th Regiment,” *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune*, January 20, 1863.

¹⁸ “From a Detroit Colored Soldier...,” *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune*, August 11, 1863.

¹⁹ “The Emancipation Proclamation: Opinions of the Conservative Press,” *Detroit Free Press*, Detroit, MI. January 6, 1863.

was unfortunately the work and triumph of radicals in Lincoln's administration. Such a policy initiative would "henceforth color the war," having the nation become "like a ship at sea in a storm, without a rudder, the sport of every wind." No matter how much of "an important step" Lincoln took in issuing the Preliminary Proclamation, the *Free Press* feared that it might aid the Confederacy all because "it is impracticable, unconstitutional, and beyond the power of the government to enforce; but above all, we have no idea that it will receive the co-operation of the slaves."²⁰

Precisely because Lincoln's proclamation was unconstitutional and implausible, it essentially divided Americans and the press, falling "upon the country like sudden thunder." The Democratic Detroit paper believed a vast majority of the North supported Lincoln up until September 1862, when the Preliminary Proclamation exemplified a massive departure from his previous policies; the presidential proclamation was thus seen as a "vacillation." Why Lincoln decided to issue such a sweeping emancipation measure was, according to the *Free Press*, "to this day a mystery." The newspaper speculated, "either that he intended, from the beginning, to turn the war into an abolition crusade (adroitly concealing his intention until he thought himself strong enough to execute it), or that he was deluded by the abolition clamor and weakly-regarded 'noise,' as the sentiment of the country."²¹ Either of these hypotheses appeared to be possible to the *Free Press*, given the Lincoln administration's decisions over the past two years managing the war. The Preliminary Proclamation seemed to be the next step in the "legitimate sequence of Mr. Lincoln's emancipation projects," yet it was not the doctrine for the country. "We protest

²⁰ "A Revolution," *Detroit Free Press*, September 24, 1862.

²¹ "The Emancipation Proclamation," *Detroit Free Press*, December 14, 1862.

against it,” the *Free Press* declared. “We trust that he will now retrace his steps, and reinstate himself in the confidence of the country, by abandoning the proclamation...”²²

Lincoln, however, pressed forward with his promise to issue the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, and the *Free Press* continued its vehement protest of the president’s emancipation decree. All of the extensive federal legislation aiming to bring about emancipation was “the *creation* of the radicals who are ruining the country... The emancipation scheme is a scoff and bye-word. No one hopes a single good result from it.”²³ The news of the Emancipation Proclamation’s release was “laughable” to the *Free Press*; “a more lame and impotent conclusion was never arrived at before. Literally, the mountain has labored and brought forth a mouse.” The Democratic Detroit newspaper considered Lincoln’s decision to proclaim this emancipation a fairly weak one, especially due to the present dynamics of the war: “The spectacle of a ruler addressing a subject caste, far within the limits of the territory of a victorious enemy; proffering freedom to men surrounded by hostile bayonets, which he has in vain essayed to break through; advising them to labor for wages, when he knows that such labor is impossible to them;...the spectacle...is one of the most ridiculous history displays.”²⁴ In short, Lincoln’s entire plan for emancipation with his January 1 declaration was utterly “absurd” and it would certainly pass off as “a dead letter.”²⁵

The *Free Press* additionally ridiculed the effectiveness of the Emancipation Proclamation since it illustrated an attempt to directly address and help Southern black slaves who could not come to Union army lines. The Union war policy under Lincoln’s administration was lackluster and absent of vigor, and Lincoln had the false assumption that a presidential proclamation

²² Ibid.

²³ “Where We Are To-day,” *Detroit Free Press*, January 1, 1863.

²⁴ “The Proclamation,” *Detroit Free Press*, January 4, 1863.

²⁵ “The Emancipation Proclamation: Opinions of the Conservative Press,” *Detroit Free Press*, January 6, 1863; “Absurdity of the Radical Plan for Emancipation,” *Detroit Free Press*, April 2, 1863.

dealing with the Confederacy's slaves would be a good idea. "Strong in the delusion that freedom to the niggers would be the trump card in his hands, Mr. Lincoln has played his game languidly, throwing away all other cards, to find that his trump, when thrown out, cuts a very sorry figure..."²⁶ Moreover, "the freedom declared by the proclamation is a dormant, not an actual freedom...[it] is inoperative and futile. It may strengthen the resistance of the rebels, but it cannot benefit the slaves."²⁷ Another article taken from the *Boston Post* that was issued within a week of the Emancipation Proclamation did not even consider the act legal: "A proclamation is not a law, it is a legislative act, it is purely an Executive act...The constitution confers no legislative powers on the President...the slave will exist as though the proclamation had not been issued."²⁸ Lincoln's decision to release his presidential proclamation of emancipation may have been deemed illegal by many Democratic newspapers, but that did not mean the decree was considered to have vast repercussions for the war and beyond.

Denouncing the Emancipation Proclamation as a pointless and unconstitutional presidential authorization additionally led the *Free Press* to worry about its implications for racial relations between whites and blacks in the United States. The same article decrying the proclamation merely as a legislative act that would have no effect on slaves' status also expressed disbelief in any political or social advancement that might occur for former slaves and freed blacks:

A paper declaration cannot, in one short hour, change relations that are fundamental – that have taken root by a century of slow and sure-footed growth. The social and political relation of classes cannot be changed suddenly without most terrible and bitter revolution. Such is the teaching of history, and we have yet to see that this history does not apply to the United States as well as to other nations.²⁹

²⁶ "The Proclamation," *Detroit Free Press*, January 4, 1863.

²⁷ "The Emancipation Proclamation: Opinions of the Conservative Press," *Detroit Free Press*, January 6, 1863.

²⁸ "Illegality of Emancipation," *Detroit Free Press*, January 9, 1863.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

The *Free Press* anticipated that Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation would have no immediate effect on changing the political and social realities of whites and blacks in American society. It was for this reason that the Democratic Detroit newspaper ridiculed blacks' celebrations of the proclamation in local cities.

As it did during the war with other federal laws and initiatives related to emancipation, the *Free Press* chided blacks' efforts when they tried celebrating their supposed new freedom authorized by the Emancipation Proclamation. A long article commented on the ceremonies held in Detroit by "the descendents of Congo" and how these "darkeys" reacted to the proclamation of freedom. The African Americans wished to commemorate this event "of greater importance than any other celebration which has ever proceeded it..." Numerous speakers from various states and even from Canada came, all in order "to make the affair ever-memorable in the annals of darkey celebrations..." Yet, portions of the speeches seemed to mean nothing to the blacks since they caused "some little confusion" and "the darkeys didn't exactly know what it meant."³⁰

This display of sheer ignorance and incompetence among blacks could also be found, according to the *Free Press*, in Ann Arbor. An "African carnival" was taking place there "for a jubilee on the President's edict of emancipation" among some "one hundred darkeys of all shades, ages and sexes" at the old Presbyterian Church. University of Michigan President Henry Philip Tappan supposedly was going to be a speaker, yet the fact that he was in New York "is more creditable to good sense." Apparently no people or abolitionists "of recognized Caucasian origin" were there, leaving "the darkeys to paddle their own canoe." The article then commended the "darkies...in not being deterred from their jubilee by the non-co-operation of their 'white brudderren.' They mounted 'brudder Cooper,' an 'edicated nigger,' on the rostrum..." The *Free*

³⁰ "The 'Proclamation of Freedom': Grand Negro Celebration in its Honor," *Detroit Free Press*, January 7, 1863.

Press found these “negro exhibitions” instructive, since they show how “the blacks can, in a measure, successfully imitate the whites. In their intellectual features – where their powers of imitation fail – they are the merest burlesques.”³¹

These *Detroit Free Press* articles demonstrate the ways in which the Democratic Detroit paper openly ridiculed blacks as a consequence of the flurry of federal legislation on slavery and emancipation throughout the Civil War.

“The approaching hurricane”³²

Given the emancipation provisions of the Second Confiscation Act of July 1862, the *Jackson Weekly Citizen* had been anticipating some sort of presidential proclamation of emancipation to follow. The Republican Jackson newspaper even covered the fact that there were numerous rumors of a proclamation being discussed among Lincoln’s cabinet in late August. A special dispatch from the *New York Tribune* provided the details of these rumors: “it seems appropriate to state the following which we learn from so many sources that it can no longer be considered a State secret. Two or three weeks ago the President laid before his Cabinet a proclamation of emancipation, abolishing slavery on the first of next December, if the rebellion should not be crushed.”³³ The exact details of Lincoln’s idea of an emancipation edict remained a mystery, given that the first of December was projected to be the announcement date. However, the eventual news of Lincoln’s Preliminary Proclamation of September 22, 1862 motivated the *Weekly Citizen* to recopy the resolutions of the Republican State Convention held in Detroit: that proclamation was “right and proper in itself, and necessary and effective for destroying this

³¹ “African Carnival at Ann Arbor,” *Detroit Free Press*, January 7, 1863.

³² “Preparations for Emancipation,” *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, Jackson, MI. December 24, 1862.

³³ “The President’s Projected Proclamation,” *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, August 27, 1862.

wicked rebellion...”³⁴ Coverage from the *Chicago Tribune* was also used to convey the necessity of the Preliminary Proclamation. Lincoln was wise to have issued it, for “there was but one course left and this proclamation is just as much an outgrowth of the situation of the country as the oak is the product of the ground.”³⁵

The *Weekly Citizen*’s response to the Preliminary Proclamation was further underscored by its discussions of the practicality and the logistics of Lincoln’s September 22 decision. One article from the middle of November 1862 included the actual numbers of slaves in each of the respective slave states according to the 1860 census. The *Weekly Citizen* estimated that around 3,405,015 slaves would be “virtually emancipated, under the proclamation of the President” if “the rebellion continue[s] in its present shape until the 1st of January next...” This article also speculated that more slaves would actually run away and fight for their freedom than that given number from the 1860 census, thereby increasing the estimate by nearly 100,000; “the natural increase will probably make the aggregate at the present time about 3,500,000.”³⁶ The fact that the Republican Jackson newspaper even considered listing the precise numbers and estimates of the proclamation’s reach in the South demonstrated its overall approval of the sweeping emancipation measure. Presenting a calculated list of what slaves were to be affected additionally reflected the *Weekly Citizen*’s commitment to reporting the significance of Lincoln’s new war policy of generally emancipating Southern slaves. Such a federal initiative by an order of presidential proclamation was not only necessary and natural at this point in the war, but also “the last best hope of the earth.” This phrase was one of many that the *Citizen* republished from Lincoln’s annual message in December 1862. The article included the same portion that the

³⁴ “Resolutions,” *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, October 1, 1862.

³⁵ “‘The Complainers’,” *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, October 1, 1862.

³⁶ “Number of Slaves Included in The Emancipation Proclamation,” *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, November 19, 1862.

Detroit Advertiser and Tribune kept at the top of its headlines: “In giving freedom to the slave we insure freedom to the free...Other means may succeed but this cannot fail.”³⁷

No matter how natural it seemed for President Lincoln to issue an emancipation order, the *Weekly Citizen* wished to dispel any rumors that he was hesitant to release such an extensive presidential proclamation. One article detailed two clergymen visiting Lincoln to convince him to “adhere” to his emancipation policy. The result of the visit led “Mr. Lincoln” to assure “them that he believed emancipation would be the only salvation of the country; that there could be no peace till slavery was abolished; and that he meant to stand by his proclamation. This assurance is the more gratifying, as certain circumstances have led to the belief that the President was becoming weak-kneed on the subject.”³⁸ News of Lincoln’s proclamation had even reached residents of the South, who were deemed to be “wise enough to seek shelter from the approaching hurricane which [was] to sweep across their territory.”³⁹

That approaching hurricane produced overjoyed announcements of the Emancipation Proclamation, filling the pages of the *Weekly Citizen* at the start of 1863. The sweeping emancipation measure of January 1 was declared to be “THE GREAT DAY IN NATIONAL HISTORY.” Like the *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune*, the *Weekly Citizen* decided to appropriately name the momentous occasion and substituted the word “emancipation” with “freedom”: “THE PRESIDENT’S PROCLAMATION OF FREEDOM” had finally arrived.⁴⁰ Additionally, as it had done in the fall with the Preliminary Proclamation, the *Weekly Citizen* provided an article detailing not only the specific number of slaves that would be freed by Lincoln’s presidential proclamation, but also the amount that were to be exempted. “President

³⁷ “Synopsis of the President’s Message,” *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, December 3, 1862.

³⁸ “The Emancipation Policy a ‘Fixed Fact’,” *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, December 24, 1862.

³⁹ “Preparations for Emancipation,” *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, December 24, 1862.

⁴⁰ “The Great Day in National History,” *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, January 7, 1863.

Lincoln's proclamation of Freedom to the slaves in States and parts of States in rebellion on the first inst.,...reduces the territory in which slavery is still legal to the following dimension."

Around 800,000 slaves appeared to be exempted from the proclamation's provisions, making the total number of freed persons around 3,100,000, which was slightly close to the *Weekly Citizen's* original estimate in the fall of 1862.⁴¹ Regardless of how many slaves the emancipation order freed, the Emancipation Proclamation represented a significant and necessary federal antislavery measure that deserved praise from everyone. Indeed, the *Weekly Citizen* republished a small excerpt from the *Chicago Tribune* that asserted, "Words of cheer and hope come from every direction in response to the freedom-giving Proclamation..."⁴²

Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation had done more than just confer freedom to nearly three million enslaved men, women, and children in the South; it also instilled a sense of manhood for all black men since they could now serve in the United States army. One *Weekly Citizen* article detailed the formation of the first federally recognized black regiment of escaped slaves from South Carolina, the South Carolina Volunteers. The black troops were sworn in by Union General Saxton who, during the ceremony, "pronounced them all free – they, their wives, children, fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters, 'and all your relations,' he added: 'and you have as good a right to freedom as any other living man. *God never made a man to be a slave.*" The entire company, "with one tumultuous feeling of enthusiasm," lifted their hats and swung them in the air, giving "three most tremendous cheers." Such a scene, according to the *Weekly Citizen*, had never been heard of. What the Emancipation Proclamation had heralded in was more than just freedom. It had established a revolutionary new idea for manhood: "No one had prompted this or hinted at it," claimed the *Weekly Citizen*, which was an odd statement for such a strong

⁴¹ "President Lincoln's Proclamation..." *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, January 7, 1863.

⁴² "Words of cheer..." *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, January 7, 1863.

antislavery newspaper that had advocated for the destruction of slavery since the start of the Civil War. Nonetheless, “it came as the rushing of waters, and there was naught to hinder. They were free. The National Government had acknowledged their manhood.”⁴³ Emancipation had come due to the nature of the conflict, there was nothing to stop it, and the *Weekly Citizen* remained supportive of this “rushing of waters.”

“So much waste paper”⁴⁴

If the confiscation and emancipation provisions of the Second Confiscation Act disturbed the *Ann Arbor Journal*, the announcement of a more extensive presidential proclamation of emancipation outraged the Republican Ann Arbor newspaper. Lincoln’s Preliminary Proclamation of September 22, 1862 constituted “a very hazardous and dangerous experiment.” The sweeping emancipation measure would actually become “an abstraction which will have no practical effect...to emancipate slaves.” Believing that such a proclamation was “like a tub thrown to a whale, to amuse him temporarily,” the *Journal* claimed that “it will prove a mere delusion to the northern fanatics and radicals, and a bugbear to the southern people; and...it may prove nothing worse than a harmless humbug.”⁴⁵

That dangerous experiment of emancipation by presidential proclamation had “fallen with startling effect upon the public mind” precisely because the principles and purposes of the Republican party seemed to have changed.⁴⁶ With the formation of the Republicans as a party in the aftermath of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, their core principles had been “truly noble, entirely constitutional and national in their character.” Now, after nearly a year and a half of

⁴³ “Colored Soldiers Mustered In and Declared Free,” *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, January 7, 1863.

⁴⁴ “Emancipation Celebration and Festival,” *Ann Arbor Journal*, January 7, 1863.

⁴⁵ “The President’s Emancipation Proclamation – Now Regarded,” *Ann Arbor Journal*, October 1, 1862.

⁴⁶ “The Proclamation,” *Ann Arbor Journal*, October 8, 1862.

bloody civil war, Lincoln's Republican administration appeared to have caved in to the demands of abolitionists in and outside of their political party. This shift in policy objectives had occurred "beyond a doubt," yet the *Journal* still believed that the majority of Republicans had not vowed to support such radical measures of an extensive emancipation order.⁴⁷ The Republican Ann Arbor publication deemed any laws or declarations to be entirely meaningless. Conflict between the Union and the Confederacy may have been centered on disputes over slavery and may have involved brief instances of emancipation (with slaves running to Union army lines), but it remained a war to be fought. "We believe that the rebels can be conquered only by powder and ball, and by overwhelming numbers of troops and good generalship, and that they can never be conquered by statutes and proclamations."⁴⁸

Like it discussed after the passage of the Second Confiscation Act, the *Journal* simply did not believe emancipation played an important part in the prosecution of the war against the Confederacy. President Lincoln's Preliminary Proclamation was therefore viewed as an unnecessary measure. In response to Lincoln's annual message to Congress of December 1862, in which he discussed the importance of emancipation, the Ann Arbor newspaper admitted that the possibilities of slavery's abolition were "interesting as abstract questions," but "they are not practical national questions to be settled either by Congress or the President of the United States." The *Journal* also seemed to be indirectly blaming abolitionists for forcing the emancipation issue on the entire country: "Let every people bear their own burdens, and solve for themselves their own difficult and troublesome political and social questions." The war was too important of an issue to sidestep, especially when it came to silly abolitionist matters of freeing slaves. "The government of the United States and the people of the loyal States have

⁴⁷ "Origins and Professed Objects of the Republican Party," *Ann Arbor Journal*, October 15, 1862.

⁴⁸ "What do Republicans Now Propose to do?," *Ann Arbor Journal*, October 15, 1862.

trouble and business enough on hand to subdue the rebels, without wasting their energies, and increasing their difficulties in vain attempts to emancipate and provide at the same time for millions of slaves.” War had indeed resulted in many slaves running to Union army lines for their freedom, and such a “legitimate” operation of the war was “all well.” But emancipation was not the overall objective of the conflict; it was, rather, to suppress the rebellion in order to “restore the Union and the supremacy of the laws.”⁴⁹ By the close of 1862 on New Years’ Eve, the *Journal* feared “a coming storm” given all of the doubts surrounding the prospects of a Union military victory. “Fighting the enemy with proclamations and statutes of confiscation and...the emancipation of negroes” were just some of the “misfortunes and evils” befalling the country.⁵⁰

Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation was finally issued on January 1, 1863, and perhaps because of its disapproval, the *Journal* appeared to provide no direct commentary on it. The Republican Ann Arbor newspaper published the entire text of the proclamation on its front page, but added no additional coverage offering its opinion of the emancipation order. There was, however, a section entitled “Odds and Ends” right next to the proclamation’s text, a common feature of the *Journal* that always included random sayings and pieces of advice. One in particular may illustrate the publication’s quiet dislike of the Emancipation Proclamation: “Stones and idle words are things not to be thrown at random.”⁵¹ Lincoln’s Preliminary Proclamation of September 1862 was considered ineffective to the *Journal*, and it therefore was likely that the proclamation of January 1 was just as meaningless with its “idle words” of guaranteeing freedom to millions of slaves outside the Union army’s control.

⁴⁹ “The President’s Message and Accompanying Reports,” *Ann Arbor Journal*, December 10, 1862.

⁵⁰ “Condition of Our Country,” *Ann Arbor Journal*, December 31, 1862.

⁵¹ “Odds and Ends,” *Ann Arbor Journal*, January 7, 1863.

The overall objective of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation may have been pointless, but that did not stop the *Journal* from commenting on its implications for black people in the United States. A good amount of blacks had celebrated the proclamation in Ann Arbor in a ceremonial festival, an occasion reported on by the *Journal* in lengthy detail. "An educated colored lady of high mental cultivation," Mrs. Cary, was the main speaker for the celebratory event. Her speech was considered "beautiful," "elegant in style and taste, and correct and accurate in grammar, rhetoric, facts, and philosophy, if there be any soundness in abolition philosophy..." She praised the recent Emancipation Proclamation "as the political and civil savior of the African race in this country," hoping for African Americans to have "a comparatively high destiny..." The *Journal's* editors were intrigued by the speech, claiming that this Mrs. Cary was "the most rational speaker on abolitionism...ever listened to." Yet, the newspaper thought it was important to mention that this "lady speaker was born not in Africa, but in the State of Delaware, is perhaps three quarters white, and has probably inherited most of her natural talent from a long line of paternal educated white ancestors." Therefore, the *Journal* declared, "she should not be taken as a fair specimen of the mental capacities of the African race, but rather of the European races."⁵²

The *Journal* then proceeded to give advice to both Mrs. Cary and black Americans concerning their celebration of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation.

- 1st. You need not expect that the President's Proclamation will be of any service to your race, or that it will amount to anything more than so much waste paper.
- 2d. You need not expect for many generations to come, to enjoy the right of voting or any political privileges, nor to enjoy social privileges with the white people. It will be sufficient for your purposes to acquire and enjoy property, to improve your minds by reading and some degree of education, and to enjoy social privileges among yourselves...
- 3d. You never need expect to improve your condition...⁵³

⁵² "Emancipation Celebration and Festival," *Ann Arbor Journal*, January 7, 1863.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

In terms of religious matters, something the *Journal* deemed important for blacks to practice if they wished to be considered civilized and virtuous, the Ann Arbor publication hoped they could take advantage of any sort of religious teaching. Some kind of religious instruction, however, may not be incredibly effective. “We will leave it to the clergy to teach you religious precepts, but will remark we have no confidence in ecclesiastical politics.”⁵⁴ Regardless of receiving the benefits of a proper religious establishment, a poem from the *Journal* seemed to illustrate that blacks in the United States were naturally “fatherless” and thus had a God watching over them. “...Deal justly with the fatherless, / Placed from their native land, / Christ looketh on them kindly, / Like the shepherd on his lambs. / ...Deal justly then with the fatherless, / A God above have they, / Who will protect the fatherless, / And watch them day by day.”⁵⁵ This poem never explicitly mentions blacks nor the Emancipation Proclamation, but it was published in the same edition as the proclamation’s news and Mrs. Cary’s speech. The poem’s text appears to be referring to those who were taken “from their native land,” perhaps representing the African slaves who were traded to the United States in the early 19th century.

These numerous articles demonstrate the provocative opinions of the *Ann Arbor Journal* in response to Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863. The changing views of this local southeast Michigan publication during the war’s progression serves as an example of the extent to which a strongly antislavery Republican newspaper was truly committed to immediate abolition. The conflict between the Union and the Confederacy beginning at Fort Sumter in April 1861 had brought about unprecedented and unexpected results, including early federal initiatives to legislate on emancipation. The *Journal* had consequently reacted negatively to the possibility of sweeping emancipation laws and declarations, generating responses that not

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Bell, “Deal Gently with the Fatherless,” *Ann Arbor Journal*, January 7, 1863.

only highlighted the importance of slavery, emancipation, and blacks' actions in the Civil War. The range of perspectives the *Journal* published throughout the war also reflected the fact that newspapers had shifting viewpoints that developed along with the progress of the conflict itself.

Whether or not the reactions were welcoming or scathing, the release of the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863 constituted a momentous federal antislavery measure by presidential proclamation, according to all four of the local southeast Michigan newspapers. Lincoln's sweeping emancipation edict represented a sort of culmination of all the previous legislation and military orders surrounding the emancipation of slaves and the end of slavery in the United States.

Conclusion: “Ever fluctuating and vibrating”¹

On May 20, 1863, the *Ann Arbor Journal* published an article detailing the progression of the Civil War. This armed rebellion between the Union and the Confederacy had been raging for more than two years by May 1863, and the *Journal* expressed contentment (if not, relief) that the Union armies had made great progress with many victories weakening the Confederates. The article went on to lament “the delusion” that many Northerners had in believing the war would be short. By this point in 1863, however, the conflict continued with no end in sight, and thousands of Union soldiers had died on the battlefield. Even more had been claimed by disease or sickness.² The fact that there had been so many false assumptions in the general American public concerning the war’s progress was striking, according to the *Journal*. Yet the May 20, 1863 article admitted that given the unprecedented consequences of the war, it was no surprise that people’s opinions and attitudes had shifted. “Popular feelings and passions are ever fluctuating and vibrating from one extreme to another. They are fickle, changeable, and unreliable.”³

Newspaper reactions to events pertaining to slavery, emancipation, and blacks during the Civil War constituted one source of many significant yet fluctuating perceptions in four southeast Michigan publications. As the preceding chapters show, the opinions of the *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune*, the *Detroit Free Press*, the *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, and the *Ann Arbor Journal* evolved over the course of the war. Abraham Lincoln’s Republican nomination and eventual victory in the 1860 presidential election was just the beginning of these four publications’ developing viewpoints on the future of slavery, the possibility of emancipation, and

¹ “Progress of the War,” *Ann Arbor Journal*, Ann Arbor, MI. May 20, 1863.

² For more on the subject of death in the Civil War, see Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 2008).

³ “Progress of the War,” *Ann Arbor Journal*, May 20, 1863.

the place of blacks in the United States. The beginning of war at Fort Sumter in April 1861 then unleashed many responses to the prospects of emancipation and what that would mean for the country during the conflict. The ensuing battles and invasion of the South by Union troops prompted vast numbers of slaves to escape to Union army lines, further causing the four southeast Michigan papers to comment on the passage of such federal measures like the First and Second Confiscation Acts. Finally, the release of President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863 constituted a significant presidential order declaring a general emancipation of the South's slaves. The three Republican publications and one Democratic newspaper in southeast Michigan again reacted most vociferously to this dramatic emancipation edict, expressing fairly provocative thoughts on the plausibility of emancipation and the presence of black people in the United States.

Perhaps the most striking element of these newspapers' reactions was the large variety of views expressed, even among the three Republican publications. The *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune*, the *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, and the *Ann Arbor Journal* all displayed fervent support for Lincoln's candidacy throughout 1860 primarily for his party's antislavery stances. With the start of military confrontation at Fort Sumter, the *Advertiser* and the *Weekly Citizen* expressed to a certain extent their desire to usher in emancipation as an appropriate punishment for the Confederacy. The *Advertiser* even displayed support for using black fugitive slaves as workers for the Union army, something the *Weekly Citizen* did not openly discuss. And the *Journal* agreed that the numerous runaway slaves who were coming to Union lines would not be returned to their masters; yet, the fugitives would inevitably become a burden for the military. These three Republican publications continued to discuss these ideas with their varying viewpoints. The 1863 Emancipation Proclamation, however, led them to publish even more provocative

statements concerning emancipation and blacks in the United States. The *Journal*, of course, had the most surprising reactions with its strong condemnation of Lincoln's presidential order and its effects on the black population in the country.

National public discussion of emancipation, its consequences, and black Americans did not end with Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. Throughout 1863, black soldiers took part in many battles in the seceded South (most notably the Fifty-fourth Massachusetts Infantry in the assault on Fort Wagner in South Carolina). The use of black men in the Union and eventually in the Confederate army was highly controversial, opening the question of what exactly black people's rights were to be after the war.⁴ The issue of equal treatment in the military among black and white soldiers became a problem, so much so that Lincoln issued a military order in July 1863 outlining the details of retaliation for those who mistreated any black soldier. Confusion over the freed slaves' rights after the war also indirectly played a role in the politics of the 1864 election, in which Lincoln was reelected against the Democrat and former Union general George B. McClellan. The same questions of emancipation's legitimacy and consequences resurfaced with the congressional debates of the Thirteenth Amendment (which officially abolished slavery in the United States), eventually ratified by both houses of Congress and finally becoming a part of the Constitution in December 1865. How the Thirteenth Amendment would be enforced throughout the Southern states revolved again on the legacy of emancipation and dealt with the future of former black slaves. These issues were at the heart of the political and social struggles of the Reconstruction era, when the former Confederate states were brought back into the Union.⁵ While this thesis deals with four local southeast Michigan

⁴ For more on the experiences of the black soldier in the Confederacy, see Bruce Levine, *Confederate Emancipation: Southern Plans to Free and Arm Slaves during the War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁵ Perhaps the most well-known and magisterial account of Reconstruction is Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harpers Collins, 1988). On the fluctuating ideas of freedom for

newspapers' reactions to the destruction of slavery during the first two years of the Civil War, it does so to demonstrate these publications' developing opinions on the volatile issues of emancipation and the place of blacks in the United States. These issues were well at the fore of newspaper coverage at the start of the war, even in a local area among a few Republican publications, and these questions would continue to be discussed well after the war's end.

Tracing the development of how local newspapers reported on the varying issues of emancipation and black slaves during the Civil War provides new insights into the significance of newspapers as a prominent source of information. The ways in which these four southeast Michigan publications presented their viewpoints of key moments before and during the war not only allows a better understanding of those critical events; the newspapers' reactions to those moments additionally highlight the complex stories and dynamics of the newspapers themselves. A February 5, 1858 article from the *Detroit Daily Advertiser* deemed the newspaper a "common blessing" and "the strongest lever that civilization has ever produced." Unfortunately, however, it seemed as if "newspapers are poorly appreciated." The entire country needed to "realize the place they now fill, and should understand their intrinsic value."⁶ As an important historical resource, a newspaper publication's "intrinsic" value lies not simply in its presentation of news, but also in the varying perceptions of important issues and how those perceptions shifted.

The fact that newspapers were "poorly appreciated" back in 1858 still reigns true in current historical scholarship. Too many recent works of scholarship tend to slight the importance of newspapers. Simply quoting or paraphrasing the content of certain newspapers in the Civil War era tends toward assuming that a newspaper's position was timeless and fixed at

former slaves and black Americans during the Civil War era, see also Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998), 95-113. For a more detailed account of the transition from slave to free labor after the abolition of slavery in a Southern state, see Rebecca J. Scott, *Degrees of Freedom: Louisiana and Cuba after Slavery* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005).

⁶ "Newspapers," *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, Detroit, MI. February 5, 1858.

any given moment. Such an assumption overlooks the fact that as the antebellum period's most critical source of news, the newspapers themselves serve as a historical resource containing numerous shifting perceptions that can be traced over time. One recent book by a local historian on the history of Detroit during the war claims that the *Detroit Free Press* began to vehemently oppose President Lincoln's policies and display hatred towards blacks after Lincoln's September 1862 Preliminary Proclamation. In fact, the *Free Press*'s opposition and pejorative remarks of blacks were displayed well before 1862. The author additionally states, "Like all Northern cities, Detroit rallied to Lincoln's initial April 1861 call for volunteers when it seemed clear to everyone that the preservation of the Union was *the* fundamental reason for going to war."⁷ Most of the southeast Michigan publications did support Lincoln's call to war after Fort Sumter's surrender. However, as this thesis demonstrates, all four of the local newspapers discussed to a certain extent how slavery had something to do with the conflict, and it was possible that emancipation could be an outcome. Simply providing the stance of the *Detroit Free Press* at one specific moment during the war unfortunately leads to historical generalizations about the perceptions of the city's newspapers. Examining various newspapers and their opinions over a period of time instead offers a more nuanced picture of the complex dynamics at work in local newspapers.

Taken together, a close examination of the *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune*, the *Detroit Free Press*, the *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, and the *Ann Arbor Journal* offers a rich new understanding of the ways in which perceptions of slavery, emancipation, and blacks in the United States dramatically shifted during the Civil War. These issues were vehemently discussed, even in a fairly small local region, and the contentious debates surrounding them

⁷ Paul Taylor, "*Old Slow Town*": *Detroit during the Civil War* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013), 63.

allowed “the pulse” of the public (according to the *Jackson Weekly Citizen*) to exhibit “a quick and feverish circulation.”⁸ Following the development of the multifaceted reactions and opinions of these four local southeast Michigan newspapers further helps illustrate the volatility of the intertwined issues of slavery, emancipation, and the place of black people in the United States during the Civil War.

⁸ “The Emancipation of Slavery...,” *Jackson Weekly Citizen*, Jackson, MI. October 10, 1861.

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