

Subduing the Slaveholders' Rebellion:
Republican Politics in Michigan and Ohio and the Coming of
Emancipation

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INTRODUCTION

In 1860, the Republican Party swept to power across the North on a platform opposed to the expansion of slavery. Yet before any statements against slavery, the first substantive plank of the platform declared that the “maintenance inviolate of the Rights of... States... to order and control its own domestic institutions” was not only constitutionally mandated but also the essential fact on which “the perfection and endurance of our political fabric depends.”¹ Slavery may have been an evil, but it was an evil which the federal government could not obstruct without undermining not only the Constitution but also the very principles of federalism.

The antebellum consensus that slavery would continue for the indefinite future continued during the Secession Crisis and the first days of the Civil War. That consensus shattered soon into the war and by early 1862, however, the thought of eliminating slavery began to tentatively enter into Republican discourse and by the time of the Emancipation Proclamation – which was issued preliminarily on September 22 of 1862 and in final form on January 1, 1863 – many radical Republicans began to imagine a Union without slavery. Before the war support for the relatively immediate emancipation of slaves was limited to a marginalized group of abolitionists. A few years later, large and respectable segments of the Republican Party had come to assume that the end of American slavery was the logical outcome of the Civil War. I will argue that Republicans in Michigan and Ohio were more radical, that is to say more strongly morally opposed to Southern slavery, before the war, than the traditional literature suggests. I will also argue that the Emancipation Proclamation,

¹ National Republican Convention, *National Republican Platform* (Chicago, IL; 1860).

as well as the more moderate antislavery measures that came before, were seen primarily as measures to weaken the Confederacy not as acts of principled opposition to slavery.

The historiography of antebellum Republicanism is large and varies widely in its conception of Republican views on slavery; while all agree that the Republican Party was an antislavery party, they disagree on the extent to which other issues were equally important, on the rhetorical focus of that opposition to slavery, and on the goals of the antislavery movement. Eric Foner's seminal *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* argues for the position that comes closest to the argument that I will outline. He focuses on the concept of "free labor ideology" which encompasses a wide range of beliefs about the economic superiority of free labor over slave labor, the necessity of the West as a place of opportunity for poor whites who did not succeed in the emerging capitalist economy of the Northeast, resentment of control of the federal government by a small group of elite Southern slaveholders (which they typically termed the "Slave Power" or less commonly the "slaveocracy") and moral opposition to slavery as inconsistent with the human rights of African human beings or with the republican ideals set forth in the American Revolution.² He describes what he means by ideology as "beliefs, values, fears, prejudices, reflexes, and commitments."³ I will use the word in much the same way. Much of this first chapter will, in fact, revisit the topics he covers, though I will come to somewhat different conclusions.

Other historians downplay the central role of the slavery issue in antebellum Republicanism. William Gienapp's *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* sees free labor ideology as only one piece of antebellum Republican ideology, alongside Whig

² Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).

³ *Ibid.*, 4.

Economics and Know-Nothing anti-Catholicism (something that was absolutely true of the period on which he writes but became less true over the four years between 1856 and 1860).⁴ He comments that he disagrees with Foner's argument that the Republican part was "basically a free soil party" focused on "protect[ing] the North's free labor system by blocking the advance of slavery."⁵ While by the end of his study, Know-Nothingism had been marginalized and former Democrats began to take a leading role in the Party, he believes that rather than a reflection of genuine concern with slave expansion, Republican antislavery came from backlash against the (substantially exaggerated) outrages by pro-slavery Kansas settlers against antislavery settlers. He notes that four-fifths of the campaign documents issued by the central Republican distribution agency "dealt with the Kansas question."⁶

One school of thought briefly popular in the 1970s, and exemplified by Ronald P. Formisano, generally denied the importance of popular ideology at all and attempted to explain antebellum Party competition with reference to cultural and social groups.⁷ While a decent explanation of voting behavior, it cannot explain the actions of political elites and the politically engaged class of citizens. Formisano reminds us that "social group conflicts do not mechanically generate party organizations" and that "elites... played the most important role."⁸ He asks historians to admit what the last fifty years of political science have shown

⁴ William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party: 1852-1856* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987)

⁵ *Ibid*, 468.

⁶ *Gienapp*, *Origins of the Republican Party*, 352.

⁷ Formisano advanced a similar argument in more than one different work. The one most important to my research was Ronald P. Formisano, *The Birth of Mass Political Parties in Michigan, 1827-1861* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971)

⁸ Formisano, *Birth of Mass Political Parties*, 13.

conclusively that “large portions of the electorate do not have meaningful beliefs.”⁹

Unfortunately, the research on this topic deals with populations before 1950. The extent to which common citizens are engaged in political issues has been a subject of controversy for as long a popular government has existed. They were central to the debate over the ratification of the Constitution, and more obviously the lifting of suffrage restrictions (for white men) in the United States and around the world, but rigorous study had to wait for the advanced survey methodology in the twentieth century. Thus any argument about the political engagement of voters in 1860 is necessarily based on anachronistic assumptions that can never be proven or disproven. When Formisano does attempt to formulate a hypothesis for Republican ideology, he generally denies the role of antislavery, focusing on Whig economics and Know-Nothingism and terming antislavery “anti-southernism.” In his study of Michigan, he flatly declares that “few Michigan Republicans cared about slavery where it did [already] exist,” a claim which I will come to reject at least for the politically engaged class.¹⁰

Because it is only here that most conventional accounts of Reconstruction begin, the shifting Northern Republican views of slavery over the first half of the War have been insufficiently explored. It is these shifting views toward slavery that occurred in the early years of the war that will be my primary focus in the coming pages. Many of the traditional accounts do discuss the Emancipation Proclamation in great deal, as a starting point. As a whole, they tend to over-romanticize the importance of the Emancipation Proclamation as a turning point that transformed the Civil War into a war for liberation of the slaves. In doing

⁹ Philip Converse, “The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics,” in *Ideology and Discontent*, ed. David E. Apter (New York: The Free Press, 1964) qtd. in Formisano, *Birth of Mass Political Parties*. Converse expanded on this general thesis in *The American Voter* (1960). Formisano also cites V.O. Key.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 8.

so they underestimate the extent to which slavery was central to the war from its very beginning and the extent to which even before emancipation was declared some Northerners saw the Civil War as a struggle against slavery as well as the extent to which even after the Emancipation Proclamation, Republicans had far to go before their universal embrace of the Thirteenth Amendment a year later. Eric Foner's synthesis, which has become the standard Reconstruction text, declares that the Proclamation "evoked Christian visions of a resurrection and redemption, of an era of unbounded progress for a nation purged at last of the sin of Slavery" for both long-time abolitionists and staid moderates.¹¹ James McPherson is most guilty of overstating the impact of the Emancipation Proclamation's immediate impact; he cites the Proclamation rather than the Thirteenth Amendment as the "climax" of the antislavery movement.¹²

Examining the Republican Party nationwide from 1860 to 1863 would be beyond my capacities in a project of this scope. As an attempt to pare the project into manageable size, I will focus on two Midwestern states: Michigan and Ohio. I will attempt to trace the development of antislavery rhetoric in these two states starting with the Campaign of 1860 and ending with the final Emancipation Proclamation in January of 1863. Two states cannot represent the whole of a political party which had at least a nominal existence in twenty-three states.¹³ They are hardly more effective at representing Republicanism in the West which was equally widely varied. Gienapp is among one of the many who has noted that even more than in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, political parties in the nineteenth century

¹¹ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988)

¹² James McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964)

¹³ In ten states – all of those which would secede, except for Virginia – Abraham Lincoln did not appear on the ballot, nor did all of the states send delegates to the Chicago Convention.

varied widely from state to state. State interests were more divergent and communications technology less advanced such that it was both more advantageous and more possible for parties to carry different messages in different states. The entire Second Party system – that is the Party System defined by competition between Whigs and Democrats that extended from the late 1820s until 1854 – ignored internal divisions over slavery within the two parties (the Democratic Party continued to ignore such divisions after 1854) and only in extreme situations, notably the Democratic campaign of 1860, did internal incoherency endanger party unity.

However Michigan and Ohio, while in not representative of the nation as a whole provide two important case studies for understanding the national party. Michigan was in many ways the archetypical radical state. It elected radical representatives to Congress, outspoken in their opposition to slavery. Some, like Zachariah Chandler went so far as to flout federal law and lend aid to the Underground Railroad. Michigan was largely an agricultural state full of yeomen who felt economically threatened by the expansion of the slave system. More importantly, it was settled largely by New Englanders who came with the moral reform impulse driven by the Evangelical Christianity of the Second Great Awakening.

Ohio was a more diverse state. Eastern Ohio, known as the Western Reserve due to its former status as land claimed by Connecticut, nearly bordered the Burned-Over District: a portion of Western New York so named for the number and fervency of evangelical revivals in the area during the Second Great Awakening. Using census data to examine Evangelicalism is fraught with difficulty since most large denominations Protestant denominations were split between revivalists and traditionalists, but the Census of 1860 did

show high levels of those denominations most associated with the Second Great Awakening in this area.¹⁴ The Western portion of Ohio, on the other hand, was largely settled by, and influenced by, both economically and socially, the slave society of Kentucky. Remarkably, this area gave a reasonably high level of support to Republicans, but the character of the Republican party in this area was much more conservative than it was further east before during and after the War. Though in keeping with conventional practice, I broadly categorize states as “moderate” or “radical,” it should be noted that such distinctions are quite crude. Michigan had many moderate Republicans, as well as many Democrats throughout the war, just as neighboring Ohio, traditionally characterized as more conservative, provided the nation with many leading radicals; Cincinnati, a bastion of Conservatism, was the home of the leading Western Radical Salmon Chase. Migration meant that political variation within states greatly exceeded political variation between states, at least within the free states. In Justin Morill’s words, “almost every free state had its New England within its borders.”¹⁵ Especially in light of the internal variation in Michigan and Ohio and the rest of the American states, they provide important objects for study because they allow us to see the full range of Republican ideology in the West, from radicals in Michigan to moderates at the *Cincinnati Commercial*, a newspaper that while always supportive of Republicans was so far to the right that other Republican papers were loath to recognize it as one of their own. Michigan was as good of a reflection as any of the belt of radical states of the far North.

¹⁴ Historical Census Browser, from the University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center: <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/index.html>. Original Data from the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, University of Michigan.

¹⁵ *Congressional Globe*, 36th Congress, 2nd Session. 1007 (1861). Qtd in Eric Foner, *Free Soil Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).

Ohio's greater diversity made it as reasonable of a cross-section as any state can provide of the diverse ideological pressures in the Republican Party.

To understand shifts in the Republican Party during the war requires a deeper examination of Republican political discourse on the eve of the war. As such, I will dedicate the first portion of my thesis to my own deeper examination of Republican Party rhetoric during the Election of 1860. Only through a better understanding of where the center of gravity of the Republican Party was on the eve of the war can we understand the shifts that took place during the course of the war. I argue that by 1860, moral outrage against slavery was a central theme to the Republican Party to a far greater extent than the historiography has traditionally recognized. In the sources which I encountered in the radical state of Michigan, this sort of moral discourse held a central place. The national literature generally recognizes Michigan as a radical state, though it is never considered as radical as "small town New England, and... the rural areas of New York," as Foner identifies the heart of radicalism.¹⁶ While, Formisano's study of Michigan mocks the idea that it was a radical state, his argument is in the distinct minority.¹⁷ In light of this literature, radicalism in Michigan is surprising mostly because it is so pervasive. Nearly every speech or editorial mentioned and focused on moral issues, though because the antislavery movement tended to push together differing arguments, usually moral arguments were not the only ones that were made.

In Ohio, even to some extent in conservative Cincinnati, such moral rhetoric in opposition to Southern slavery, while not as central, remained an important part of the discourse. Ohio juggled the moderate West of the state with the radical East side. It is surprising to see radicalism when it appears in Cincinnati given that J.L. Balen called

¹⁶ Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 106.

¹⁷ Formisano, *Formation of Mass Political Parties*, 8.

southern Ohio a “breakwater between... North and South.”¹⁸ It is even somewhat surprising to see radical sentiment in the *Ohio State Journal*, which served as the organ for the central leadership of the state party in this divided state.

The moral outrage that motivated the antebellum radicalism which I identify expressed itself in several different ways. These included the idea that the ideals of Christianity were fundamentally opposed to the ownership by one human being of another and the idea that slavery was incompatible with the republican example of the United States and the exalted position of Western civilization (to use an anachronistic term) after the Enlightenment. While these concepts may appear conceptually distinct to the twenty-first century reader, nineteenth century politicians appear to not have seen them as such. Christianity and temporal politics were deeply linked in the aftermath of the Second Great Awakening. Together with polygamy, Republicans often termed slavery one of the “twin relics of barbarism,” or less commonly the “twin relics of an unchristian age.” We can see slavery, not only within the territories, but also even within its existing boundaries, described as “barbaric” on the one hand and “unchristian” on the other. The former distinction suggests that the peculiar institution was unfit for the modern enlightened era: an argument that could be made on an entirely secular basis. The second suggests more explicitly that slavery was incompatible with Christianity. Republicans made arguments based on both the former contention and the latter one in the same sentence.

It is not surprising that Republicans would link so closely subtly different justifications for moral opposition to slavery, including Southern slavery (that is to say slavery within the states in which it was already permitted). More surprisingly Republicans

¹⁸ J.L. Balen to Justin Morrill, March 11, 1859, Justin S. Morrill Papers qtd. in Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 187.

linked moral opposition to slavery wherever it existed with economic opposition to Southern slavery and to economic opposition to the expansion of slavery to the territories. When previous writers have been inclined to focus on the moral aspect of the Republican antislavery at all, they have differentiated between moral opposition to slavery and economic opposition to slavery as if the two operated independently on different individuals.¹⁹ I will argue that both sentiments operated simultaneously within the same individuals. Even though they seem to be totally conceptually distinct, there is little evidence that Republicans distinguished the two. Republicans regularly made arguments based on morality and economic expediency in the same breath, as if they built upon each other logically or even as if they were two ways of expressing the same thought.

Next, I will examine the development of Republican opposition to slavery during the first half of the War: the period until the Emancipation Proclamation. I will argue that Republicans in Michigan and Ohio did not understand the Proclamation to be a document of moral character, but rather a war measure, albeit one with potentially positive consequences. Many Republicans in Michigan understood, but did not focus on, the potentially radical implications of declaring three million men and women free. In Ohio, Republicans were more universally focused on the usefulness of the Proclamation in weakening the rebels, though outside of Cincinnati, they could see the potential for Lincoln's declaration to be the first step toward ending slavery altogether.

All the Republicans that I studied shared some similarities in their course toward supporting the Emancipation Proclamation. First, over the course of Secession Winter, the winter of 1860 and 1861 during which time the states of the Deep South contemplated and

¹⁹ I think of Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men* who argues that while radicals opposed slavery on both moral and economic grounds, moderates avoided attacking slavery as immoral.

then finally declared their independence, Republicans, especially radical republicans whose tone was most offensive to Southern slaveholders, moderated their attacks on slavery significantly, in an effort to assure them that their peculiar institution was not threatened by the election of a Republican President. Most however, did not alter their positions on policy. Unlike many apolitical abolitionists – most famously William Lloyd Garrison – Radical Republicans were far from the disunionists that Democratic propaganda portrayed them to be. The inter-Republican consensus, rhetorically conciliatory but opposed to acquiescing to the South on the Crittenden Compromise, faded just a few months into the war, as Moderates and Radicals split on how to interpret the events of the first year of the war, such as the Confiscation Acts of August 6, 1861 and July 17, 1862, General John C. Frémont’s (short lived) proclamation declaring free the slaves of rebel sympathizers in Missouri on August 30, 1861 and the ongoing return of fugitive slaves by federal troops.

In this study, I use a methodology based on the limitations – of funding and above all of time – as well as on historical worth of sources. I have made limited use of the private papers of some Republican elites in Michigan, but primarily used debates in congress, from the *Congressional Globe* which I accessed online through the Library of Congress website, and above all newspapers which I chose to reflect as much as possible the broad spectrum of Republican thought in Michigan and Ohio. In Michigan, I examined the *Lansing State Republican*, a weekly paper from the state capital, which remained a relatively small rural town despite the presence of the seat of government (the town of Lansing had a population of slightly over 3,000).²⁰ I also examined the largest Republican paper in the large city of Detroit. Detroit’s population was about 46,000 and was far more ethnically diverse than the

²⁰ Michael J. Fishman, *Population of Counties, Towns, and Cities in the United States, 1850 and 1860*. Distributed by Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, Ann Arbor, MI.

population of a small town like Lansing.²¹ In Ohio, I examined the *Columbus State Journal* from the state capital of, which secondary literature has described as the quasi-official voice of the Ohio Republican establishment.²² I also examined two Republican papers in Cincinnati. With a population over 160,000, Cincinnati was the largest city in the entire Northwest, heavily Democratic, and was heavily linked economically and culturally with slavery just across the river and heavily Democratic.²³ It had two Republican papers the more radical *Cincinnati Gazette* and the more conservative *Cincinnati Commercial*. I will discuss later the limitations of this methodology as well as the reasons why I believe it can nonetheless can tell an effective story about the changes in the political rhetoric between 1860 and 1863 that contributes to our understanding of not only Republicanism in Michigan and Ohio, but indeed in the nation as a whole.

²¹ Campbell Gibson, *Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790-1990* (Washington, DC, 1998).

²² Robert D. Sawrey, *Dubious Victory: The Reconstruction Debate in Ohio* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1992).

²³ Gibson, *Population of Largest Cities*.

CHAPTER ONE: “Relic of Barbarism”: The Campaign of 1860 (January, 1860- November, 1860)

In order to properly examine shifting Republican attitudes during the Civil War, we must first reexamine the traditional historiography of Republican politics in the immediate antebellum period. A great deal has been written on the development of a coalition opposed to the Democratic Party and to the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which opened territories north of the 36°30' line to slavery in violation of the thirty-four-year-old Missouri Compromise: the coalition that became the Republican Party by 1856. In an effort to better understand the breed of Republicanism that swept Abraham Lincoln into office in 1860, I will revisit these studies and focus on the position of mainstream Republicanism, especially with regard to race and slavery, in Michigan and Ohio on the eve of the Civil War. For reasons that I mentioned in my introduction, Michigan is as good an example of Western radicalism as any single state could be and Ohio is large and diverse enough to represent a wide range of Republican thought. I will argue that the evidence I have gathered suggests that Michigan was substantially more radical, that is to say more committed to the eradication of Southern slavery, than Ohio was, but that both were influenced by radicalism more than the traditional historiography admits.

Some historians of the third party system have explained the development of the Republican Party with a primary focus on the economic interests of Northern whites. Ronald P. Formisano, who has done, to my knowledge, the only extensive study of antebellum politics focusing specifically on Michigan, deemphasizes the role of ideology in mass voting behavior instead noting strong correlations between class and especially ethnic background and voting behavior. He argues, in short, that the Republican Party was a party of native-

born Protestant yeomen while the Democrats represented the more marginalized members of (white) society: for example, Catholics, immigrants, and urbanites. This view does ascribe ideological content to antebellum party competition at least at the elite level. Here it focuses on the importance of fusion with Know-Nothingism in the hope of uniting the disparate anti-Democratic elements (Democrats being at the time the majority party) and the resulting inclusion of nativism and anti-Catholicism in Republican discourse. The Republican Party's passion, he writes, "flowed from the desire of most Northern white Protestants to assert their rights... against... white slavocrats, and to protect their values and status... from aliens and Catholics."²⁴ Though he denies it, Michigan is widely accepted in the national literature as home to a more radical breed of Republicanism than either Ohio or the nation as a whole. Even Formisano does not argue that it was more conservative; thus, we must assume he would find the Republican Party equally void of antislavery ideology throughout the country. While we can assume that the Ohio Party, like the Michigan Party, was, in Formisano's conception, not focused on slavery, it was probably not as concerned with nativism and temperance.

William Gienapp notes that Republicans in Ohio were successful in attracting a larger portion of the immigrant vote than in other states. Indeed, in 1856, it was the only state where votes for Republican presidential candidate John C. Frémont did not closely mirror votes for temperance.²⁵ Gienapp notes a significant role for the American Party in the early days of fusion. However, he argues that Salmon Chase successfully pushed it out of the

²⁴ Ronald P. Formisano, *The Birth of Mass Political Parties in Michigan, 1827-1861* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), 265.

²⁵ William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party: 1852-1856* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 434.

Party during his 1855 campaign for governor and that by the second half of the 1850s, Ohio Republicanism had been largely purged of nativist elements.

While no one has done work as extensive as Formisano's with an exclusive focus on either Michigan or Ohio, the extensive national literature nonetheless merits consideration. Materialists, following in the tradition of Charles and Mary Beard, though doubtlessly rejecting their more extreme conclusions, have charted the importance of Whig economic policies.²⁶ They portray the Republican Party as latter-day promoters of the American System, a group of policies meant to encourage industrial development and development of the West which included a protective tariff, support for a strong Homestead Law, support for railroads (especially a railroad to the Pacific), and for other internal improvements such as federal support for harbor improvements and road construction. William Gienapp focusing on national politics from the period from 1852-1856 presents a quite moderate version of this argument focusing on the importance economic issues (and nativism) in the creation of a successful anti-Democratic coalition.²⁷

Eric Foner offers the conventional historiography that most emphasizes the role of antislavery in antebellum Republicanism. His introduction to *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men* laments the negative perception of the Party among other historians who either fail to recognize the extent of principled antislavery in the Party or blame them for blundering into a needless civil war.²⁸ To Foner, Republicans were indeed focused on slavery; they united under the umbrella of free labor ideology: a belief in the superiority of a society founded on free – as opposed to slave – labor. The party was primarily founded on independent self-

²⁶ Charles and Mary Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization* (New York: 1927).

²⁷ William Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

²⁸ Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 2.

sufficient yeoman farmers and artisans. This ideology simultaneously attacked the Southern slave economy and exalted the Northern capitalist economy as a place of almost unlimited opportunities for free men. In this ideology, the West was especially necessary as a place of social mobility for those stifled in the East, which is precisely why Republicans supported a stronger Homestead Law than Democrats did.

Slavery threatened this role for the West primarily because it was assumed that white yeomen would not be able to compete with unpaid slave labor. The more racist supporters of free labor ideology worried that the very existence of black men and white men working on the same jobs side-by-side degraded the labor of the free whites morally as well as economically by equating them with slaves. Republicans also saw slavery as a hindrance on the macroeconomy especially on industrial progress. They were fond of comparing the growth in population and industrial output of the slave-less North with the relative stagnation of the slave economies of the South. This line of thinking need not argue that Republicans were opposed to slavery solely because of its effects on white laborers and not out of any degree of genuine concern for the plight of the slave himself or herself. Concerns about the effects of slave labor on the white man co-existed with concern for the plight of the slave in the Republican coalition. As Ohio governor William Dennison declared, the Republican Party had “its conservative and radical elements” with the radicals characterized by what Foner calls a “moral imperative” in antislavery politics.²⁹ My research suggests that this radical element was quite widespread in Michigan and, although to a lesser extent, Ohio as well.

Apart from Formisano, no one has comprehensively studied Republicanism in Michigan, specifically. But the national literature acknowledges that Michigan was a more

²⁹ *Ibid*, 103.

radical state than most, and it associates radicalism with moral opposition to slavery.³⁰ Since the literature pays little attention to Michigan, I take their narratives to suggest that the composition of party ideology in Michigan differed only slightly from the ideological composition of the rest of the party in the rest of the country and, therefore, was less radical than I will suggest that it was. Gienapp gives focuses more on nine states than the rest; among these is Ohio. However he focuses on electoral results which, for reasons I discussed in my opening analysis of Formisano, can be difficult to translate to the higher-level political discourse I am discussing. Foner notes the presence of some prominent radicalism in antebellum Ohio, especially in the Western Reserve, but does not note any substantial ideological differences between Ohio and the rest of the country.

I will argue that the Republican Party, as represented through the sources I examined in Michigan and Ohio on the eve of the Civil War, was primarily an antislavery party. Whiggish economics was coupled on to antislavery for a majority of Republicans but that was a secondary part of party ideology, not a test of party loyalty. This was especially true in Michigan where slavery was the only prominent issue in the newspapers I examined. Nativism was not relevant in either state. Indeed, in both states, the Republican press which I examined made great efforts to attract foreign born, especially German, support. Furthermore, I will argue that the Republican sources that I examined in Michigan and Columbus, though not in Cincinnati, were focused on more than non-extension. They were also fundamentally opposed to slavery in the states where it already existed and looked toward the day when the institution would be abolished nationwide. Further south, the moderate newspaper in Cincinnati focused almost exclusively on the narrower issue of the territories. Finally, I will argue my research suggests that in Michigan and Columbus,

³⁰ See *Ibid* chapter 4.

Republicans were opposed to slavery largely out of concern for the plight of the black slave, and that in Michigan, this concern was largely voiced in the language of religion. In Southern Ohio, the concerns that were driving antislavery were more in keeping with the traditional literature about the national party.

Congressman DeWitt Leach, in a speech widely reprinted and lauded throughout Michigan, summarized my conception of Michigan Republicanism on the House floor on March 14, 1860 where he called slavery “really the only vital question of American politics” and said that Republicans believe that “all men,” by which he meant to include blacks, “have an inalienable right to ‘life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness’” and Republicans “*know* that slavery, socially, morally, and politically is a blighting and withering curse” on both “the oppressor and the oppressed.”³¹ For Leach, the fundamental difference between Republicans and Northern Democrats was that for Republicans, slavery was a question of “justice [and] conscience,” not of “interests.”³² In an hour-long and varied speech, Leach never made a moral distinction between slavery in the territories and slavery in the states where it already existed. Yet Leach was not an abolitionist, he was careful to distance the bulk of the party from true abolitionists like Gerrit Smith and William Lloyd Garrison. He called Republicans “fanatics” for non-expansion only. In short, Smith was making an argument for a very moderate position at the center of the Republican Party, but did so with primarily moral arguments about the inhumanity of one man enslaving another. Leach had been the editor of one of the state’s leading Republican newspapers, the *Lansing State Republican*, which I will look at in depth throughout my paper, I will show that his views were echoed by subsequent editors of that newspaper and by the State’s most circulated newspaper, the *Detroit Tribune*.

³¹ *Congressional Globe*, 36th Congress, 1st Session. 1163 (1860).

³² *Ibid.* 1164

Before turning to my own evidence, I will first discuss why I find the Know-Nothing thesis and the Whig thesis, while important to some Republicans, insufficient to explain the common ideology of Republicanism. My argument most closely tracks the argument made by Eric Foner who acknowledges that “it cannot be overemphasized that that the radicals adopted [their political] program as a sure means toward abolition.” My evidence will suggest (albeit tentatively due to my small number of sources) that this breed of radicalism was more pervasive than he suggests, for within Michigan the moral reform impulse was a primary rather than secondary motivation even for those who were comparatively moderate.³³ In Ohio, there was a more substantial ideological (and geographic) split between those whose views, while more conservative than the ones I found in Michigan, reflected a degree of radicalism, and those who staked out more moderate antislavery positions.

Republicanism Other than Antislavery

First, I turn to the economic beliefs of the Republican Party. It would be impossible to deny that Republicans generally were generally supportive of Whiggish economics, but economics were neither central nor defining for Michigan Republicans. In Ohio, my research suggests that they were more of an important issue than they were in Michigan. Surely, it is true that the majority of Republicans were former Whigs. Both Eric Foner and Ronald Formisano, estimate the party consisted of approximately eighty percent former Whigs despite drawing vastly different conclusions from this datum.³⁴ It is also true that except for those who traced their history to the Free Soil or Liberty Parties, almost all of the

³³ Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 117.

³⁴ Ronald P. Formisano, *The Birth of Mass Political Parties: Michigan 1827-1861* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971).
Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*.

top tier of political elites in Michigan and Ohio were former Whigs, not former Democrats. Former Whig elites were unlikely to change their opinions on economic issues and Republicans championed a stronger homestead law and greater internal improvements than did Democrats on the eve of the Civil War.

In Ohio, economics played a central role in the rhetoric of the Republican Party up until the Civil War. When Congress ceased debates on slavery to discuss the tariff, the *Columbus State Journal* found it “really quite refreshing” and promised that everyone except “the squad of radical fire-eaters [the most conservative pro-slavery southerners]” was “heartily sick of the Slavery discussion.”³⁵ Not only did the voice of the party find slave questions to be too much the focus of public debate, they presumed that the whole North wanted to ignore the slave question and move on to something more important. The only people, according to the *Journal*, keeping the slave question relevant were radically conservative southerners. Similarly, Governor William Dennison’s address upon being inaugurated in January of 1860, touched on antislavery but began with a call for Whig economic principles like internal improvements.³⁶ Unsurprisingly, the more conservative *Cincinnati Commercial* also focused on economic issues. The first substantive reason they could give for voting for Lincoln was not his opposition to slavery, but his support for a Homestead Law.

While the Michigan Republican platform of 1860 did indeed declare the need for a strong Homestead Law, and “the improvement of our rivers and harbours” – repeated from the national platform of 1856, these concerns took a backseat to concerns over slavery.³⁷

Henry Waldron, a former Whig Congressman from Hillsdale in South-central Michigan,

³⁵ “News from Washington,” *Columbus State Journal*, January 4, 1860.

³⁶ William Dennison, “Inaugural Address” qtd. in *Columbus State Journal*, January 10, 1860

³⁷ 1860 Michigan State Republican Platform, qtd. in *Lansing State Republican*, May 9, 1860.

spoke for most Michigan Republicans when he said that “the questions of finance and tariffs, of production and improvement, dwindle into insignificance.”³⁸ DeWitt Leach’s speech with the same message was one of the few speeches from Michigan members to be reprinted in full in multiple newspapers from various parts of the state.³⁹ When the Republican press in Michigan reprinted speeches from the floor of Congress, as it frequently did, they generally took the same tone. A glance through the *Congressional Globe* shows that only a small portion of the floor debate in 1860 was dedicated to the issue of slavery, yet nearly every speech that was reprinted in the *Lansing State Republican* and the *Detroit Tribune* focused on slavery. There were a few exceptions, most notably when Zachariah Chandler gave an impassioned speech defending appropriations for the improvement of harbors on the St. Clair Flats, an area just north of Detroit on the border with British Canada, but they were rare and focused on issues of only local importance (the St. Clair Flats issue was an issue of special local concern and appears to have been more prominent in Detroit than out-state).⁴⁰ Debates on issues unrelated to slavery took place; the fact that the Republicans that I examined in Michigan generally ignored them suggests that they agreed with Leach that slavery was the vital question of the day.

Having briefly discussed the influence of economic policy, I want to turn to Know-Nothingism, another potential component of Republican ideology suggested by the literature that is unrelated to slavery. Fusion with nativists was indeed vital to the early growth of the Republican coalition; however, by 1860, the self-proclaimed American Party was declining in importance while the immigrant voting population continued to increase. As a result, not

³⁸ *Congressional Globe*, 36th Congress, 1st Session. 1871 (1860).

³⁹ DeWitt Leach, “The Bogus Democracy Examined and Exposed,” *Lansing State Republican*, April 3, 1860
Ibid, *Detroit Tribune*, March 27, 1860.

⁴⁰ Zachariah Chandler, *Detroit Tribune*, February 21, 1860.

only had the influence of nativism declined, Republicans had begun to actively pursue votes from immigrants. Here alone, do I find nearly no differences between the sources which I examined in Michigan and those in Ohio. The Republican press in Michigan was full of anecdotes of Irishmen who had become Republicans, stories attempting to show the ways in which the Democratic Party disrespected immigrants, and reports on immigrant Republican clubs.⁴¹ When Wayne County, the largest in the state, sent naturalized Germans to the National Convention, they explicitly declared that they wanted “all the world to recognize the right of all nationalities by birth.”⁴² From this we can see that the Republican Party was making an active effort to separate the party from nativists (unsurprising, given the substantial number of foreign-born voters in Detroit). Nonetheless, the almost defensive tone of the County Convention also suggests that distrust remained, probably as a result of fusion with the American Party in previous years.

In the Buckeye State, the story was almost exactly the same. The *Cincinnati Commercial* applauded the nomination of German immigrants as a fitting recognition of the “large and influential German element in the Republican ranks.”⁴³ The *Columbus State Journal* cheered the selection of German delegates as well, lauding them as “Americans by choice.”⁴⁴ Even when outreach to immigrant voters was not obviously politically beneficial, the *Commercial* showed a genuine opposition to the Know-Nothing platform. The paper despised Stephen Douglass, but when confronted with rumors that he was a Catholic (which often circulated about Presidential candidates), they did not embrace them, nor did they

⁴¹ Some examples include “An Irishman’s Experience with Slavery,” *Detroit Tribune*, January 10, 1860, “Irishmen in New York,” *Detroit Tribune* July 24, 1860, “Address of the Albany Wide Awakes,” *Lansing State Republican*, October 17, 1860

⁴² “Wayne County Convention,” *Detroit Tribune*, April 17, 1860.

⁴³ “The Result of the Republican Convention,” *Cincinnati Commercial*, June 21, 1860.

⁴⁴ “The German Delegates to Chicago,” *Columbus State Journal*, March 5, 1860.

simply label them false. Instead they took the opportunity to ask “what harm would it do him or anyone else [if the rumors were true]?” and “[w]hen will the people learn that a man’s religious belief is a matter between him and the Almighty?”⁴⁵

Racism

If historians agree that slavery, rather than Whig economics or nativism, motivated the Republican Party, many have attributed Republican opposition to slavery to racism, suggesting that it was not slavery, so much as black men, whether slave or free, that Republicans wanted to keep out of the territories. They point out that several Republican states – mostly in the West – banned blacks from entering, and that the vast majority of states, Michigan and Ohio included, denied blacks the right of suffrage. This racism was real and durable, but a closer examination of Republicanism within Michigan will show that in the context of antebellum politics, Republicans were remarkably willing to acknowledge the humanity of black Americans. Republicans in Ohio, while more conservative on these issues, were still profoundly less racist than Democrats. The Republicans I examined in both Michigan and Ohio differed with Democrats on race in that Republicans believed the rights enumerated in the Declaration of Independence applied to all people, while Democrats argued that it was intended to apply only to whites. DeWitt Leach’s speech on the floor of the House, which I mentioned before references “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Austin Blair was more explicit giving a speech in Grand Rapids on behalf of his successful gubernatorial campaign in 1860. “Our enemies tell us that the Declaration of Independence only refers to *white men*. Douglass would have us believe it,” he announced before giving a

⁴⁵ “Is Mr, Douglass a Catholic?,” *Cincinnati Commercial*, July 26, 1860.

long explanation of why the Declaration of Independence also applied to blacks.⁴⁶ Henry Waldron reiterated this opinion on the floor of the House saying that Republican “hostility to bondage” “came down... from the Declaration of Independence.”⁴⁷ In Ohio, William Dennison spoke of the Northwest Territories’ ban on slavery as the policy logically resulting from the principles of the Declaration of Independence and excoriated the *Dred Scott* ruling that blacks are not citizens and did not have standings to due in court as a repudiation of the promise in the Declaration of Independence that all men are created equal.⁴⁸ Even the *Commercial* found the worst of the racism of the Democrats as intolerable as any other Republicans did.⁴⁹ When a Douglass supporter declared that “it was hard to tell which was a monkey and which was a nigger” and that blacks “don’t look like us... don’t smell like us... don’t feel like us,” it could find no better advertisement for Lincoln than to highlight the offending speech.⁵⁰

Radical Antislavery

Having found that some of the conventional account of Republican ideology does not fit with my findings in Michigan and Ohio, I will propose my own conception of the ideology expressed by those Republicans whom I investigated. No coherent ideology could ever explain the rhetoric of hundreds of thousands individuals in Michigan and Ohio who voted for or campaigned for Republican candidates, but to speak in broad generalities, Michigan Republicans focused their attention on a moral revulsion toward slavery, largely

⁴⁶ Austin Blair, “Speech of Hon. Austin Blair,” qtd. in *Grand Rapids Eagle*, qtd. in *Detroit Tribune*, October 23, 1860.

⁴⁷ *Congressional Globe*, 36th Congress, 1st Session. 1871 (1860).

⁴⁸ William Dennison, “Inaugural,” qtd. in *Columbus State Journal*, January 10, 1860, “Glance at Political History,” *Columbus State Journal*, April 4, 1860

⁴⁹ “A Negro Burned at the Stake,” *Cincinnati Commercial*, June 21, 1860.

⁵⁰ “A Douglass Orator on the Negro,” qtd. in *Cincinnati Commercial*, March 31, 1860.

driven by religion. Republicans in Ohio were more concerned with some of the more conventionally recognized concerns for antebellum Republicans, such as the excessive control of the Slave Power. This is generally consistent with the literature which usually suggests that Michigan was a more radical and Ohio a more moderate state. However, I will suggest that both states were more radical than the national literature implies – I use the word implies purposely because the national literature is often quite vague, and falls back on generalizations when attempting to distinguish between states. The sources I looked at in Michigan suggest a level of pervasive radicalism, especially in urban Detroit,⁵¹ that goes beyond what the literature would lead a reader to suspect from any state. While Ohio reflects the picture of national moderation better, it shows heavy tinges of radicalism especially for a state whose population was centered (along with two of the newspapers that I will examine) in the South, an area which Foner says was so full of Southern settlers that it felt “[t]o Republicans... like parts of slave states transplanted onto free soil.”⁵² I will attempt to piece together this ideology in the coming pages.

To help understand Republicanism in Michigan before the war, as well as the development of Ohio Republicanism during the war, I want to discuss the prevalence of the Evangelical Christianity and millennial belief in the nineteenth century. The new breed of Christianity that emerged out of the Second Great Awakening rejected Calvinism and embraced the power of human action to make change not only with regard to each person’s own personal salvation but in the world as well. Some Evangelicals were driven by an eschatological desire to morally perfect the world in order to ready it for the Second Coming

⁵¹ Cities were generally more Democratic than Republican, see *Formisano*, *Formation of Mass Political Parties*. Within the Republican Party, cities tended to be more conservative see Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 107.

⁵² Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 49.

and the Millennium. As a result, evangelical Christianity spawned pushes for temperance as well as missionary activities both overseas and in the growing poor urban areas within the United States, and, most notably for our purposes, antislavery.

Dorothy Ross discusses the merging of millennialism and republican ideology (with a lowercase “r”) in nineteenth century historical thought, through which America became not only a temporal example to the world, but God’s chosen venue through which to bring about the Millennium.⁵³ George Fredrickson’s study of Northern intellectuals (almost universally middle and upper class New England Protestants and their intellectual relatives – a major base of support and ideology formation for the Republican Party) argues that this Millennialism was both pervasive and somewhat non-specific. The perfectionist impulse (which he also notes combined with the “ideals of the Declaration of Independence) saw America as a “fulfillment of divine purpose” to remake the world in God’s image, even among those less concerned about the exact date of the Second Coming.⁵⁴ The fact that few followed the lead of William Miller who waited up the night of October 22, 1844 sure that Christ would return that day, does not make the desire to perfect the world and bring His Second Coming any less real or influential in the politics of the nineteenth century. These religious ideas can provide a framework in which the positions taken by Michigan Republicans, and the rhetoric used to support them, fits well.

The primary thrust of Republicanism in Michigan was opposition to the expansion of slavery, yet, as I mentioned at the outset, it would be a mistake to view the territories as intrinsically vital for Michigan Republicans. Don E. Fernerbacher rightly wrote that the

⁵³ Dorothy Ross, “Historical Consciousness in Nineteenth-Century America,” *The American Historical Review* 89, no. 4 (1984): 908-928.

⁵⁴ George Fredrickson, *The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union*, 7.

territories were a “skirmish line of a more extensive struggle.”⁵⁵ Michigan Republicans used the territorial issue as a way to legally, and with less controversy, attack slavery as a whole. As William Seward said to great cheers in Detroit, slavery “is at all times and everywhere unjust.”⁵⁶ Similarly, the Michigan Senate, writing to US Senator Zachariah Chandler, instructed him to oppose the Fugitive Slave Act and to support the prohibition of slavery in the District of Columbia as well as to oppose slavery in the territories and in any newly created states.⁵⁷

Within the sources that I examined in Ohio, views on slavery varied from something approaching the level of radicalism found in Michigan to a large degree of disinterest. The party’s organ *The Columbus State Journal*, cared deeply about slavery, sometimes with similar motivations to those found in Michigan newspapers. They were willing to print stories about the barbarism of slavery similar to the ones that appeared in Michigan, focusing on the violated honor of female slaves. In one, a traveler learns of a slave woman seemingly treated well, but forced into having children.⁵⁸ Like everyone in 1860, they knew that they could never remove slavery from the Southern states, and they hinted less than in Michigan at the idea that an antislavery policy might lead to the extinction of slavery everywhere. Instead they printed calls for “divorce” of the federal government from slavery to “spare [the North] the “shame” of supporting “a relic of barbarism.”⁵⁹ Indeed, while genuine abolitionists were criticized in both Michigan and Ohio, the *Journal* was more aggressive in

⁵⁵ George Harmon Knoles, ed, *The Crisis of the Union*, qtd. in Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*.

⁵⁶ William Seward, qtd in *Lansing State Republican*, September 12, 1860 and *Cincinnati Commercial*, September 13, 1860.

⁵⁷ Michigan State Senate to Senator Zachariah Chandler, *Zachariah Chandler Papers*, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

⁵⁸ For example, “The Slave Woman that ‘had an easy time,’” *Columbus State Journal*, January 14, 1860.

⁵⁹ “From Washington—Slavery a “relic of barbarism,” *Columbus State Journal*, March 6, 1860.

doing so, trying to tie “the nigger [Fredrick] Douglass” and a British antislavery conference to John Brown.⁶⁰

The moderate *Cincinnati Commercial* was, as one would expect from a more conservative paper, less concerned with slavery than the *Journal*. They explained on September 27 that they were supporting Lincoln because he “represents the interests of free labor,” but their conception of free labor was nearly void of any content related to slavery and included only honesty, support for a Homestead Law, support for the liberties of people in states or territories (perhaps a veiled reference to *Dred Scott* which even Northern Democrats opposed), support for the rights of immigrants and economical government.⁶¹ Admittedly, all of the newspapers I examined tended to moderate their rhetoric as the election drew nearer probably to avoid alienating, to use an anachronistic term, potential swing voters, but none of the others did so to the point that slavery nearly disappeared as a political issue.

Furthermore, from the beginning, the *Commercial* decried anything tainted with radicalism yet proved open to the Democracy. Like all of the newspapers I examined, the *Journal* often printed articles from other papers, especially New York papers, but unlike the other newspapers, they proved as willing to print stories from the Democratic *New York Herald* as from the Republican *New York Times* and *New York Tribune*. While indicative of either a commitment to a fair hearing of their opponents or a greater degree of moderation than the other newspapers I examined, usually the *Tribune*'s story was presented alongside traditional Republican accounts or at least in relation to a topic where the newspaper had already printed traditionally Republican accounts. However, in response to a speech by

⁶⁰ *Columbus State Journal*, January 19, 1860.

⁶¹ “What are We Voting For?,” *Cincinnati Commercial*, September 27, 1860.

Owen Lovejoy focusing on the twin relics of barbarism – a concept many radicals use to encompass and tie together slavery and polygamy – and which the *Lansing State Republican* had found so wonderful as to print in it in its entirety, the *Commercial* offered just two accounts, both Democratic, including one from the *Tribune* which excoriated Lovejoy as a “Northern fire-eater.” The other report, originally from the *Ohio Statesman*, launched into criticisms of Lovejoy’s radical colleagues as well, including Benjamin Wade who it calls a “brutal gross old scold.”⁶² Yet even the *Commercial* had its scattered moments of outrage for the moral wrongs of slavery; like other Republican papers, they could not resist printing a story on the lynching of a black slave and they attacked Douglass’s belief in Popular Sovereignty with reference to the Declaration of Independence’s guarantee of equality although the reference was rather opaque.⁶³

The *Commercial* was probably a representation of the more conservative tendencies, even than the rest of the conservative city of Cincinnati. The more radical newspaper in the city, the *Cincinnati Gazette*, criticized the *Commercial* for being insufficiently Republican, although quite possibly simply because, when competing for readership, it was a good business strategy to impugn one’s rival.⁶⁴ The radical *Lansing State Republican* deemed it “independent” instead of “Republican” when reprinting the *Commercial*’s positive take on Lincoln’s first inaugural address, though here potentially out of a desire to portray Lincoln’s speech as unifying. Though, even the *Gazette*, which I was unfortunately only able to find

⁶² “A Lovejoy Sensation in the House—A Northern Fire-Eater,” *New York Herald* and “Another Account of the Lovejoy Scene in the House—Washington Gossip,” *Ohio Statesman*, qtd. in *Cincinnati Commercial*, July 12, 1860.

⁶³ “Popular Sovereignty Milk for Massachusetts Babies,” *Cincinnati Commercial*, July 26, 1860.

⁶⁴ “CYLINDRICAL PATRIOTIM REVOLIVING ON ITS OWN AXIS,” *Cincinnati Gazette*, Septmeber 22, 1862

starting in 1861, was far more conservative than the newspapers in Michigan or Columbus, it was also significantly more radical than the *Commercial*.

Despite the conservatism in Cincinnati, the Republican Party of the state as a whole remained generally radical. The *Journal* noted approvingly that all of the Republicans from Ohio – including John Gurley of Cincinnati’s Hamilton County -- supported a resolution offered by Oberlin’s Harrison Blake which argued that “the holding of persons as property [was] contrary to natural justice” and therefore the Judiciary Committee should introduce a bill “giving freedom to every human being, and interdicting Slavery wherever Congress has the constitutional power.”⁶⁵ The resolution while enjoying universal support among Republican members from Ohio and Michigan was so radical that it was easily defeated with less than half of the Republicans in the House voting for it. The *Journal*, putting aside its role as a representative of the party went on to say that any Republican who would not vote for such a bill was not a Republican worth supporting.⁶⁶

One way to examine further the differing views on slavery is through the lens of the Fugitive Slave Act. By removing the territorial question, we can to some extent limit the economic critique that slavery made the territories inhospitable for the labor of free whites to better differentiate between different versions of Republican antislavery. Passed as part of the Compromise of 1850, the Fugitive Slave Act required Northern law enforcement to aid in the capture of fugitive slaves, offered incentives for agents capturing slaves, and did not provide a trial of blacks captured and accused of being fugitive slaves (although there was a nominal fact-finding procedure once the captive had been returned to a slave state). For obvious reasons, Northerners resented being made to enforce a system they disliked and

⁶⁵ *Congressional Globe*, 36th Congress, 1st Session. 1359 (1860)., “Mr. Blake’s Resolution,” *Columbus State Journal*, April 3, 1860.

⁶⁶ “Mr. Blake’s Resolution,” *Columbus State Journal*, April 3, 1860.

distrusted that free blacks would not be kidnapped and taken to bondage. By 1860, Republicans across the North opposed the Fugitive Slave Act, yet the patterns of their opposition suggest different reasons. Many states, including Michigan, continued to doggedly support their Personal Liberty Laws – laws intended to impede the enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Clause of the Constitution – although they were in clear violation of the Fugitive Slave Act. While Republicans in Ohio also depreciated the Fugitive Slave Law, they were never able to pass a Personal Liberty Law.

There were two intellectual justifications for opposition to the 1850 Law. One came from a moral outrage at being forced to play the role of Pharaoh’s soldiers chasing down escaping slaves.⁶⁷ Anger at being made to uphold a system that they found morally abhorrent motivated many Republicans in Michigan. Jacob Howard summarized this view up calling the Fugitive Slave Act “remarkable for its cruelty and severity, the violation of everything connected with the Christian heart.”⁶⁸ The *Detroit Tribune* echoed this opinion even in the heat of the succession crisis, which tended to incline Northerners towards compromise. Because aiding fugitive slaves was based on deeply held “generous emotions, and in many cases religious conviction,” changing the law could never make Northern Republicans “surrender... habits of education... sympathies of heart... conception of the requirements of Christian duty.”⁶⁹ Similarly, Ohio State Representative Jesse Baldwin, when introducing a personal liberty law, declared the Fugitive Slave Act “opposed to... the plain teachings of the Christian religion.”⁷⁰

⁶⁷ For an example of the Exodus comparison see *Lansing State Republican*, April 3, 1860.

⁶⁸ “Ratification Meeting,” *Detroit Tribune*, June 12, 1860.

⁶⁹ “The Real Nature of the Demand,” *Detroit Tribune*, November 27, 1860.

⁷⁰ “Report of the Select Committee on H.B. No. 17—To Prevent Slaveholding and Kidnapping in Ohio,” qtd. in *Columbus State Journal*, March 9, 1860.

The more moderate and legalistic justification for opposition to the Fugitive Slave Act was that it denied those accused of being fugitive slaves of *habeas corpus* before subjecting a potentially free black person to the ultimate denial of liberty and was more commonly made in the sources I examined in Ohio than the moral argument. In short, while capturing fugitive slaves was acceptable, the mechanism of the Fugitive Slave Law unconstitutionally endangered free blacks. For instance, the *Columbus State Journal* called the law “dangerous to free men.”⁷¹ This view shows many Ohio Republicans adopting a middle way between Michigan radicals on the one hand and conservatives on the other. The *Journal* used strong language, declaring the law “inhuman [and] odious,” but its argument was primarily a legalistic one.⁷² It cited English Common Law and the American Constitution, not the Bible or abstract principles of justice in its opposition to the Fugitive Slave Law. In Michigan, this view was occasionally expressed in tandem with concerns over the immorality of the fugitive slave law, but, generally, such concerns were secondary.⁷³

The *Commercial*, on the other hand, could not even muster opposition to the Fugitive Slave Act, indeed they supported William H. Seward for President with the promise that under his leadership, “fugitive slaves [would be] returned, according to the law.”⁷⁴ In reporting on the capture of fugitive slaves in Ohio, their language displayed none of the sympathy with the fugitives demonstrated in Michigan or Columbus. The *Detroit Tribune* printed an article referring to the capture of even a confirmed fugitive slave as “kidnapping.”⁷⁵ Even the *Columbus State Journal* referred to the escape of a fugitive slave

⁷¹ “The Fugitive Slave Law,” *Columbus State Journal*, January 5, 1860.

⁷² “Fugitive Slave Law,” *Columbus State Journal*, January 5, 1860.

⁷³ For example, in Governor Moses Wisner’s farewell address printed in *Detroit Tribune*, January 2, 1861

⁷⁴ “Mr. Seward and the Abolitionists—Conservatism of Representative Men,” *Cincinnati Commercial*, March 29, 1860.

⁷⁵ *Chicago Journal*, qtd. in *Detroit Tribune*, January 10, 1860

as a “rescue.”⁷⁶ The *Commercial* barely took sides in stories of fugitive slave hunts, instead viewing them rather like sports, free of ideological content. These stores were “generally replete with hair breadth escapes, and perils without number completely eclipsing in brilliancy of strategy and courageous daring the contents of a two shilling novel.”⁷⁷

Discourse of Morality

The universal opposition to slavery everywhere, demonstrated by all of the Republicans that I examined in Michigan and most of the ones I examined in Ohio cannot be explained by the justifications that are often given for Republican antislavery. If Republicans simply wanted to keep the West and the North free of blacks in order to protect the laboring white man, why would they concern themselves with the status of slavery in the District of Columbia? Why would they be outraged that Southern slaveholders captured the blacks living in Northern states to take them back South? Even economic opposition to the inefficiencies of the slave system cannot explain the deep emotional opposition of Michigan Republicans to the capture of fugitive slaves. The small number of slaves who managed to escape hardly undermined the slave system as a whole. A more logical explanation is that the Republicans in these states were morally horrified by the conditions of African slavery and, as such, hoped to limit those horrors as much as possible within the confines of the Constitution. Indeed, every Republican in Ohio and Michigan voted for the Blake Resolution explicitly affirming this.⁷⁸

To argue that slavery was an immoral institution, Republicans spoke of the “twin relics of barbarism” or less commonly the “twin relics of an unchristian age.” Even within

⁷⁶“THE NEWS,” *Columbus State Journal*, June 4, 1860.

⁷⁷ “THE NEGRO HUNT,” *Cincinnati Commercial*, October 18, 1860.

⁷⁸ *Congressional Globe*, 36th Congress, 1st Session. 1359 (1860).

the states in which it already existed, slavery was “barbaric” -- or in the words of Blake’s Resolution “[a] reproach to our country throughout the civilized world” -- on the one hand and “unchristian” on the other.⁷⁹ Although homogenized in Republican discourse, the former distinction suggests that the peculiar institution was unfit for the modern enlightened era: an argument that could be made on an entirely secular basis. The second suggests more explicitly that slavery was incompatible with Christianity. These two arguments, developed in greater detail, provided the rhetorical basis for moral opposition to slavery in the Republican Party.

First I will attempt to further explain my argument that the discourse of many Republicans in Michigan was the discourse of Evangelical Christianity. Michigan Republicans typically used deeply religious rhetoric in their condemnation of slavery. In the same speech of DeWitt Leach that I have already mentioned, he criticized Douglass’s popular sovereignty position for ignoring not just “the rights of man” and “justice and conscience” but also to the “law of God.”⁸⁰ On May 9, 1860, the *Lansing State Republican* printed a letter, initially from the *New York Tribune* that called the rise of the Republican Party proof that “God still reigns in His providence.”⁸¹ A month later, it reprinted a speech in its entirety from John Hickman of Pennsylvania in which he opposed slavery for being contrary to the “law of God.”⁸² All of the speeches that were reprinted by the Republican tended to have similar religious overtones. Though it was not rare for the *Republican* to reprint such speeches, it happened perhaps once or twice a month in a weekly paper, it still

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, For examples see 1860 Ingham County Republican Platform, qtd. in *Lansing State Republican*, March 20, 1860, “A Popular Sovereignty Test for Douglass,” *Detroit Tribune*, March 27, 1860 Leach, “Bogus Democracy Examined and Exposed,” April 3, 1860, a Detroit Republican meeting, qtd. in *Detroit Tribune*, August 21, 1860.

⁸⁰ Leach, “Bogus Democracy Examined and Exposed,” in *Lansing State Republican*, April 3, 1860.

⁸¹ *Lansing State Republican*, May 9, 1860.

⁸² John Hickman, “Southern Sectionalism,” May 1, 1860, qtd in *Lansing State Republican* June 19, 1860.

represented an effort on the part of the newspaper to select those speeches out of the many that would have taken place in week.

The Republican Press in Michigan also reported much more prominently on Evangelical Protestantism than the press in Ohio did. The *Republican* included a long and glowing report of the funeral of radical antislavery Unitarian minister Theodore Parker.⁸³ In a eulogy that the *Republican* praised and reprinted in full, Parker's more famous friend Ralph Waldo Emerson praised his religious ministry for opposition to "the Fugitive Slave bill and the repeal of the Missouri Compromise" goals which were not abolitionist but rather mainstream Republican. More explicit, was Henry Ward Beecher's celebration of Lincoln's election which appeared in the *Republican*. Beecher, an abolitionist and a Republican, who had become famous for his preference that antislavery settlers in Kansas receive guns rather than bibles, wrote that Lincoln's election would bring "the dawning of Millennial glory."⁸⁴ Here Republican antislavery was both religious and explicitly millennial.

The extensive temperance impulse among Michigan Republicans added to the moralist flavor of the party in that state, and serves to further draw the contrast between that state and its more moderate Southern neighbor. Many Michigan Republicans considered strict temperance to be a mark of good moral character. Representative Henry Waldron advertised Abraham Lincoln as a man who drank "not even a glass of wine."⁸⁵ Michigan's Republican governor even pardoned a man convicted of perjury on the condition that he refrained from drinking, a remarkably incongruous request unless the man had been drunk

⁸³ *Lansing State Republican*, June 27, 1860.

⁸⁴ Henry Ward Beecher, "The Moral Significance of the Times," qtd. in *New York Tribune*, qtd. in *Lansing State Republican*, November 21, 1860.

⁸⁵ *Congressional Globe*, 36th Congress, 1st Session. 1877 (1860).

while testifying.⁸⁶ Republicans brought these beliefs to policy-making in Michigan, though never with the same success as they did in the Northeast. One group of tremendously naïve Republicans suggested more free public drinking fountains would reduce the consumption of beer.⁸⁷

The papers I examined in Ohio showed fewer signs of concern with temperance, just as the same newspapers were less concerned with the moral antislavery imperative. The *Columbus State Journal* printed without comment a call for a state temperance convention, and then duly reported on the convention after it had taken place. Other than that, there are few mentions of temperance in the *Journal*. The *Cincinnati Commercial*, by far the most conservative of the newspapers I read on the question of slavery, openly criticized the temperance campaign. It claimed to “not, in general, think it” appropriate to comment on religion. However, it was so appalled by “critici[sm] and condemn[ation] of... things which form a part of the habitual and harmless daily life of man,” specifically dancing and drinking that it felt compelled to note that “the great founder of the Christian faith” partook in drink. It added that “regarding both or either [dancing or drinking], the sin – if there is one -- in excess, not in doing it.”⁸⁸

It is important to remember that temperance was linked inextricably with Evangelical Christianity and that the major temperance campaigns were run by the Church. Even Ronald Formisano, loath to focus on popular ideology admits “[t]emperance reform seemed to grow with revivalism,” while Gienapp notes that both temperance campaigns and antislavery campaigns “sprang from similar moral impulses.”⁸⁹ This fact was not lost on Republicans.

⁸⁶ *Detroit Tribune*, April 3, 1860

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, October 2, 1860.

⁸⁸ “The Church and the World,” *Cincinnati Commercial*, April 12, 1860.

⁸⁹ Formisano, *Birth of Mass Political Parties*, Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*, 47.

The *Detroit Tribune* reminded us that the meeting of the American Temperance Union was a “great religious” organization.⁹⁰ Temperance campaigns could also be motivated by ethnocentric desires to differentiate between the temperance campaigners themselves, often middle class, native-born Protestants, and the stereotypically heaviest drinkers, the urban immigrant working class. Gienapp notes the strong relationship between support for temperance and support for the American Party.⁹¹ But given the utter lack of nativism in the Michigan and Ohio press, it seems unlikely that the temperance movement in these states was based on ethnic conflict.

While I talk about the profound religious element in the party discourse in Michigan, and the generally secular, moderate, discourse in Ohio, I must admit that Michigan was not more deeply penetrated by those denominations most associated with Evangelicalism than was Ohio (though as I mentioned before, quantitative measures of Evangelicalism are difficult to obtain from Census data). Across the North, it is similarly difficult to form correlations between radicalism (or Republicanism more generally) and Methodism, Baptism or Adventism. Indeed the largest Evangelical denominations had substantially more pews *per capita* in Ohio than in Michigan.⁹² Within each state, the relationship between political ideology and religious identification works slightly better, but still is pretty weak.⁹³ No argument can be made, then, that Evangelical religion motivated or caused radical Republicanism in Michigan. All I can say with confidence from my research is that the

⁹⁰ “The Great Religious Anniversaries in New York,” *Detroit Tribune*, May 15, 1860

⁹¹ Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*, 99.

⁹² Historical Census Browser, from the University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center: <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/index.html>. Original Data from the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, University of Michigan.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

language of Republican political discourse in Michigan to a far greater extent than in Ohio, was the language of Evangelical religion.

Closely linked to the idea that slavery was un-Christian was the idea that slavery was inappropriate for a virtuous republic in a post-enlightenment age, in short, barbaric, or to use another word common in Republican parlance, “uncivilized.” This argument took many different forms. Slavery of blacks in America might be compared to the ancient oppression of all men under absolutist monarchs and thereby antislavery men were compared to William and Mary, and the antislavery plight to the Glorious Revolution: the founding myth of Anglo-Saxon liberalism.⁹⁴ Most common was the suggestion that slavery corrupted the moral Republican example of the United States to the world. The Ingham County Convention said that the fight to stop the expansion of slavery would “redeem our country from disgrace in the eyes of a civilized world,” a remarkable statement in a political climate generally marked by what might later be called American exceptionalism.⁹⁵

Similarly Blake’s resolution noted that slavery was not only “a reproach to our country throughout the world” but also “a serious hindrance to the progress of republican liberty among the nations of the earth.”⁹⁶ William Seward echoed the same sentiment on his speaking tour throughout Michigan to the widespread approbation of the Republican press across both states and a wide range of ideology. The radical *Lansing State Republican*, hailed the speech as a something like a biblical revelation, while the moderate *Cincinnati*

⁹⁴ “Lord Macauley and an Abolitionist,” *Lansing State Republican*, March 20, 1860.

⁹⁵ “County Convention,” *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Congressional Globe*, 36th Congress, 1st Session. 1359 (1860).

Commercial reprinted Seward's speeches in full from throughout the tour, a rare honor for a paper in Ohio to give to a campaign speech by a New Yorker in Michigan.⁹⁷

Though I argue that the moral aspects of Republican antislavery were far more prominent in Michigan and Ohio than the literature acknowledges, economic arguments against slavery remained important. Indeed, the two cannot be separated very easily. The argument that slavery was a moral wrong because it denied rights to the slave and the argument that slave labor in the territories degrades white labor seem conceptually distinct, yet, in reality, in both Michigan and Ohio, is that these issues were so closely connected that it is difficult to disentangle economic arguments from moral ones; Republican discourse of the immediate antebellum period felt no need to. Unfortunately, the literature has too often artificially disentangled these issues. Foner is most concerned with the moral antislavery impulse and admits that radicals "like other Republics did engage in... statistical comparisons... to prove the economic superiority of the free labor system."⁹⁸ He, however, separates these radicals completely from conservatives and moderates who either wished to stop talking about slavery at all, or "treated as a problem of political economy" only.⁹⁹ I find instead that even the most conservative Republicans occasionally appealed to morality in their argument against slavery.

Republicans threw together disparate arguments against slavery so easily, that it is nearly impossible to know, 150 years later whether they even conceptually understood the difference between the concept that slavery was economically inefficient and the concept that slavery was intrinsically immoral regardless of its effects on white men. Nearly every major

⁹⁷ "Seward at Lansing," *Lansing State Republican*, September 12, 1860, *Cincinnati Commercial*, September 13, 1860.

⁹⁸ Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 115

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 189

speech or editorial written by a Michigan Republican touched on all of these topics, often in the same paragraph. Similarly the *Columbus State Journal*, a party organ that needed to speak as much as possible for the whole of Republicanism in a moderate state, also focused on the moral wrongs of slavery, albeit to a lesser extent. Only in Cincinnati, and even there only occasionally, were economic arguments against slavery invoked without also invoking moral ones. At times, the concepts are so homogenized that it is ambiguous as to whether the “freedom” of which Republicans spoke was freedom from slavery or freedom for white laborers. Perhaps, this was the intention of Republicans, hoping to attract the widest possible coalition. Perhaps not all Republican writers were concerned with both the economic and moral failings of the slave system, but they understood that acknowledging both was good politics. For whatever reason, in the public discourse, the two concepts were conflated. My argument in this chapter must not be taken to mean that support for emancipation was an inevitable result of the Civil War. My suggestion is that the Republican Party in Michigan and Ohio on the eve of the Civil War discussed more prominently the moral wrongs of slavery than the literature suggests. But, in 1860, the ironclad belief in universal emancipation that would soon become a consensus across the North was still completely outside the political mainstream. Some papers, like the *Commercial*, which would become strong supporters of emancipation, barely showed signs of concern with slavery. While my argument in this chapter provides a useful starting point for understanding the transformations in Northern Republican attitudes that took place during the war and the beginning of Reconstruction, the following chapter will go further in depth about this transformation.

CHAPTER TWO: “Forever Changed”: The Coming of the Emancipation Proclamation (November, 1860-January, 1863)

The Civil War would end American slavery and in the process transform a Party that had ruled out attempts at immediate emancipation into one that considered it to be a *sine qua non* of loyalty to the United States.¹ Much of the Reconstruction literature begins with the Emancipation Proclamation, but there is too little work on changes in political ideology over the first half of the war. During that time, the Party came to embrace emancipation in the rebel states and some of the more radical came to envision the total end of American slavery. To attempt to piece together the changes among Republicans, especially the Republican press, in Michigan and Ohio, over the first half of the Civil War, I will examine the debates surrounding the most important moments in antislavery politics in the period between the election of Abraham Lincoln in November of 1860 and the issuing of the final Emancipation Proclamation in January of 1863. I will look primarily at the Republican press and the Congressional debates during five periods. First will be Secession Winter: the period from Lincoln’s election until the Rebel shelling of Fort Sumter. Second, I will examine the period of late summer of 1861 during which Congress passed the First Confiscation Act, General (and 1856 Republican presidential candidate) John C. Frémont emancipated slaves of rebellious masters in Missouri, and President Lincoln rapidly revoked Frémont’s Proclamation. Third, I will look at the period of June and July 1862 when Congress debated the Second Confiscation Act and the use of black soldiers. Fourth, I will focus on the period

¹ One of the few conditions of Reconstruction that was universally demanded by Northerners was acquiescence to the abolition of slavery.

of September and October 1862 when President Lincoln issued his preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. Finally, I will examine the period surrounding New Year's Day 1863, when Lincoln issued his final Emancipation Proclamation. This approach can capture shifts in political ideology in a way that has not been sufficiently examined by the literature. Unfortunately, it does so incompletely because it ignores the large interludes in between the "slices" of time that I will look at. I have tried to choose the most important moments in the evolution of Northern white attitudes toward slavery to examine, but the growing acceptance of emancipation and growing conviction that the war ought to strike at the institution of slavery did not happen in a few week long jumps as my methodology might suggest, but instead somewhat gradually over the course of these two years. As such, I often leave the narrative at one point and pick it up several months later only to find that the debate has shifted substantially in the interim. While this prevents me from being able to understand important parts of the rhetorical and ideological changes which I am trying to study, I simply lack the time necessary to properly examine the entire twenty-six month period from Lincoln's election to the final emancipation.

I will argue that over the course of Secession Winter, the Republican Party moderated their rhetoric on slavery, although Republicans were unwilling to compromise on the most important issues of policy. Rather than moving toward emancipation, Republicans in Michigan and Ohio placed increased emphasis on their commitment to protecting slavery in the Southern states and their self-proclaimed "conservatism." As the war progressed, Republicans moved toward dismantling Southern slavery, first entirely as a war measure. Despite the mythology it would later obtain, even the Emancipation Proclamation

was also primarily seen as a military measure, though Republicans to varying degrees applauded its humanitarian side effects.

The literature tends to homogenize the nation as a whole as if all Northerners, or at least all Republicans, came to embrace abolitionism at once. Foner, for instance, suggests that “[t]he attack on Fort Sumpter crystallized in Northern minds the direct conflict between freedom and slavery that abolitionists had insisted on for decades.”² DuBois, stakes out nearly the opposite position, but similarly homogenizes white Northern opinion. He thinks that abolition remained unpopular throughout the North past the Civil War, claiming that the response to the Emancipation Proclamation was positive only “among Negroes and in England.”³

In my first chapter, I argued that the Republican Party, in both Michigan and Ohio, was more radical and more willing to focus rhetoric on the moral outrage over slavery even in the states in which it already existed than the literature traditionally suggests. During the campaign, moral opposition to the conditions to which black slaves were subjected mixed easily with denunciations of the slave power – the small group of elite Southern slaveholders who held disproportionate power in the federal government -- and concerns with preserving the western territories for free white labor. Despite this opposition to slavery, when Lincoln was elected in November of 1860, even the most radical Republicans agreed that slavery in the Southern states was legally and politically untouchable. When the *Columbus State Journal* was confronted with the accusation that the broad humanitarian language of the Blake Resolution would contemplate emancipation of slaves in Southern states, the *Journal*

² Eric Foner, “The Civil War and the Story of American Freedom,” *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 27, no 1 (2001): 8-25+100-101.

³ DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, 87.

laughed off the suggestion, calling for “a little common sense” and saying that the call for “freedom for every human being” would no more free slaves in Southern states than it would free prisoners.⁴ The same radical sheets insisted that insisted on the rights to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” for slaves denounced the abolitionists that sought to bring them those rights immediately. The same single issue of the *Detroit Tribune* twice attempted slandered Democrats with the accusation that Wendell Phillips prefers them to the Republicans.⁵

Secession Winter

The political rhetoric of Secession Winter was largely similar in both Michigan and Ohio, among radicals and moderates. In the lead-up to the election and its immediate aftermath, Republicans largely mocked threats of Southern secession in the event of Lincoln’s election, their rhetoric turned conciliatory as soon as that threat became real. The threat of secession had a long history in a country with an engrained distrust of government and a strongly federal system. Secession threats by Southern Democrats who had long been disproportionately represented in the federal government, probably struck Republicans as the hyperbole of a declining Party. Some might have remembered Federalist secession threats at the Hartford Convention and seen the threats more with bemusement than fear. The *Lansing State Republican* printed an article suggesting that a fictional town in Illinois secede since no Republicans were elected in the South” and lightheartedly offered to let Louisiana and Florida go if they would pay back with interest what the Federal Government had spent to

⁴ “Mr. Blake’s Resolution,” *Columbus State Journal*, March 26.

⁵ *Detroit Weekly Tribune*, April 3, 1860.

purchase them.⁶ When they first started to take the threats seriously, Republicans urged a hard line. With Jackson's firm stand against South Carolina's effort to nullify the tariff in 1833 in mind, they likely assumed that Southerners would never actually follow through on their promise to secede.⁷

As the secession rhetoric heated rather than cooled over the course of the winter, Republicans, while remaining opposed to most substantive compromise focused rhetorically on their willingness to protect slavery in the states where it already existed. As I have already pointed out, no one involved in mainstream politics had ever contemplated any attacks on slavery in the Southern states. It was legally sacrosanct as an institution. Yet, the fact that Republicans could never outlaw slavery in the states where it existed was taken for granted before the secession crisis, perhaps because this fact was distasteful to Republicans, perhaps because it was considered so uncontroversial that it was not an issue worth discussing. Once the threat of secession became real, however, denunciations of abolitionists and promises of moderation became central to Republican discourse. The *Detroit Tribune* desperately tried to distance itself from "crazy fanatics like GARRISON," while the *Detroit Advertiser* and *Lansing State Republican* pleaded that "the position now held by Republicans in reference to the slavery question is less radical than that which was occupied twelve years ago by a majority of [Northern] Whigs and Democrats."⁸ Ohio Republicans responded similarly, which is less surprising given it was a more conservative state. The *Cincinnati Gazette* reminded Southerners that while they disagreed on "one question relating to Slavery, we, (and probably a large majority of the people of every Free State) substantially agree with

⁶ "Prospects in South Carolina," *New York Tribune*, qtd. in *Lansing State Republican*, November 21, 1860

⁷ For an example of the explicit comparison to the 1833 Nullification Crisis see *Lansing State Republican*, December 5, 1860.

⁸ "A Shameful Statement," *Detroit Weekly Tribune*, November 20, 1860. "A RECORD OF THE PAST," *Detroit Advertiser* qtd. in *Lansing State Republican*, February 27, 1861.

[the South] in regard to every right.”⁹ Like their Michigan counterparts, however, Ohio Republicans rejected compromise on issues.

Such rhetorical commitment to Union from radical newspapers is surprising and important for several reasons. First it undermines the “blundering generation” popularized by James Randall and Avery Craven in the middle of the twentieth century that holds that refusal to compromise by Northern Radicals (and Southern fire-eaters) led to the Civil War. No longer as popular as it once was, it retains some degree of importance. Even Foner’s sympathetic portrayal holds that “the radicals’ support for the Union hinged on the government’s remaining true” to the goals of liberty and that for them, the Union was “a means, not an end.”¹⁰ It is true, radical and moderate Republicans – along with not a few Democrats, at least in Michigan where a Resolution against compromise passed the State House with an overwhelming bipartisan majority – opposed giving into the threat of secession with concessions on policy.¹¹ For instance, Republicans in every state universally rejected the Crittenden Resolution with the Ingham County Republican convention reasoning that to adjust government policy “under menace... would be a disgrace.”¹² Still, it is important that they were rhetorically committed to underlining the compromises they would make in an effort to avert disunion.

The newspapers which I examined also engaged in a second, and closely related, tactic intended to also downplay the differences between North and South in hopes of averting war. Republicans argued, in a remarkable divergence from the positions that many of the newspapers which I examined had held a year before, that the conflict over slavery

⁹ “A WORD TO THE SOUTH,” *Cincinnati Gazette*, July 5, 1861.

¹⁰ Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 139

¹¹ “Resolved, That concession and compromise are not to be entertained or offered to traitors” passed 65-8, qtd in *Lansing State Republican*, February 3, 1861.

¹² Ingham County Convention, qtd. in *Lansing State Republican*, February 27, 1861.

was a rather minor one which could be easily overcome. In the words of the *Cincinnati Gazette* “union or disunion [was] the only practical issue.”¹³ These arguments were strongest in Cincinnati, just across the river from Kentucky, perhaps the state most split between Union and Rebel sympathies. In fact, here, the radical newspaper even showed limited signs of willingness to compromise on policy. Rejecting the Crittenden Compromise for establishing a line “protective of slavery” they offered instead to accept a return to the Missouri Compromise which allowed, but did not require slavery in Southern territories.¹⁴ Although the willingness compromise on policy was limited to Cincinnati, conciliatory rhetoric was notable for its universality across geography and ideology. The radical *Lansing State Republican*, for instance, began to celebrate slaveholding and pro-slavery Union Democrats, just months after attacking Douglass as worse than Breckenridge.¹⁵ The similarity in rhetoric would dissipate as radicals and moderates used different rhetoric, even as converging around the same positions over the course of the war. All of the newspapers which I examined would remain enthusiastic supporters of the war and all the antislavery measures that the government would take, but they would justify these positions in tremendously different ways.

The First Confiscation Act and Frémont Emancipation

On August 6, President Lincoln, under pressure from his left, overcame fears of alienating conservative border state unionists and signed the First Confiscation Act, allowing for the confiscation of any property used “for insurrectionary purposes.”¹⁶ The act itself was

¹³ “A WORD TO THE SOUTH,” *Cincinnati Gazette*.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ “Border-State Compromise,” *Lansing State Republican*, February 3, 1861.

¹⁶ “An Act to confiscate Property used for Insurrectionary Purposes.” U.S. Statutes at Large, vol. 12.

so tailored to suppression of the rebellion that it did not free the contraband slaves. Instead it left their status ambiguous. Major General John C. Frémont, the military commander of the Western Department and a 1856 Republican Presidential candidate who had been nominated and previously known more for his appealing past as an adventurer than his antislavery credentials, declared martial law in Missouri and declared free the slaves of rebel masters (of whom there were many even in unionist Missouri as was the case in other border states) on August 30. After Frémont refused Lincoln's request to rescind his order, the President overruled the General himself on September 11. By the summer and fall, opposition to Southern slavery had reemerged as a strong part of the political discourse, especially in Michigan and Northern Ohio. Opposition to slavery was not now justified by any of the rationales that had been common before the war. Newspapers focused less on the fact that slavery was immoral or economically inefficient, harmful to the slaves, or harmful to white yeomen. Instead slavery was to be attacked simply because it was a driving factor in the rebellion. Later in the war, the arguments for antebellum opposition to slavery would reemerge and combined with a desire to strike at the labor force supporting the South would be used to argue for the more sweeping emancipation measures that would come later in the war: primarily the Emancipation Proclamation. In 1861, the Republican press, even the more radical Republican press, embraced the Confiscation Act and short-lived Frémont Emancipation primarily as measures to weaken the rebellion. Still, radical sheets were willing to hint at the benefits of undermining slavery, while moderates focused exclusively on the benefits of the Confiscation Act and Frémont Emancipation as war measures.

While the *Cincinnati Commercial* represented moderate Republicans rather than radical ones and was traditionally more sympathetic to whites in neighboring Kentucky than

to their slaves, it spoke for most Republicans in Ohio, even those of a more radical stripe, when it wrote in support of Fremont's proclamation that to Kentuckians and the *Commercial* "the nigger interest was nothing beside the preservation of the Union."¹⁷ Despite the epithet, which seldom appeared in more radical sheets, and the insistence that black slaves had no importance in and of themselves, the article was intended to support Frémont's emancipation with much the same justification as the radicals. Indeed, the *Commercial's* radical city rival the *Cincinnati Gazette* took the time to print a similarly approving view from across the river regarding Frémont's proclamation. It noted that even those Kentuckians who did not support the emancipation realize that such a proclamation had to be expected in light of the fact that "the negro property of Union men [was being] confiscated by Secessionists."¹⁸ Far from denouncing slavery to justify the emancipation in Missouri, the *Gazette* gives space to an argument that criticizes Confederate sympathizers for their violation of the apparently sacrosanct right to hold slaves. But, it is difficult to discern a clear position for the *Gazette* because the it also highlighted a sermon which couched Frémont's declaration in Biblical language and suggested reframing the war as the moral struggle for "universal freedom" that it would become by 1865.¹⁹

Michiganders did not see the First Confiscation prefiguring broader emancipation and understood that it was meant primarily to deprive rebels of their property whether human or otherwise, but the Republican press in that state universally held a more radical position than the Ohio press and those outlets more likely to make moral arguments to supplement instrumental ones against slavery as early as the time of the First Confiscation Act. The *Detroit Tribune* printed a report from Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune* on contraband

¹⁷ "What a Kentuckian Thinks of Fremont's Proclamation," *Cincinnati Gazette*, September 5, 1861

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ "A Pulpit Response to Fremont," *Cincinnati Gazette*, September 2, 1861.

escaping to General Nathaniel Banks's lines in search of their freedom. Those whose masters claimed loyalty were returned and such renditions, according to the *Tribune*, rapidly made "Abolitionists" "of both officers and soldiers." They went on to note with none of the disapproval that one might have expected to accompany reports of such insubordination in the military that "[i]n some cases the fugitive have been secretly provided with means of escape."²⁰

Here, I want to pause briefly to note the non-derogatory use of the term "abolitionist" in August of 1861. The term in antebellum America was tremendously negative. Its primary use was as an epithet with which to brand political opponents. Even in radical Michigan, before the war, the term was widely deprecated. When Garrison's *The Liberator* denounced the *State Republican's* favored candidate – William Seward – the *Republican* eagerly took the opportunity to compare "abolition disunion[ists]" to "democratic disunionists."²¹ Perhaps it is unsurprising to see attacks on a self-proclaimed opponent of the Constitution, but other abolitionists hardly fared better. In the first chapter I noted a speech by DeWitt Leach that laid out a very radical platform, but also noted that he marginalized Gerrit Smith – who unlike Garrison embraced the Constitution and several times ran for political office – as much as he marginalized William Lloyd Garrison.²² Opponents often tried to marginalize antislavery parties, like the Republican Party, by calling them "abolitionists," a charge that even the most radical Republicans vehemently denied, knowing that such a designation would destroy their electoral prospects.

Over the course of the Civil War, the politically impossible policy advocated by abolitionists – unconditional, immediate and universal emancipation – became universally

²⁰ "From Washington," *Detroit Tribune*, August 10.

²¹ "NOT SURPISING," *Lansing State Republican*, March 20, 1860.

²² *Congressional Globe*, 36th Congress, 1st Session. 1163 (1860).

accepted throughout the North. This development was so stunning and unexpected that no one has yet provided a satisfactory answer to why. The development of the word “abolitionist” itself provides an example of the more substantive shifts that freed four million. As I noted above, radical Republicans were coming to embrace the term as early as 1861. They did not necessarily adopt the abolitionist platform: making unconditional, immediate and universal emancipation the purpose of the war, but the fact that the word lost its rhetorical bite suggests that what would have been considered extreme positions on slavery were already becoming far more palatable to those radicals who would have previously disavowed them. A few months later, the *Detroit Tribune* published a several day long feature, supposedly from a Democrat, but one whose self-described political views before the War and during it put him squarely in the Republican mainstream, purporting to describe the reasons that the North had become “abolitionized.”²³ In addition to such outward declarations of abolition sentiment, segments of the Republican press responded to accusations of abolitionism with less outrage even early in the War than they would have before Fort Sumter. The *Tribune* barely pushed back against the Copperhead designation “Republican-Abolitionist.” But, Ohio Republicans, even comparatively more moderate ones, still assigned the phrase all of the ugliness that it carried before the War, with the *Commercial* quoting Andrew Johnson’s commentary that “the Abolitionist and the Secessionist... occupy the same stand.”²⁴ Meanwhile, about two weeks before the *Tribune* embraced the term “abolition,” the *Gazette* fumed at local Democratic paper, the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, for “interat[ing] and reiterat[ing]” the “monstrous falsehood... that the Republican

²³ “The Abolition North,” *Detroit Tribune*, September 11, 1861

²⁴ Andrew Johnson, “Speech of a True Democrat,” *Cincinnati Gazette*, July 8, 1861.

party was an Abolition party.”²⁵ Even after the Emancipation Proclamation, the *Commercial* vehemently resisted the concept that the Civil War was an “abolition war” and impugned the character of those who would suggest it to be such.²⁶

Also in the late summer of 1861, the *Tribune* brought back stories about the barbarism of slavery that had been common in antebellum radical Republican discourse, but had been less common as Republicans sought to gain support first in the Deep South and then in the Border States. This suggests the *Tribune* was looking to bring back to the forefront of the public discussion, the idea that slavery was a moral evil. On August 22, it published the story of a Northern traveler in Virginia who witnessed first-hand the horrors of slave life. As usual, the story suspiciously included exactly the types of details that would make the slaves most sympathetic victims to middle-class northern whites, a “light mulatto” woman whose husband was sold before she could say goodbye.²⁷ The fact that the sympathetic slave character must still be portrayed as light-skinned reminds us that race remained vitally important and that Northern white Republicans still found sympathy with lighter-skinned individuals easier to muster than sympathy with dark-skinned ones. More interestingly, the consistent creation of female characters reminds us of the extent to which racial dynamics were gendered in a society where women were conceived of as needing protection from the world, and where their husbands were expected to provide it. Outrages against them, and most especially against their marital relationship, were unconscionable. Black men, on the other hand, were threatening, as Democratic and Southern white propaganda would effectively note for one hundred years after the end of the Civil War. Still, stories about the barbarism of slavery were somewhat less common in 1861 than they had been the year

²⁵ “The Cincinnati Enquirer,” *Cincinnati Gazette*, July 27, 1861.

²⁶ “One of those Personages who Believe the Present an Abolition War,” *Cincinnati Gazette* January 2, 1863.

²⁷ “A Scene in Slave Life,” *Detroit Tribune*, August 22, 1861.

before. Opposition to slavery had lost the moral focus that it had and would, to some degree, regain by the time of the Emancipation Proclamation.

The Second Confiscation Act and Black Troops

In the summer of 1862 Republicans agreed on the substance of the major debates of that summer; they favored a stronger confiscation bill and the use of black contraband – escaped and liberated slaves – in the military. But this agreement concealed deepening divisions in the intellectual justifications for these positions. James McPherson argues by the middle of 1862 moderates and “all but the most conservative Republicans” had “accepted the abolitionist argument that emancipation could be achieved by exercise of the belligerent power to confiscate enemy property.”²⁸ Here he is correct, but in stating that the “the war was becoming... a war to overturn the southern social order as a means of reconstructing the Union,” he oversteps.²⁹ Moderate Republicans in Ohio did not see the Confiscation Act as way to fundamentally alter the slave system, but as simply another way to aid the Union war effort. The *Ohio State Journal* took a radical stance, perhaps reflecting the Party’s base in the Western Reserve rather than conservative Cincinnati. The *Journal* vociferously praised the floor speech on the Second Confiscation Act by relatively obscure Western Reserve Republican John Hutchins in which he justified confiscation to punish rebellious slaveholders and to deprive the Confederacy of their labor, but above all as an act of “obvious... justice” to the unjustly oppressed slaves. Hutchins attacked fellow Ohio Representative Samuel Cox for being “in favor of the perpetual enslavement of the African,” an accusation that would not have been shocking a few years prior, and closed with a

²⁸ James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 496, 494.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 496.

warning that God's justice can not "sleep forever," a jeremiad prefiguring Lincoln's second inaugural which captured a much different political climate. Most shockingly of all, he noted that "had [negroes] the right of suffrage... no doubt [Cox] would sit up night to compose peans to their praise" and that "the whole secret of his abuse is *they cannot vote.*"³⁰ While he did not explicitly call for black suffrage, indeed, he explicitly reassured his colleagues that recognizing the basic "natural rights" of blacks need not lead to social or political equality, but he considered such a radical notion as early as 1862 and was applauded by the voice of mainstream Ohio Republicanism. For some, including Representative Hutchins and the *Columbus State Journal*, McPherson's thesis seems to hold: a massive social transformation was underway.

On the other hand, when confronted with such language, the *Commercial* ridiculed the "considerable number of Congressmen" who had become so infatuated with black rights as to "think there is no statesmanship or patriotism in any measure unless they have thrust into it the words, "[w]ithout reference to color" and whose chief concern "was with the introduction of the negro."³¹ The focus needed to be, they argued, on the restoration of the Union. For the most moderate Republicans, the purpose of the Civil War had not changed.

By the summer of 1862 with Republicans moderate and radical had come out in favor of stronger confiscation measures. The Union army had begun to be associated with liberation of the slaves and slaves and runaways flocked to union ranks. In a war that was going worse than most Northerners expected, all of the Republicans I looked at in Michigan and Ohio looked for ways to use contraband to hasten the end of the war. Most generally agreed with the *Cincinnati Commercial* that "[t]he question as to arming negroes should be

³⁰ "Response by John Hutchins to S.S. Cox," *Cincinnati Gazette*, July 14, 1861.

³¹ "'Without Reference to Color,' and With Reference to It, *Cincinnati Commercial*, July 10, 1862.

settled by answer to the question: Will the Government be stronger in the field if it is done.”³² Republicans from across ideological and geographic lines supported generally the same policies as the summer of 1862, generally, but not universally, for reasons related purely to military necessity and show us little about the development of less racist beliefs of the sort that Hutchins demonstrated. First: they agreed that in the desperate struggle to save the Union, any measures including the use of contraband and runaway slaves ought to be taken. This importance of increasing the manpower of the Union war effort tended to overshadow any racial beliefs. The *Commercial* would argue for the use of blacks in the war effort, although only where their racial differences would make them better suited than whites such as “malarious districts... where the negro remains health, and the white man sickens and dies” or as teamsters given their special skills as “the best mule drivers in the world.”³³ Mixed into this argument were reminders of the deep and abiding racism that the editors of the *Commercial* still clung to. They worried that black soldiers would “throw [their guns] away on too slight a provocation” in the rare circumstances where they would be armed (such as in patrolling districts with malarial threats). They also clearly saw blacks as adjunct labor rather than true federal troops. The *Commercial* was willing to consider giving blacks uniforms out of a desire to appease them but made it clear they didn’t see black contraband as worth of wearing the nation’s uniform: “we see no Insurmountable objection... even [to] indulging them in red breeches and other right colored garments.”³⁴ Finally, the *Commercial* went well beyond the mainstream policy of paying black regiments less than white ones until June of 1864, suggesting that the colored regiments might receive no pay at all, noting that “their conditions would be no worse than it [sic] was with their masters.”

³² “Arming Negroes,” *Cincinnati Commercial*, July 12, 1862

³³ “‘Without Reference to Color,’ and With Reference to It,” *Cincinnati Commercial*, July 10, 1862.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

While more radical papers had denounced slavery as inhuman even before the war, for the *Commercial* it was a moral basis for federal government to model its own labor conditions years later.

The radical Michigan newspaper, the *Detroit Tribune* promoted the use of black troops with far fewer qualms than did the *Commercial*, but it too promoted racial stereotypes that shed doubt on the suitability of blacks as soldiers. Far from cowardly, “the negro, when not excited, is mild and gentle... but when his passions have been inflamed... he becomes excited by a taste of blood, he is a demon.”³⁵ The *Tribune*, in one of its more viciously racist moments, focused on black service as an aid to white men. “The negro [was] idle” while “the lives of THOUSANDS OF UNION soldiers have been sacrificed” wrote the *Tribune*, attacking Democratic opposition to the use of black soldiers as belief that “Slaves are of far more consequence than Free White Men.”³⁶ Radical Congressman John Sherman showed greater recognition of the humanity of slaves calling them “a race of men whose hearts are with the loyal people of the United States” but even he reassured Border State Unionists that blacks would be laborers, not soldiers since “whites and blacks will always be separate.”³⁷ None of those I examined were ready to accept blacks as separate but equal members of the army with whites.

The Emancipation Proclamation

After a year and a half of reluctance to enforce measures pushed for by radical Republicans such as the Confiscation Acts or Frémont’s Emancipation, on September 22, 1862 President Lincoln, under his war powers as commander-in-chief declared that all slaves

³⁵ “THE LATEST PHASE OF THE NEGRO QUESTION,” *Detroit Tribune*, July 16, 1862.

³⁶ “SLAVES BETTER THAN WHITE MEN,” *Detroit Tribune*, July 14, 1862.

³⁷ *Congressional Globe*, 37th Congress, 2nd Session. 3198 (1862).

in any area still in rebellion by the first of 1863 would be free. Loyal owners would be compensated for their loss (compensated emancipation was Lincoln's ideal solution to the slave question in both Union and Confederate states for most of the War); rebel owners would not. On January 1, he made good on his threat, issuing a proclamation declaring three in four American slaves "henceforth and forever free."³⁸ A few years later, when the Union Army had made the Proclamation something more than the dead letter that it was when it was issued (by definition it originally applied only where it could not actually be enforced), when the sentiment against slavery in the North had hardened toward universal emancipation in border states as well as rebel ones, and when Lincoln himself had been transformed from a divisive politician into a martyred hero, the Emancipation Proclamation took its place as the cornerstone of the myth of the Great Emancipator where it has remained ever since.

Even academic historians of the period, whom I generally fault for being too reluctant to recognize the centrality of moral antislavery discourse in antebellum Republican political ideology, sometimes tend to see the President's Proclamation as a turning point in the purpose of the War. I find only Kenneth Stampp's admission that "even after the Emancipation Proclamation, the total abolition of slavery had not become an indispensable part of Lincoln's war aims" supported by the documents that I examined in Michigan and Ohio.³⁹ Stampp argues that the Proclamation's appeal "was not to the rights of man... but to military necessity," something that even the most radical of Lincoln's contemporaries agreed with.⁴⁰ Eric Foner quotes the moderate *New York Times* as a representation of mainstream Republicanism as trumpeting a new "era in the history... of this country and the world."⁴¹

³⁸ Abraham Lincoln, "Emancipation Proclamation," January 1, 1863.

³⁹ Kenneth Stampp, *The Era of Reconstruction, 1865-1877* (New York: Alfred A Knopf Press, 1965), 45

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 44.

⁴¹ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 2.

W.E.B. DuBois, a Marxist far less willing than Foner – whose first book attempted to reaffirm the importance of political ideology and whose *Reconstruction* helped debunk the idea that Northern Radicals were simply acting in the interests of Northern capitalists – to find ideas at the root of history (and a black man writing in that half-century of darkness between the end of the First Reconstruction and the first stirrings of the Second), sees the Emancipation Proclamation as an accidental byproduct of a Union war effort, but appreciates its immediate revolutionary consequences among black slaves.⁴² Although James McPherson acknowledges that the shortcomings in the Emancipation Proclamation were disappointing to antislavery men he still claims that “January 1, 1863, was the climax of the drive for emancipation,” while acknowledging the “important anticlimax” yet to come. After that date he sees emancipation as fundamental to “Republican war policy” and places Lincoln “firmly and irrevocably on the side of freedom.”⁴³

I cannot say what Lincoln’s plans were in the winter of 1862-1863 or why he and his Cabinet supported the Emancipation Proclamation, but the Republican press that I examined in Michigan and Ohio, would tend to have supported Stamp’s argument that the Emancipation Proclamation, while a vitally important blow against slavery, was a war measure, not the “climax” of abolitionism or a “purging of sin” (to use another phrase from Foner).⁴⁴ The interpretation found in the traditional historiography is curious given the fact that I have traditionally faulted the same writers for focusing too much on non-extension as the only core of antebellum Republicanism and failing to acknowledge the fact that in Michigan, and even in most of Ohio, slavery everywhere was seen as the evil and the territories simply the place where slavery could be most easily attacked, and for ignoring the

⁴² W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America*

⁴³ James McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964)

⁴⁴ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 2

importance of the moral dimension of antislavery politics. Thus I argue for a Republican Party that was more radical and more desirous of abolishing Southern slavery in 1860 than the traditional literature does; yet I also argue that the Party was more conservative at the time of the Emancipation Proclamation. While the sources I looked at underwent significantly changes in their beliefs about slavery, those changes were less significant than the changes that would be required to fill the gap in a literature which largely ignores antebellum radicalism and which, in its most extreme form, argues that the Emancipation Proclamation was received by a suddenly radicalized Northern Republican public.⁴⁵

Based on my sources, contemporary Republicans in Michigan and Ohio did not believe that the Emancipation Proclamation was as transformative of a document as the literature suggests. None of the papers which I have examined saw the Emancipation Proclamation as a document of moral character. If they valued the cause of human freedom, they noted the happy side effect that the Proclamation would have in liberating slaves and transforming the Southern economy. However, radical papers, especially in Michigan, were quick to remind readers that the Proclamation was intended as a war measure only, understood the potential it had to undermine American slavery within the Border States as well as Confederate ones. The most conservative newspaper I read continued to insist that slavery as an institution was of no consequence, and that the Proclamation was, like the Confiscation Acts, nothing more than an effort to deprive the rebellion of its *raison d'être*. The Emancipation Proclamation forms something of a Rorschach blot for Republicans in Michigan and Ohio. All of them supported it, but in it, they all saw an expression of their own ideology whether moderate or radical.

⁴⁵ For an example of the belief in the rapid radicalization of the Northern public see McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, Chapter 16.

In retrospect, we know that radical Republicans in Michigan were correct in that the Emancipation Proclamation was a prelude to the Thirteenth Amendment and a broader, more enduring restructuring of racial and economic relations in the South. Despite claims like those made by McPherson, at the time, it was less clear that the nation was on the verge of such historic change. The President and the Republican Congress, in keeping with the belief I earlier noted existing among Republicans in Michigan and Ohio that slavery was always and everywhere an evil, proposed paying the slaveholding union states – Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland and Missouri – to abolish slavery, but these efforts met only limited success. If reports on the Republican press are to be believed, the proposals were well received in Maryland but met resistance at least in Kentucky. Given that Kentucky borders Cincinnati and many of the reports are from the *Commercial*, the information on Kentucky seems likely to be trustworthy, especially since Republicans, above all moderate ones fearful of more radical measures, would be more likely to want to overestimate than underestimate the effectiveness of gradual and compensated emancipation.

The moderate *Cincinnati Commercial* had “no doubt the... proclamation [would] be approved by an immense majority of the [loyal] people,” but they depreciated its importance.⁴⁶ As with other steps toward ending slavery during the War, the *Commercial* understated the implications of the Emancipation Proclamation. In their article announcing the President’s policy the day after the initial proclamation was issued, they dwelt on the extent to which the Proclamation was not an abolitionist document. They assured their moderate readership that President Lincoln “fully understood the practical aspect” of universal emancipation and the arming of black troops and therefore opposed it.⁴⁷ A week

⁴⁶ “Proclamation by the President,” *Cincinnati Commercial*, September 23, 1862.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

after the final proclamation was issued, the *Commercial* lumped together in one breath the “antislavery editors” who “wrote that the year of jubilee had come” and the “conservative Democrats of extreme proclivities” as both substantially overestimating the impact that the proclamation would have.⁴⁸ While few Republicans in Michigan or Ohio went so far as to declare in the quasi-Biblical language that the *Commercial* mocked and that later historians (as well as popular culture) would embrace that “the fetters were . . . to be broke and the oppressed be free,” they still all saw greater significance in the Emancipation Proclamation than the *Commercial* did.⁴⁹ The *Commercial* had long taken the most conservative positions of any of the newspapers which I examined, so it is unsurprising that it interpreted the Emancipation Proclamation rather conservatively. However, in the light of some of the literature which I just mentioned, it is surprising to see this interpretation of the Emancipation Proclamation in the Republican coalition at all.

Radicals in Ohio also tended to see the Emancipation Proclamation primarily as a war measure, but the further from slaveholding states we move, the more we see newspapermen able to imagine the potential that the proclamation had to reshape society. The radical voice of the conservative city of Cincinnati, was more surely favorable to the Proclamation than the *Commercial*, but saw only military necessity, and only vaguely understood the potential for the Proclamation to bring an end to slavery imagined further north. Slavery was to be put down because it was “the great lever of the rebellion.”⁵⁰ Similarly, so far as slavery did not motivate rebellion it would enjoy the “security it always” had. While the *Gazette* intended by this comment to place the responsibility for abolition on Southern rebels rather than on Northern Republicans, the same logic presumably applied as well in the Border States, who

⁴⁸ “The Effect of the Proclamation,” *Cincinnati Commercial*, January 7, 1863.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ “Proclamation by the President,” *Cincinnati Commercial*, Sept 23, 1862.

were being encouraged but not required by Lincoln and other Republican elites to abolish slavery. Likely, the *Gazette* and the *Commercial* were both careful to avoid alienating slaveholding unionists in neighboring Kentucky with too strong a suggestion of emancipation in Border States.

Unlike the *Commercial*, the *Gazette* recognized that if “rigidly enforced [the Emancipation Proclamation would] of itself constitute a new war policy” but added this only as an aside, and seemingly found it of little importance. While one can only speculate, it would have been quite reasonable for the *Gazette* to assume that the Proclamation would not be enforced. After all, “if rigidly enforced” the Second Confiscation Act would have been a powerful tool for freeing slaves, but Lincoln signed the law but barely enforced it. The President was probably unlikely to refuse to enforce his own declaration, but two years of watching Lincoln refuse to enforce either confiscation measure may have wounded their confidence in him. Though the newspapers I looked at were loath to publicly criticize the leader of Party and Country at a time of civil war, the small amounts of private correspondence I looked at suggested that some radicals had grown disillusioned with the President. When Lincoln overruled Frémont’s emancipation order in Missouri, a correspondent wrote Zachariah Chandler that “only one, born of ‘poor white trash’ and educated in a slave state,” could be so “tender” to slaveholders.⁵¹

The party organ, the *Columbus State Journal*, saw the proclamation primarily as a measure to “compel the obedience” of the rebels and put down the “slaveholders’ rebellion.”⁵² The *Journal* also clearly took some pleasure in punishing slaveholders for their sin. They declared in overwrought language, “what retribution is more righteous than [the

⁵¹ B.F. Ward to Zachariah Chandler, September 23, 1861 in *Zachariah Chandler Papers*, Bentley Historical Library, Ann Arbor, MI

⁵² “The Executive Proclamation,” *Columbus State Journal*, September 24.

rebels] should see their idol prostrated?”⁵³ Interestingly though, they also imagined not just a punishment for rebels but a national “overthrow” of the peculiar institution “that civilization condemns.”⁵⁴ The Proclamation itself, of course, did not call for any such national overthrow. On the contrary, the same article, like all coverage of the September proclamation, spoke in the conditional tense, rhetorically holding onto the vain hope that the rebellion would crumble in two months. Even if it did not, it would have left one million slaves untouched in Border States and subjugated areas of the Confederacy. Did the *Journal*, after the Emancipation Proclamation, expect the war to bring about the end of slavery across the nation or did it simply imagine the beginning of a slower end to the institution; perhaps it assumed that it could not last long isolated to a few states? Unfortunately, I cannot answer this question with the material available. As with the *Commercial*, the *Journal’s* stance mirrors the more radical stance that it had held throughout the war. The same paper had seen flirted with the idea of black suffrage as early as the time of the First Confiscation Act.

Radicals Republicans in Michigan were clearer in their predictions for the end of slavery, and as such their understanding of the Emancipation Proclamation fits better with Foner’s “turning point” thesis. They acknowledged that emancipation was not intended as a humanitarian measure but reveled in the fact that, in the words of Austin Blair’s Governor’s Message, “it is not forbidden to the philanthropist... to rejoice in the redemption of a race” and the elimination of “the one great and humiliating stain upon our National escutcheon.”⁵⁵ Blair clearly saw the Emancipation Proclamation as a prelude to universal emancipation. While liberating three million slaves while leaving another million in bondage would have no doubt been seen as a great step forward, it is difficult to imagine such piecemeal

⁵³ “Executive Proclamation,” *Columbus State Journal*, September 24, 1862.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*

⁵⁵ Austin Blair, “Governor’s Message” *Supplement to the Lansing State Republican*, January 1, 1863

emancipation being described as eliminating a moral stain. The *Republican* was even more direct declaring that Lincoln gave freedom to “four million black bondmen.”⁵⁶ The fact that there were only 3.1 million slaves in rebel states was widely circulated and known. The *Republican* apparently included in Lincoln’s proclamation the 900,000 slaves in Border States and already conquered Confederate States in their calculation. This might have been a newspaper misprint, but that is quite unlikely. Far more likely, when the article later stated that “slavery [was] to be abolished” it truly believed the Emancipation Proclamation to be a document of universal scope.⁵⁷ The same issue of the paper printed the Proclamation in its entirety; obviously the newspaper understood the formal limitations of the document, but was so caught up in the almost frenzied jubilation with which it greeted news of emancipation that it could not imagine emancipation in Confederate territory as anything but a prelude to broader emancipation. A few months later, the paper approvingly noted a comment by Maryland War Democrat Thomas Hicks that peace could not come until slavery was abolished “throughout the land” including in his home state.⁵⁸ The fact that a slave state Democrat came to hold this position as early as January of 1863 may itself state that Ohio Republicans who still imagined slavery continuing in the Border States were remarkably conservative, but to answer such a question is beyond the scope of my research.

Like the *Republican*, the *Tribune* similarly presumed institution of slavery had been “overthrown” and looked forward to building an entirely new nation.⁵⁹ The *Tribune* a week after emancipation refers to a light-skinned mulatto woman (again the common sympathetic character most likely to get the vote majority of white northerners who shared at least some

⁵⁶ “The Great Proclamation,” *Lansing State Republican*, October 1, 1862.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ “Growth of the Emancipation Movement,” *Lansing State Republican*, A

⁵⁹ “THE PROCLAMATION OF FREEDOM,” *Detroit Tribune*, January 5, 1863

degree of what we would today call racism) who would have been treated as chattel despite her primarily European ancestry in “the Union as it was.”⁶⁰ The *Tribune* co-opted a Copperhead slogan, “the Union as it was,” and used it as a negative instead of a positive, suggesting fundamentally different beliefs about the nature of a reconstructed post-civil-war society. Democrats, though portrayed as disloyal by Republican Party propaganda were not, at least formally, in favor of allowing secession. Their propaganda accused Republicans of carrying on the War not to return the Union to *status quo ante* but instead to remake the nation in their own image. Here, the *Detroit Tribune* rhetorically accepted and celebrated the charge by turning it on its head and challenging the desirability of “the Union as it was.” While Michigan papers knew they did not want the Union “as it was,” they did little to explain how they envisioned a post-emancipation society.

Newspapers and politicians sometimes greeted emancipation with the same religiously inspired rhetoric that had formed a central part of much of their antislavery discourse before the war. The *Lansing State Republican* declared the President’s Proclamation “the most important proclamation ever issued, since that of the Angel to the Shepherds of Judea.”⁶¹ Above all, Republicans in Michigan saw the Emancipation Proclamation as a singularly transformative moment in American history and world history, providing, as Lincoln would term it a few months later, “a new birth of freedom.”⁶² Blair’s message declared that “our country starts on a new course,” and that only on this new road of a society without slaves could “Republican liberty... be fairly tried.”⁶³ The *State Republican* declared the Proclamation gave “truer, deeper, more glorious significance” to the Declaration

⁶⁰ “Bleaching the Colored Race,” *Detroit Tribune*, September 27, 1862.

⁶¹ “The Great Proclamation,” *Lansing State Republican*, October 1, 1862.

⁶² Abraham Lincoln, “Gettysburg Address,” November 19, 1863.

⁶³ Austin Blair, “Governor’s Message,” *Supplement to the Lansing State Republican*, January 7, 1863

of Independence and hailed Abraham Lincoln and the “second Savior of his Country.”⁶⁴ The *Tribune* looked forward to a Republic built on the “principles of God’s eternal justice.”⁶⁵ Notably, emancipation was not seen only as a remaking of the United States, but as a transformative moment for the entire world. Americans have long seen their country as a “city upon a hill,” an image that many radical Republicans had a hard time reconciling with the continued existence of what the *Republican* termed, with only slight hyperbole, “bondage more cruel than any other ever tolerated on earth” several decades after it had vanished from much of the rest of the world.⁶⁶

For the Republicans I looked at in Michigan, the Emancipation Proclamation offered the possibility of a nation, that was both republican and without slavery. The perfected United States could lead the way to a perfected world. The prevalence of millennialism as a religious belief and as a motivator of the way that people thought about politics and history has been well documented and discussed briefly in the previous chapter. My research cannot definitively say how millennial ideology shaped views among radical Michigan Republicans about the Emancipation Proclamation, but the commentary often treats the Emancipation Proclamation as one might expect. I have discussed the extent to which the reception of the Emancipation Proclamation was received with religious imagery in Michigan and the fact that many Michiganders imagined emancipation as prefiguring a real lasting abolition of slavery which would morally regenerate the country and along with it the world. The *Lansing State Republican* argued that in addition to giving freedom to slaves, the regenerated South would be more democratic, more free, and more perfect by breaking the Southern

⁶⁴ “The Great Proclamation,” *Lansing State Republican*, October 1, 1862.

⁶⁵ “How an Ernest Loyal Democrat views it,” *Detroit Tribune*, September 26, 1862

⁶⁶ “Emancipation,” *Lansing State Republican*, January 7, 1863

aristocracy.⁶⁷ In this, their earthy vision of the economic order in the post-slavery South differed substantially from even radicals in Ohio who, if the *Cincinnati Gazette's* hope that “black labor can be as well governed used and made profitable in... freedom as in Slavery” is any indication presumed that whether formally enslaved or formally free, blacks in America would be a permanent laboring, not free-holding class. The *Gazette* offers a vision of what freedom might actually mean, a year or two before the question would become the main preoccupation of the national discussion.

The Border States

Having focused thus far on the coercive antislavery measures applied to Confederate states, I want to briefly discuss the conversations surrounding emancipation in the Union Border States especially of Kentucky and Maryland. It is tempting to suggest that such situations would allow us to view opinions on slavery stripped of its association with the rebellion. Unfortunately, this simplistic view will not do, for the slaveholding class was widely considered a disloyal class regardless of location. The Civil War was often referred to as a “slaveholders’ rebellion.”⁶⁸ Despite stories, especially early in the War, lionizing individual Border State Democrats like slaveholder Andrew Johnson, the slave power, whose place as a bugbear in antebellum Republican discourse is well documented,⁶⁹ in loyal and rebel states, was seen as a bulwark of disloyalty. In Border States, just like in rebel states, Republicans argue for abolishing slavery using the same justifications they used to argue against slavery before the war, but they also might be motivated to strike against slavery to undermine the distrusted class of slaveholders. As we saw in the first chapter, seemingly

⁶⁷ “The Great Proclamation,” *Lansing State Republican*, October 1, 1862.

⁶⁸ For example, see earlier “The Executive Proclamation,” *Columbus State Journal*, September 24

⁶⁹ See Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*.

disparate ideas regarding the impact of slavery on the slave and the impact of slavery on white society were often homogenized to the point that the historian cannot determine whether the ideas were conceptually linked in for early Republicans or whether they were simply tied together for the sake of political expediency, however I will briefly attempt to examine the rhetoric surrounding the abolition in loyal states which, along with strict enforcement of the Emancipation Proclamation would have effectively killed slavery by limiting it to Tennessee, western Virginia and a few parishes around New Orleans.

By the time that emancipation was declared in the rebel states, most of the Republicans I examine also wished to see it abolished in loyal states. No longer was this a sort of vague desire to see slavery ended that many Republicans shared even before the war. By 1863 abolition was a realistic expectation for Republicans who supported some plan to, at the very least, schedule the extinction of slavery: with compensation for loyal owners in loyal states. The Cincinnati newspapers seemed to shy away from discussing the idea of emancipation in loyal states beyond some assurances early in the war that the Union was the way for Kentucky to protect its slaves.⁷⁰ This is likely out of a desire not to scare neighboring Kentucky and ensure that the Bluegrass State would stay in the Union. Unlike Maryland where compensated emancipation was somewhat popular, Kentuckians remained attached to their slaves until 1864.⁷¹ Outside of Cincinnati other newspapers embraced voluntary emancipation as doubtlessly good from early on in the war. On July 9 of 1862, the *Columbus State Journal* was gleeful to see the idea of compensated emancipation gain

⁷⁰ "Submissionists," *Cincinnati Gazette*, January 19, 1861.

⁷¹ The Governor of Kentucky proclaimed against the freeing of slaves to serve in the Union war effort in March of 1864, by which time even the *Cincinnati Commercial* derided him. "The Proclamation of the Governor of Kentucky," *Cincinnati Commercial*, March 17, 1864.

traction in Maryland.⁷² The *Detroit Tribune* carried a similar report three days later calling it “good news for the lovers of human freedom and the haters of human slavery.”⁷³ The *Lansing Republican*, by no means traditionally more conservative than the *Tribune* seemed to take for granted that slavery must be abolished in Border States in order to bring sustained peace, by the beginning of 1863, but did not focus on the traditional critiques of slavery, instead focusing on abolition as an instrument for winning the war. My evidence is too limited to say anything on the progress of emancipation in the Border States beyond the fact that by out the time that the Emancipation Proclamation was issued, the Republican press that I examined, outside of the very special case of Cincinnati, was fully committed to ending slavery in the Border States. I cannot suggest what reasons they focused on to justify that position, nor can I know whether they were ready to coerce unwilling states like Kentucky to abolish slavery, as they eventually would with the Thirteenth Amendment.

Race and the Definition of Freedom

Republicans debated issues of race more explicitly and this debate helped to inform both the debates over emancipation and the debates that would come on the nature of freedom for emancipated slaves. The question became especially important as mass slave escapes, and then the Emancipation Proclamation raised the possibility millions of free blacks in the United States. When the vast majority of blacks were enslaved, the moral status and intellectual competency of Africans as members of a polity was easily avoidable. That is not to say the humanity of black Americans never entered into the discourse before the War. It did, as I discussed in the first chapter. It is simply to say that when the War made mass emancipation a reality, the conversation took on a different level of urgency and tangibility.

⁷² “Emancipation in Maryland,” *Columbus State Journal*, July 9, 1862.

⁷³ “Progress of Emancipation in Maryland,” *Detroit Tribune*, July 12, 1862.

For as controversial as it was prior to the war, the question of whether human slavery was moral was resolved comparatively quickly, albeit with the bloodiest war in the nation's history. The challenge of reconstructing a nation with four million free blacks and thirty million, whites many of whom found the freedmen to be inferior either due to intrinsic characteristics or a lifetime of being kept illiterate and ignorant, proved harder to solve, and in many ways has defined politics for the century and a half since.

As was the case before the war, Jefferson's promise that "all men are created equal," occupied a central place in rights claims for blacks during the war. The founders and founding documents held quasi-religious significance in the middle of the nineteenth century, far beyond even that which they have today.⁷⁴ Within Ohio, we can see the moderate *Cincinnati Commercial*, which was loath to recognize the potential for abolition of slavery that others saw in the Emancipation Proclamation and earlier antislavery efforts, representing one extreme point of view, explicitly repudiating the radically egalitarian implications of the Declaration of Independence. Defending Republicans against what it considered to be the pernicious charge of favoring racial equality, it worked to find Democrats who had taken racially progressive positions in order attempt to prove that the Democrats were the true party of "negro equality."⁷⁵ Opening their case against the Democrats was the accusation: "Who said that all men are created equal? Thomas Jefferson the father of Democracy."⁷⁶ Given the reverence that the Founding Fathers in general, and Jefferson specifically, enjoyed in American political culture, this statement is very shocking indeed, even when stripped of any racial content. It is reminiscent of Confederate Vice President Alexander Stephen's

⁷⁵ "The Democracy and the Nigger—A Shorter Catechism on Negro Equality," *Cincinnati Commercial*, January 2, 1863

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

declaration on the eve of the Civil War that the American Republic was flawed from the beginning thanks to the belief of Jefferson and the other founders in the “equality of the races.”⁷⁷

For other Republicans, the Declaration of Independence continued during the war to form the rhetorical basis for arguments in favor of black rights, arguments which the *Commercial* often attacked as unnecessary distractions from the war focus. In my first chapter, I discussed the importance of the Declaration to Republican rhetoric before the War. When the war came, the rhetoric continued. Hutchins’s speech arguing for the Confiscation Act, to which I referred earlier, defended the Act on the grounds of “the inalienable rights of [the black] man to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”⁷⁸ The rights Republicans saw in the Declaration of Independence did not entail the full spectrum of what we would now call civil rights. In discussing which rights should, and should not, be extended to blacks he still attacked Democratic claims that Republicans sought “political or social equality” for blacks. By political equality, Hutchins presumably meant suffrage which was not conceived of as a fundamental right of citizenship and by social equality, Hutchins meant equal access to public accommodations like integrated schools and streetcars and public race mixing. These were not “natural rights” guaranteed by the founding creed, and Republicans, argued Hutchins had no plans to extend them to blacks. Thus the Declaration of Independence could also be used to define the rights that maximum as well as minimum level of rights to which black Americans were entitled.

The Declaration of Independence, and the larger debate about the fundamental rights of man, became more urgent as the prospect of a large mass of free blacks emerged. If the

⁷⁷ Alexander Stephens, “Conerstone Speech,” March 21, 1861.

⁷⁸ Response by John Hutchins to S.S. Cox,” *Cincinnati Gazette*, July 14, 1861.

Emancipation Proclamation were to go into effect, three million black men and women were no longer to be slaves, but what role, if any, that they were to have in a reconstructed American society remained a subject of fierce debate. At one end of the spectrum stood those who would exclude the freedpeople entirely from American society. As many moderate antislavery men had since the founding of the Republic, all the way through the Civil War, some supported colonizing emancipated slaves in Africa (or as they would have described it “back” in Africa, despite the fact with the slave trade illegal since 1808 almost no American slaves had actually ever been to Africa). President Lincoln himself supported colonization through most of his career and into his Presidency. A second, less oft-noted, way to isolate the freedman was to create a “negro colony” within the United States, in much the same way that Native Americans had been isolated in present-day Oklahoma (at least until white settlers decided that they wanted the land there). It was this plan that the *Cincinnati Commercial* supported, arguing that the Federal Government could “set aside a territory” for freed slaves in South Carolina.⁷⁹ What was to be done with the indigenous white population of South Carolina was not made clear, but the possibility of breaking up large slaveholding estates was likely seen as a felicitous side effect if not an end in and of itself for the *Commercial*; Republicans, as I noted, generally despised large Southern slaveholders (the same article indicted “too much solicitude ‘rights’ of both master and slave”).⁸⁰ Finally, blacks could be, as they eventually would be, integrated into a multiracial society alongside whites. An interracial society did not necessarily mean a society of equals – indeed most Republicans in 1863 would never have supported social equality – at least its most radical connotations. Even in early Reconstruction, Republicans were primarily

⁷⁹ “‘Without Reference to Color,’ and With Reference to It,” *Cincinnati Commercial*, July 10, 1862

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

concerned only with those rights necessary to ensure economic self-sufficiency for the freedman. They demanded equality before the law so that blacks could enter fair contracts, sue to hold whites to those contracts and hope to have other black men on the jury willing to listen to their case fairly. The discussion of social integration of whites and blacks was not only off the table for white Republicans but quite probably not even desired by most blacks themselves.⁸¹ One vision of a multiracial, post-emancipation America, the *Cincinnati Gazette* did not call for either internal or external colonization, but also clearly did not expect to see blacks as members of Northern white society. They cheered emancipation for a cynical combination of selfishness and racism, informing its readership, two days after Lincoln signaled his intention to emancipate the slaves, that blacks were naturally suited to the tropical climates of the South and would naturally stay there even if granted freedom of movement. Indeed, without slavery making life in the South inhospitable, the slow trickle of black migrants northward would slow further, or even stop.⁸² Whether the *Gazette* itself feared the contamination of Northern society with blacks is unclear – other parts of the same article defended the work ethic of blacks and their ability to participate as free members of a society – but, at the very least, it reflected a widespread desire for a white-only Ohio on the part of even the type of people that would read the city’s radical newspaper. In papers that did not call for colonization explicitly, the question of what to do with emancipated slaves was largely ignored, perhaps to preserve a consensus in favor of emancipation, though there were hints that perhaps blacks might have some place in a reconstructed America. The *Tribune*, the *State Journal* and the *Gazette* all referred at one time or another to the orderliness of emancipation in the West Indies, arguing that, contrary to apparently popular

⁸¹ For a description of the difference between civil rights, political rights, and social rights see Harold Hyman and William Wiecek, *Equal Justice Under Law: Constitutional Development, 1835-1875*, 396.

⁸² “WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE EMANCIPATED BLACKS,” *Cincinnati Gazette*, September 24, 1862.

belief, emancipation in the West Indies had not lead to widespread violence, debauchery and work stoppages but initiated an orderly transition to a society based on free labor.⁸³ From this evidence, it impossible to deduce exactly what these more radical papers in 1863 envisioned in a society without slavery, but the West Indies example suggests they did not support colonization.

As emancipation was declared, Attorney General Edwin Bates offered a legalistic take on the role of the slaves, newly declared free, though without Union Army in control of most Confederate territory, yet to actually enjoy that freedom. In a repudiation of the central holding of *Dred Scott*, the Attorney General declared emphatically that blacks were citizens of the United States, to the universal approbation of the Republican press. Bates was equally clear that citizenship for freed blacks did not need to include suffrage rights, just as women, children and criminals were full citizens of the Republic despite being denied the right to vote.

The opinion was unambiguous, and among the Republican newspapers I looked at, uncontroversial. However, the differing ideologies of different newspapers were reflected in different rhetorical emphases. The *Cincinnati Gazette* focused on the symbolism of accepting blacks into the newly conceived “America” and argued that to not grant them citizenship would be an example of “darkest barbarism.”⁸⁴ The word choice was probably not coincidental; the concept of barbarism had been vital to the moral critique of slavery in antebellum Republican discourse and had apparently now been adopted to argue for at least limited rights for free African-Americans. The moderate *Commercial*, on the other hand,

⁸³ “Response by John Hutchins to S.S. Cox, printed in the *Columbus State Journal*, July 14, 1862, “Effects of Emancipation in the West Indies,” *Detroit Tribune*, July 12, 1862, “The Proclamation of Freedom,” January 5, 1863, “Emancipation in the West Indies,” July 6, 1862, *Cincinnati Gazette*

⁸⁴ “What Constitutes Citizenship,” *Cincinnati Gazette*, December 30, 1862.

also agreed that blacks ought to be citizens but focused on the paucity of rights actually granted by formal citizenship. They printed an article from the *New York Times* mockingly noting that short of traveling to foreign countries or piloting ships on the high seas – rights that almost no one, and most certainly not a largely impoverished race would take advantage of – national citizenship conferred little practice benefit. The real rights that constitute practical, rather than formal, membership in the American polity remained, as they should be, in the hands of the state governments.⁸⁵ While one might be tempted to laud the *Commercial* for being willing to extend citizenship rights to freed blacks and acknowledge this to be a rather remarkable position just a few years after *Dred Scott* one might also acknowledge that this narrow conception of citizenship is perhaps the lowest possible conception of rights for the freedman. Republicans, though more concerned with the *obiter dictum* holding that slavery was protected property under the Fifth Amendment, had never accepted the decision in *Dred Scott* that blacks could not have the rights of American citizens. Indeed, it is difficult, given the conceptions of republicanism common at the time to have conceived of a large portion of the population – in some black belt counties, a majority – without some degree of formal membership in the polity. Debating the extent of that membership would define the politics of the following decades.

⁸⁵ “The Attorney General’s Opinion on Negro Citizenship,” *Cincinnati Commercial*, December 31, 1862.

CONCLUSION

The Republican Party, which would enjoy absolute control of the Presidency and Congress until 1875 and launched a series of efforts that began with emancipation, moved to include the full-scale arming of black regiments, the formal inclusion of blacks as citizens and voters through the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution, and finally large-scale federal efforts to defend emancipated Southern blacks against the violent repression of Southern white terrorists like the Ku Klux Klan. These efforts began quickly after the first Republican President took control in March of 1861 and the Civil War began with the shelling of Fort Sumter the following month. The crucible of the first half of the Civil War justified the previously improbable (not to mention illegal) emancipation of slaves in the Confederate states and the controversial creation of black regiments that would total nearly 190,000 soldiers by the end of the War. While slavery would not be formally outlawed until the end of 1865, the first years of the war sowed the seeds of destruction for that institution. Alone, the liberation of one-eighth of the nation from bondage would mark the most important humanitarian advance in the nation's history, and be worth of sustained study. But the emancipation of the slaves, resolved the first chapter of America's original sin, only to open the second. The meaning of freedom and the role of a racially distinct and economically disadvantaged class would define politics for much of the rest of the nineteenth-century. To some extent, it still does today. The Republican Party that supported, and then eventually abandoned Reconstruction, was the Republican Party that the Civil War made. To understand the politics of Reconstruction, we must first visit the politics of the Civil War.

For all of these reasons, understanding how the Republican Party came to universal support Emancipation is vitally important, and I set out to do that. Instead, I found that by the time of the Emancipation Proclamation, some moderate Republicans still envisioned the possibility of a reconstructed Union in which slavery was not abolished. By a year after my study ends, even the most conservative of Republicans, the editors of the *Cincinnati Commercial* saw the absolute abolition of slavery as *fait accompli*.¹ The shifts in public opinion during the period of time that followed my study need to be fully examined.

Furthermore, while the development of the ways in which elites in Congress and the Executive Branch conceived of freedom, a study like mine on the politically engaged segment of the Northern voting public would be useful. Sawrey's *Dubious Victory* attempts to cover "northern public opinion" about Reconstruction focusing on Ohio, but unfortunately starts only in 1865 with the formal surrender of the South. Slavery had been dying for several months, even years, when Lee surrendered, as the victorious Union Army enforced the Emancipation Proclamation. Indeed, the Thirteenth Amendment was in the final stages of ratification. Conceptions of the role of freedmen had already begun to form by the time Sawrey's account begins. Such a study would be useful because elite conception of public opinion drove both pushes for black rights and ultimately the retreat from black rights that marked the rise and fall of Reconstruction.

Finally, I will close by discussing both the limits and advantages to my methodology. By focusing on Michigan and Ohio, I intended to embrace the diversity of Republican ideology, and thus be able to provide a better understanding of the Party nationally than a study of any single state would have been able to. Yet my methodology, far from perfect, is likely to meet a host of objections, but the most important is likely the small sample size of

¹ "The Proclamation of the Governor of Kentucky," *Cincinnati Commercial*, March 17, 1864.

my study. Is it possible to say anything meaningful about the ruling party of a huge nation on the basis of five newspapers and a few congressmen? It might seem entirely within the realm of possibility that I have simply chosen a series of outliers. However, the newspapers I selected should bookend the extremes of the Republican Party. Although it firmly supported Republican candidates, the *Cincinnati Commercial* was so conservative that it was not considered Republican by more radical sheets. It represented the extreme right of the Republican Party nationally. On the other hand, the newspapers which I examined in Michigan represented the most radical elements of the Republican Party. Thus where I was able to find agreement between all of the newspapers, it should be taken as strong circumstantial evidence in favor of some form of consensus, at least among Republicans in the Old Northwest. Where I found disagreements or, far more often, rhetoric that while not contradictory argued for similar positions for differing reasons, it can be taken to suggest a range of Republican opinion, although since neither “moderates” nor “radicals” formed a monolithic group across given states yet alone across the nation as a whole, these shouldn’t be taken to necessarily represent the full range of Republican opinion.

In each state, I took pains to select the most influential Republican papers representing both the state capital and the largest city. In Ohio, the use of the capital paper was especially useful because it functioned as an organ for the leadership of the State Party, while the selection of the largest city was especially useful, because it allowed me to examine Republicanism as it was expressed in conservative and Democratic areas. Still, while my selection of newspapers helped to eliminate the random variation inherent in choosing only a few newspapers by focusing on those that were most influential, it opened up the potential for nonrandom variation by focusing primarily on urban newspapers. Cities were more likely

to vote Democratic than rural areas in the North and, when they did support Republicans, were more likely to support the most Conservative among them. Although Formisano finds other social conditions more relevant than place, he notes that in Michigan's largest cities, only in Battle Creek, did Lincoln outpoll his statewide total in 1860. In the rest, including Detroit and Lansing, he did worse.² Foner's national study notes that within the Republican Party, at least in New England "rural areas and small towns were the most radical" while in the West, "the rural areas... of Michigan were heavily Republican."³ In Ohio the urban-rural divide was less important than the geographic divide: "the center of Ohio radicalism was the Western Reserve." This area included the large and rapidly growing town of Cleveland, but still serves to underscore the idea that the papers which I examined – which did not include any from Cleveland or anywhere in the East of the State – would be biased toward conservatism. My research supports the general consensus. I found the *Lansing State Republican* to be more radical than the *Detroit Tribune* and the *Ohio State Journal* to be to the left of either the *Cincinnati Gazette* or the *Cincinnati Commercial*. If my sources were to be biased to the right, it would strengthen the argument of my first chapter, which suggests that Republicans in Michigan and Ohio were more radical than the traditional historiography suggests, while it would weaken one of the arguments: that the traditional historiography overestimates the moral and abolitionist sentiments with which Northern Republicans greeted the Emancipation Proclamation.

Yet, for all the limitations of my methodology, my study has started to fill an important gap in the political history of emancipation, by focusing state-by-state on the evolving attitudes of local elites and engaged citizens toward slavery as the institution

² Formisano, *Formation of Mass Political Parties*, 291.

³ Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 107.

collapsed. This same group pressured Lincoln and those in Washington to take stronger measures against slavery, perhaps hastening the end of human bondage in America. These measures, combined with the initiative of the slaves themselves, who took the opportunity of the war to flee in unprecedented numbers from their masters, destroyed slavery. The opinions of the group I study helped to determine the manner in which four million men, women, and children would be freed. In addition to its intrinsic importance, the conflicts over the meaning and exercise of that newfound freedom launched one of the most studied periods in the nation's history: Reconstruction. My work helps to lay the groundwork for that period. However, more complete studies on Michigan and Ohio, and on other states, are still needed.

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