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The politics of race in Illinois, 1853-1869

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The Politics of Race in Illinois, 1853 - 1869

(TITLE)

BY

Andrew Roling

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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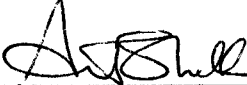
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To my mother, siblings, and my friend, Delbert Crosser

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ABSTRACT

On February 12, 1853, Illinois legislated its notorious black exclusion law and soon after President Lincoln made public his Emancipation Proclamation in 1862, the Illinois legislature threatened to condemn this policy but Governor Richard Yates prevented them from doing so. On February 1, 1865, the same state ratified the Thirteenth Amendment and a few days later, repealed the state's Black Laws; then on January 15, 1867, it redefined the state's citizenship to include blacks by ratifying the Fourteenth Amendment. Finally, on March 5, 1869, Illinois ratified the Fifteenth Amendment, granting nationwide suffrage to black men. This work deals with these events in an attempt to answer these questions: What circumstances in Illinois' politics and society changed to allow such a dramatic reversal in laws dealing with that state's race relations? To what extent did this reversal create permanent, positive change for blacks living in Illinois? How did national issues of race intertwine with Illinois' own political contestation of race?

In answering these questions, this work demonstrates that the racially liberal principle of equality that existed in the antebellum years in Illinois strengthened during and after the Civil War in spite of the prevalence of white supremacist outlook among whites during this period. In spite of the conservative element of free labor ideology that initially formed the platform of the new Republican party, there was another element within the free labor ideology that created tension with the party's ranks; the egalitarian ideal of racial equality. While many conservative free labor adherents may have expressed little or no interest in abolishing slavery, but merely in excluding it from western territories, the more racially liberal free labor adherents supported abolishment of

slavery, and for some, even extending blacks equal political and social rights. This was the dynamic development in Illinois' politics of race during this period.

Chapter one discusses the political construction of race relations in the antebellum years of 1852 to 1860, in particular the impact of the passage of Illinois' black exclusion law and how this state-level controversy interplayed with national developments in the politics of race. Chapter two covers the Civil War years, focusing on the debates that raged on contraband policy, the Emancipation Proclamation, recruitment of blacks into the Union army, and towards the end of the war, the debates over the Thirteenth Amendment and repeal of Illinois' Black Laws. Again, I demonstrate the interconnection between national issues of race with the politics of race in Illinois. Chapter three discusses the immediate post bellum years, 1865 through 1869. This chapter focuses on the impact of the controversy of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments on the politics of race in Illinois at a time when blacks were now free to settle within the state. All three chapters demonstrate how the continual flux in the relations between racially conservative and liberal Republicans directly affected the politics of race in Illinois.

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Introduction

One can gain a greater understanding of the persistent dilemma of race in the United States today by studying the *history* of the same dilemma. If the controversy of race in the nineteenth century was chiefly concerned with Americans and immigrants of African, Chinese, and Amerindian descent, today the dilemma of race is complicated with the dramatic increase in the diversity of races and ethnicities in United States, such as Latin American and Middle Eastern immigrants and citizens, to cite two examples. And today, we still grapple with the convulsed legacy of the Mexican-American War in the form of the issue of illegal immigration. We can begin to understand the persistent failure of the United States to renounce racism completely by looking at the politics of race in Illinois, specifically, during the period 1852 to 1869.

How can studying the politics of race at a state level further our understanding of the controversy of the history of U.S. race relations? By examining the politics of race at the state level, we can go into greater detail in our study than we could by doing the same at the national level. The second advantage of a state level study is that state politics was often intertwined with national politics; a detailed look at the politics of race in Illinois can provide a view of any similar development (or lack of such development) at the national level. In spite of the greater autonomy of individual states in the mid-nineteenth century there was still mutual influence between the state governments and national government. Finally, by examining the politics of race in Illinois, we can also examine how political parties can shape, yet at the same time, be affected by, the issue of race. I argue that the minority movement of racial liberalism in Illinois gained strength during the years 1852 – 1869.

The historical study of Civil War era politics and race has generated much scholarly attention. In *Bright Radical Star*, Robert Dykstra included newspaper accounts concerning specific developments as well as the more traditional judicial and legislative decisions when discussing the political discourse of race in nineteenth century Iowa. By using newspaper articles he broadened the view of politics by including public debate among ordinary citizens on the issue of race. His main argument is that, alongside the tradition of white racism, there was also a tradition of egalitarianism and that this dualism was possible because Iowans had no *economic* stake in preserving slavery. Jean Baker took a different approach in her book, *Affairs of Party: The Political Discourse of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century*, by expanding the traditional limitations of politics by discussing the culture that fundamentally shaped Northern Democrats' outlook on race. She points to how education, family life, and popular entertainment such as minstrel shows all helped to shape how Northern Democrats formed their racial attitudes. Baker's main argument is that the Northern Democratic belief in a white man's republic meant that blacks had to be denied equality, lest they undermine the republic of white men.¹

David Roediger and Alexander Saxton offered two different class analyses of race and politics. In his book, *Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, Roediger rejects the traditional Marxist emphasis on economic-based race conflict. Instead, he argued that whiteness was white workers' response to the fear of wage dependency and to the necessity of capitalist work discipline. He disagreed with the traditional Marxist claim that white racism was merely a means for the upper class to manipulate lower class whites; racism welled up from below and was originally

influential to working class formation in antebellum United States. In *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America*, Saxton offers a different class analysis. He uses an ideological approach to discuss how white racism dynamically interacted with different historical circumstances, resulting in different constructions of white racism over time. His is a Marxist interpretation, portraying white racism as a means to further elite class interests.²

Ideology is the central theme in the separate works of Eric Foner, Eugene Berwanger, and James D. Bilotta. In *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War*, Foner defines the free labor ideology as a belief among many white Northerners in antebellum America that free labor was economically and socially superior to slave labor. The ideology idealized the opportunity for wage earners to rise into property ownership, and thus, independence. The Republican party emerged by basing itself on this free labor ideology in opposition to the expansion of slavery. Foner explained how the free labor ideology involved the issue of race when free labor adherents, who were racist, tried to advance the interests of labor only concerning the interests of white men. However, other free labor adherents recognized the basic humanity of blacks who were entitled to at least very basic civil rights. Berwanger offers a different ideological analysis. In *The Frontier Against Slavery: Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy*, Berwanger examines how discrimination against blacks in the Midwest became more prevalent between 1846 and 1860 when the issue of expanding slavery was at its height. For Berwanger, white racism ironically was an important factor for political opposition to the spread of slavery into the territories. This racist opposition to extending slavery

sought to preserve western territories for free white settlers by excluding *all* blacks, free and slaves. In *Race and the Rise of the Republican Party, 1848 – 1865*, Bilotta rejects other historians' claims that anti-slavery parties had some fundamental egalitarian principles. Instead, he argues that anti-slavery parties were inherently racist from their very inception. He maintains that the free soil ideology of whites was antagonistic to the interests of blacks.³

All the authors above focus on how the issue of race intertwined with politics in the antebellum and post-bellum years. The overarching historiographical context of these works is that of expanding the study of politics beyond formal politics, to include public society and how different groups of the population (such as classes) participated in the political construction of race. In a historiographical sense my work here is social political history in that I expand beyond the traditional history of politics by including the public sphere of newspapers, as editors debated the issues that their representatives, judges, and governors found to be important. I chose to discuss the politics of race in Illinois from 1852 through 1869 in order to examine how the socio-economic differences between southern and northern Illinois contributed to this dynamic development. Southern Illinois in the antebellum period was economically and socially oriented towards the South with its reliance on river trade routes. Northern Illinois was economically oriented towards the northeast through the Great Lakes trade routes and railroad connections after the 1840s. These patterns also resulted from different migration patterns. Migrants from slave states settled mostly in southern Illinois while migrants from northeastern states settled in northern Illinois. This antebellum legacy affected the political discourse of race in Illinois all the way through the Civil War and

the immediate post-bellum years. Another distinguishing point in studying Illinois is that unlike Iowa, the state Dykstra studied, Illinois was a territory of the old northwest from the 1780s. The history of frontier Illinois is distinct from Iowa's frontier history, and thus, the political discourse of race in Illinois had a different trajectory than that of Iowa despite some similarities. With this in mind, I argue that one cannot simplistically portray the free labor ideology as being monolithically racist. We cannot disregard the fact that the free labor ideology had strong elements of white racism, but at the same time, I argue that one cannot ignore that there was a parallel, competing ideological element of racial equality within the free labor outlook of Illinois Republicans.

The emancipation of slaves, the courage of black soldiers in Union army, and Abraham Lincoln's evolution towards racial liberalism and his influence were strong factors in the strengthening of the minority movement of racial egalitarianism in Illinois. The emancipation of slaves in the Southern states released an incredible source of manpower for the Union war effort; thousands of black men and women found ways to contribute either on the battlefield itself, or in the army camps. This demonstrated to white Illinoisans the pragmatic advantage the Union had gained through emancipation; and, in turn, this allowed some to advance from this realization to recognizing blacks as equals. The courageous actions of black Union soldiers also similarly contributed to this same shift. Abraham Lincoln in many ways personified the evolution from conservative free labor ideology in identifying only white men's interests, to becoming more racially liberal in recognizing the human dignity of blacks. Although we cannot explain the shift of all white Illinoisans as simply mimicking Lincoln, we also cannot deny the influence of Lincoln's own opinions, and when in position of government power, his policies.

This work is organized chronologically into three chapters. The first chapter examines the political construction of race in the antebellum years from 1852 to 1860, discussing in particular the impact of the passage of Illinois' black exclusion law and how this state-level controversy interplayed with national developments. The second chapter discusses the Civil War years, focusing on the debates that raged on contraband policy, the Emancipation Proclamation, recruitment of blacks into the Union army, and toward the end of the war, the debates over the Thirteenth Amendment and of the repeal of Illinois' Black Laws. Here, I show that national issues had a direct impact on the politics of race in Illinois, especially when the controversy of repealing the state's Black Laws emerged. Chapter three discusses the immediate post-bellum years, 1865 through 1869. This chapter focuses on the impact of the controversy of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments on the politics of race in Illinois at a time when blacks were free to settle within the state. With all three chapters, I demonstrate how the continual flux in the relations between racially conservative and liberal Republicans directly interplayed with the politics of race in Illinois. As long as power relations within the party was in flux, there was room for elements of both, racism and racial equality within the free labor ideology. How this constant shift finally settled determined whether or not Illinois would faithfully carry out fairness and justice in relations between its black and white residents.

NOTES

¹ Robert Dykstra, *Bright Radical Star: Black Freedom and White Supremacy on the Hawkeye Frontier*, (Ames, 1997); Jean Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century*, (New York, 1998). For other works that discuss Illinois nineteenth century politics, see Arthur Cole, *The Era of the Civil War, 1848 – 1870*, (Urbana, 1987 edition); Richard Hines, "Settlement, Race Politics and the Civil War: The Political Transformation of Illinois," (PhD dissertation, Washington State University Press, 2001); John Rozett, "Racism and Republican Emergence in Illinois, 1848 – 1860: A Re-Evaluation of Republican Negrophobia," in *Civil War History*, (22: 2, 1976), 101 – 115; James Simeone, *Democracy and Slavery in Frontier Illinois: The Bottomland Republic*, (DeKalb, 2000); Bruce Tap, "Race, Rhetoric, and Emancipation: The Election of 1862 in Illinois," in *Civil War History*, (vol. 39, 1993), 101 – 125.

² David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, (New York, 1999); Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America*, (New York, 1990).

³ Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War*, (New York, 1995 edition); Eugene Berwanger, *The Frontier Against Slavery: Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy*, (Urbana, 1971); James D. Bilotta, *Race and the Rise of the Republican Party, 1848 – 1865*, (Xlibris Corporation, 2002 edition).

Chapter 1: The 1853 Black Exclusion Law and Antebellum Politics in Illinois

In the 1850s, runaway slaves who fled through Illinois did not stay in that state, and instead continued all the way to Canada. This is clear from a published account by Boston abolitionist Benjamin Drew. Drew used fictitious names to protect the fugitives' identities:

"William A. Hall" began his journey to freedom in Tennessee and made a long a perilous trip through Illinois. The following is his testimony:

"You are a free man, are you?"

"Don't you see he is a free man, who walks in a free country?"

"I suppose you run away-a good many fugitives go through here, and do mischief."

"I am doing no mischief-I am a man peaceable, going about my own business; when I am doing mischief, persecute me,-while I am peaceable, let no man trouble me."¹

"William" traveled through Mt. Vernon, Springfield, Bloomington, and other towns in Illinois and he also stayed for a short time in Indiana and Wisconsin. But in the end, he successfully ensured his own freedom by settling in Canada. Illinois may have been a free state, but by the time "William" traveled through it, the state meant to send runaway slaves back to the South. And for runaway slaves like "William," there was great risk in traveling through Illinois; the person who encountered "William" in the above dialogue was actually an agent in the Underground Railroad but he could have easily captured "William" and sent him back South.

Blacks such as "William" found themselves in a precarious circumstance after the Illinois General Assembly passed a new law on February 12, 1853 to exclude free blacks from settling within the state. The so called "Negro Exclusion Law" stated that any white person who brought blacks into the state that were not slaves would be fined \$100 to

\$500 and be sentenced to prison for one year. It also required the governor to request his extradition to face charges and trial if the white person was not a resident of Illinois. Blacks who stayed in Illinois for ten days could be tried for high misdemeanor, which brought a fine of \$50. If the convicted black person could not pay then he/she would be publicly auctioned with length of service determined at the time of the purchase. This law threatened free black residents of Illinois, as it allowed malicious whites to challenge the free status of blacks who had settled in Illinois before 1853. And while this law did not reestablish slavery in Illinois outright, it created a quasi-slave trade when convicted blacks failed to pay the fine, as evidenced by the following excerpt from the law itself stated:

It shall be the duty of said justice to commit said negro or mulatto to the custody of the sheriff of said county, or otherwise keep him, her or them in custody; and said justice shall forthwith advertise said negro or mulatto, by posting up notices thereof in at least three of the most public places in his district, which said notices shall be posted for ten days. The said justice shall, at public auction, proceed to sell said negro or mulatto to any person or persons who will pay said fine and costs, for the shortest time; and said purchaser shall have the right to compel said negro or mulatto to work for and serve out said time.²

As shown in the excerpt above, the local justice was responsible for advertising the convicted black person, organizing the auction, and finalizing the sale.

This chapter focuses on the politics of race in Illinois during the 1850s, beginning with the 1853 Black Exclusion Law. During these years, an embryonic advocacy of racial egalitarianism emerged in tension with more conservative free labor and free soil ideology in Illinois. This ideological division would define the new Republican Party. To be sure, there were other contemporary issues in the 1850s, including nativism, temperance, intrastate regional differences, tariffs, banking, and transportation improvements. But none of these issues emerged as the dominant issue in this state's

politics. For Illinois, political discourse over the next 16 years occurred through the issue of race, beginning with the black exclusion law in 1853. In this period racial liberals did ideological battle with conservative and moderate Republicans, whose views initially held sway over Illinois voters. Mainstream free labor thought allowed for the exclusion of blacks insofar as it did not threaten legal black residents of Illinois. Free black residents who were severely restricted by other racist laws in Illinois did not threaten the interests of white citizens and their free labor idealism. But white Illinoisans' fear of a huge influx of free blacks was the motivating factor behind the referendum of black exclusion. This racist position continued to dominate Republican politics through the 1850s.

Origins and Passage of the Black Exclusion Law

This law originated shortly after 1846, when antislavery activists confronted the controversy of a state constitutional referendum on black exclusion in 1847. In that year, Benjamin Bond of Clinton County put forth a resolution in the convention calling for prohibition of free black migration into the state. Southern Illinois delegates immediately expressed their full support for Bond's proposal. In March 1848, Illinois voters decided 50,261 to 21,297 (58 percent majority) to exclude free blacks entirely from their state. Eighteen counties had an anti-exclusion vote of more than 50 percent. However, the eleven counties that Republicans gained in 1860, which they had failed to win in 1856, were strongly pro-exclusion, averaging 96 percent in support of the clause, while the 27 original Republican counties from 1856 had a high anti-exclusion vote. It's important to remember that the 1848 black exclusion referendum was not immediately binding, as

Article XIV of the newly amended state constitution instructed the Illinois General Assembly to pass specific laws to implement black exclusion at its first meeting. So in January 1849 the Sixteenth General Assembly convened and Democratic representative James J. Richardson, from Marion County, proposed a bill to implement black exclusion, but it failed to pass. Debate over this issue would continue until 1853 when the General Assembly successfully passed the infamous law.³

According to historian Eugene Berwanger, there was a strong fear that unlimited immigration of blacks into Illinois would lead to miscegenation. Indeed, during the Illinois convention in 1847, William Kinney asserted that the lack of restriction on immigration of blacks would allow blacks “to make proposals to marry our daughters.” Even after the settlement of former slaves into Illinois ceased by 1840, the fear that Illinois would serve as a dumping ground for Southern freed blacks persisted and helped to bolster demand for an exclusion law.⁴ Very few Illinois political editors expressed opposition to the proposed law because Democrats and Whigs favored the entire proposed constitution and pressured political editors to either advocate its acceptance or to keep quiet.⁵ There was much less vocal opposition to a proposed black exclusion law during the referendum in 1848 than occurred later in 1853, when the specifics of the new black exclusion law were hammered out. But once white Illinoisans realized the severity of the final law that the Illinois General Assembly passed in 1853, they came to see it as repugnant to the principles of free labor. Specifically, it was the clause that allowed for the selling of blacks into quasi-slavery on Illinois soil that white, pro-free labor Illinoisans found most objectionable.

Debate over the black exclusion law resurfaced when Democratic assemblyman John A. Logan reintroduced the new law for passage on January 29, 1853. Logan reintroduced the bill as a means to advance his own political career, using his political skills by demanding that representatives vote on the bill as it was, without adding amendments. As a Democratic politician, Logan knew he had an opportunity to garner greater support among voters by appealing to their prejudice toward blacks. The politics behind the passage of this law involved anti-slavery Whigs and Democrats and their fear that less-informed white Illinoisans would equate their opposition to the extension of slavery with the more radical abolitionist movement. Democrats outnumbered Whigs almost four to one in the Eighteenth General Assembly, leading to the defeat of a bill would have repealed all of the black laws. As historian Richard Hines noted, "Democratic legislators intended the anti-immigration bill as a message to abolitionist forces resident in the state. When justifying it, however, they usually couched their support in terms of the economic benefits brought by limiting the possible over abundance of black laborers taking jobs away from whites."⁶

After Logan reintroduced the bill, anti-slavery Whigs and Democrats helped pass the new black exclusion law to preserve their own conservative image; that is, in order to avoid alienating their electorate, they avoided debating this bill, although there were notable exceptions. During this legislative debate, racial egalitarianism had its own voice through representatives such as Joseph Gillespie, who expressed his strong opposition to the bill when he denounced it as "a gross and palpable violation of the laws of this state." He also said that the bill invaded the jurisdiction of Congress with regard to the Fugitive Slave Law and that it infringed upon the constitution of Illinois by allowing a form of

involuntary servitude within the state. Even though another representative, Asahel Gridley of McLean County, opposed abolitionism, he opposed the bill because "in his section of the state, blacks were good citizens. In the considerable number that lived in his town, there was but a single individual that he could wish to leave." Gridley pointed out that other areas of Illinois might claim problems with local free blacks, but this was not the case in the community he lived in. Representative Henry Blodget was the only outspoken abolitionist in the house and protested the bill, "as everything that is wicked." Another representative, John Deitrich, claimed that the bill conflicted with and would supersede the Fugitive Slave Law.⁷

Despite the emergence of a small racial liberal minority, the predominant form of protest among Illinois newspaper editors against the black exclusion law took the form consistent with the free labor ideology. As described by Eric Foner, free labor ideology served its northern proponents as a means both to justify the workings of antebellum northern society and to critique southern society, insofar as free soilers believed Southern values were detrimental to the ideal of free labor. The free labor ideology held to the ideal of upward mobility through the dignity of labor; ideally people would not remain permanent wage-laborers but would work for wages on the way up to economic independence.⁸ The predominant reaction against the black exclusion law in 1853 was that of a conservative protest against the technical, unconstitutional aspect of the black exclusion law which threatened the safety of free blacks who had been living in Illinois legally. This conservative sympathy for legal black residents in Illinois did not flow from egalitarian commitments, but rather from the fear that any form of black exclusion that allowed for a form of the slavery to function in Illinois undermined the dignity of free

workers, including white workers who took pride in living in a free state. The more racially liberal reaction, however, went further. The black exclusion law repugnantly degraded the dignity of humanity by kidnapping blacks and selling them like chattel into slavery. In some cases, racial liberals went so far as to argue that all Americans were entitled to freedom. The free labor ideology fit very well with the conservative position, insofar as conservatives could see no justification in denying free, legal black residents their own livelihood which they had earned through their own labor. The ability for even conservatives to sympathize with at least a specific group of blacks would later serve as a wedge into which the more liberal principle of recognizing blacks as political and even social equals would later influence the Republican party, especially during and after the Civil War.

Indeed, it was only through the wrenching social changes of the Civil War that egalitarian principles became stronger and more widespread in Illinois. But the principle of racial equality had its origins in the antebellum years, including the controversy over the black exclusion law. As a result, during the antebellum years, the division between the more conservative advocates of free labor and free soil and the more egalitarian advocates for racial equality already became prevalent within the new Republican Party in Illinois.

Political and Social Development of the Politics of Race in Illinois

The origin of race in politics in Illinois can be traced back to the earliest history of the state. Historian James Simeone has described how Illinois conventionists in 1823 opposed Governor Edward Coles' attempt to abolish de facto slavery in Illinois. Simeone

focused on the convention movement of 1823 to 1824 to illustrate how white lower-class workers in Illinois rose up in opposition to wealthy whites, Yankees, blacks, and Amerindians. According to Simeone, Illinois developed “a pattern of democracy that made white supremacy implicit while class warfare was sublimated into cultural warfare.” This cultural clash later made possible the development of a new party system within Illinois, with ideological clashes creating cleavages from which parties could emerge. During the convention movement both conventionists and non-conventionists appealed for greater support through racism.⁹ This use of racism by both sides would be replayed in 1853 and afterwards. Decades later, the political controversy of the 1853 black exclusion law signaled the beginning of the end of the party system that the convention movement of 1823 to 1824 established.

All across the nation during the 1820s, suffrage expanded to include a greater number of white male citizens, and the convention movement in Illinois was part of this national democratic movement. The convention movement’s Jacksonian characteristic came from the fact that conventionists, who consisted of backcountry and lower class whites, rose up to challenge the status quo imposed by the elite of Illinois.¹⁰ By the time the black exclusion controversy erupted in 1853, an entire generation had grown up believing in democratic ideals for white male citizens. It was this generation whose leaders and followers would bring about a dramatic change in the political party system in Illinois. The black exclusion law controversy by itself did not make the new Republican Party possible, but the political discourse of race was one of the important factors among others that laid the foundation on which this new party would stand. The

convention movement also bequeathed another important legacy: that racism in antebellum American could be a potent appeal to the mass of white male voters.

Another factor that influenced the opposing reactions to the black exclusion law was the antagonism between southern and northern Illinois. An editor from Ottawa, a northern Illinois community, protested the anti-black law by emphasizing regional tensions, pointing out that the vast majority of Illinois representatives from the northern region voted against the bill while most representatives from southern Illinois favored it.¹¹ There were certainly significant social and economic differences between northern and southern Illinois in the antebellum period. Settlers who came to Illinois from the Northeast brought with them Yankee values and often pooled resources and talents for common goals while committing themselves to moral and social reforms. Southern settlers, on the other hand, held different values from those of northern settlers and had a deep distrust for institutions other than their local churches. By the 1820s, moreover, cotton plantation owners encroached on upland regions in some of the Southern states, which caused many Southern yeomen to migrate to southern regions of some of the Northern states, such as Illinois. After Illinois became a state in 1818, an increasing number of settlers from the Northeast and from Europe arrived in the state's central and northern regions. This migration increased even more dramatically with the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825 and then with the arrival of steamships to Chicago in 1832.¹² Throughout the antebellum period, migratory, cultural, social, and economic differences created two very distinctive regions within Illinois.

The development of two different regions later influenced the political discourse of race in Illinois. Regional antagonism within Illinois was interrelated with the anti-

Southern free labor ideology that many northern Illinoisans came to believe in. But it is important to remember that this regional antagonism between northern and southern Illinois was not an exact replication of the broader regional conflict between the North and South. Southern culture, rooted in the economic system of slavery, was not literally transplanted into southern Illinois. Yet, it is also undeniable that southern Illinoisans had strong Southern roots. During the controversy of the black exclusion law the regional antagonism between northern and southern Illinois would play itself out in similar ways to the broader national conflict.¹³

When northern Illinois newspaper editors pointed out that the interests of northern Illinois and southern Illinois clashed, they usually claimed that there was too strong of a pro-slavery *sentiment* among southern Illinoisans. For many northern Illinois newspaper editors and their readers, southern Illinoisans did not exhibit any enthusiastic belief in free labor and free soil; their support for the part of the black exclusion law that allowed for auctioning convicted blacks was proof of that.

In his book, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic*, Alexander Saxton claimed that the politics of class in United States was strongly connected with the conceptualization of race, particularly through the media of nineteenth-century mass culture. Jean Baker also discussed the influence of minstrel shows. She stated that Democrats often used politically-infused minstrel shows to humiliate their political opponents, the Republicans. One theme they often used in skits was the "Miscegenator's Ball" in which white Republicans and blacks mingled with one another. During the 1864 campaign, the Northern Democratic Party constantly used the theme of miscegenation to try to draw voters away from the Republican Party.¹⁴

Popular cultural portrayals of blacks that were tied to class interest also influenced the political discourse of race in antebellum Illinois. During the antebellum years miscegenation or amalgamation was not an unusual theme in Illinois political discourse. For instance in 1853, the same year the controversy of the black exclusion law unfolded, an Illinois editor in Springfield published a copy of an article from another newspaper titled, "Practical Amalgamation." The article's original editor shared a short story in which a white woman sought to marry a local free black man. However, a mob in the community formed and managed to persuade the white woman to reconsider marrying the black man. Upon being convinced by the mob, she fled. The black man fled from the town as well, fearing violent reprisal from the mob. This article and others like it shared the common theme of repulsion of amalgamation/miscegenation. Another Illinois editor produced an article expressing similar abhorrence of interracial sex in which he told a story of a young white man who married a woman without knowing she was mulatto. On the day of the wedding, the groom angrily shot and wounded the bride's father, a wealthy plantation owner, after believing the father deceived him of the woman's true race. The editor then stated that the bride killed herself upon realizing for the first time that her mother was a black slave.¹⁵

Minstrel shows and political discourse were connected to one another. One way this connection was forged was when Northern Democrats used elements of minstrelsy in their campaign literature. They used the stock characters that portrayed blacks in minstrel shows that were already long familiar to audiences in order to present political arguments concerning race. The same stereotypical stock characters used in minstrel

shows appeared in newspaper editorials such as this one in Springfield's *Illinois State*

Register:

The happiest man in the world is supposed to be "a nigger at a dance." In our opinion, this rule is too limited. A Negro is not only happy at a dance, but in every other position. A darkey may be poor, but he is never low-spirited. Whatever he earns he invests in fun and deviltry. . . . There is something in the African that sheds trouble as a duck would water.¹⁶

The dual influences of minstrel shows and newspaper editorials in turn, influenced the political discourse of race in Illinois, and across the nation. This was the case in Illinois during the controversy of the black exclusion law and afterwards. The conservative free labor opposition to the black exclusion law in 1853 still allowed the same protesters to accept the denigrating, stereotypical perspective of blacks. Blacks were seen as lazy, dim-witted, childish, contented with a life of poverty, and even happy with being slaves on Southern plantations. They could enjoy the entertainment of minstrel shows and, at the same time, protest the harshness of the black exclusion law, which seemed to sanction the kidnapping of legal black residents and threatened to allow a part of the slave system (auctioning captured blacks) to function in Illinois.

Although racist conceptions of blacks were prevalent in Illinois, some Illinoisans were influenced by abolitionist literature and abolitionist-themed plays. One work of literature that influenced Illinoisans along with other Americans throughout the nation was *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe. Illinois newspaper editors held varying reactions to not only Stowe's novel but also its productions of plays based on it. An editor in Bloomington provided the community's readers with a copy of an article that had nothing but high praise for recent performances of a play based on Stowe's novel. The article not only praised the content and characters of the play but also expressed hope

that the play would expose all the evils of slavery to its audiences. But more common were editors who lambasted Stowe and her work. An editor from the southern Illinois town of Jonesboro ridiculed the hypocrisy of the British nobility who went all-out to give Stowe a splendid welcome when she visited England:

Negroes in this country may here and there, be neglected, and may even be abused; but then is it not ever true that the poor of England, Ireland, and Scotland are universally neglected by the great and rich of the British kingdom? Even while we write, there are thousands of operatives in Manchester and Birmingham who would rejoice to be the sharers of the portion of the slave in the South, cared for as he is by law in old age, and secured from want.

Other editors presented stories in their newspaper about black slaves who were approached by abolitionists, but the black slave would refuse to take their offer of help in escaping. One editor from Springfield printed an article about a slave who supposedly fled from his master, but was so unhappy that he willfully returned back to the plantation. In another issue of the same newspaper, the editor provided a copy of a brief article from a different newspaper concerning a case in New York in which three blacks insisted on equal seating in an opera house, but were kicked out. The editor then went on to claim that insolence among blacks was on the rise because of the appeal to equality by white radicals.¹⁷

The media of antebellum mass culture, whether it was anti-abolitionist or pro-abolitionist, produced strong, forthright reactions from newspaper editors and their readers. Illinoisans expressed strong reactions to Stowe's work during the same year that the controversy of the black exclusion law raged. The historical legacy of the early nineteenth century convention movement, regional differences, the cultural expression of minstrel shows, and popular literature set the context for how Illinoisans reacted to the controversy of the 1853 black exclusion law.

Reactions to the 1853 Black Exclusion Law

Newspaper editors in Illinois protested the strong possibility of abuse of the black exclusion law by Southern slave owners coming into Illinois and kidnapping lawful black residents of the state. In Bloomington, an editor of the *Intelligencer* objected to the severity of the new black exclusion law but not against the basic principle of excluding blacks from Illinois:

The present law, which authorizes the selling of colored persons into slavery, is thereby unconstitutional, and is therefore null and void. We have before said, and still say, that we approve of taking such steps, in a legal manner, as shall prevent this state's becoming a refuge for desperate and vagabond slaves from the Southern states; but this does not imply the necessity of enacting laws equally obnoxious to the statutes and to the humane movements of the day.

The editor of the *Free Trader* of Ottawa, in northern Illinois, quoted the *Alton Telegraph* and expressed a widespread concern that the 1853 law was unconstitutional:

We do not believe that the legislature has the power, by a mere declaration, of making that which is innocent to itself, a crime, and of then providing involuntary servitude as a punishment for it. Besides, we think that it invades the jurisdiction which Congress has already exercised over this subject, by the enactment of the Fugitive law.

An editor of the *Rock River Democrat* in Rockford expressed opposition to the new law, but mostly insofar as it concerned the principle of free soil ideology. He saw the danger to free, working blacks:

No good cause can be assigned for the virtual introduction of slavery into our free state. Upon what constitutional basis the law is framed we have been unable to learn No excuses from us for the men who permit the impaling of freemen upon the altar of slavery enactments. In short, we disapprove of this act in toto. It is in direct and open hostility to the sentiments of our people, none will deny.¹⁸

Very few editors in the 1850s willingly extended the principle of free labor to blacks.

The idea of free labor often focused on constitutional means to prohibit slavery from

territories and free states with the interest of whites being the primary concern. Such editors did not object to the exclusion of blacks from Illinois, but were apprehensive of what they claimed was the unconstitutional part of the black exclusion law, which, in their view, seemed to have allowed for a form of slavery within the free state of Illinois. These editors, and other Illinoisans who agreed with them, found slavery to be repugnant to the idealization of free labor but did not see any contradiction with their principle of free labor and that of excluding blacks from settling in Illinois. With the exception of more liberal editors, who included the interests of blacks in the free labor ideology, this was essentially what the conservative opposition to the black exclusion law was based on: free labor as it applied to white men. The interests of blacks remained unclear, or worse, nonexistent.

While it is true that the Republican Party did not coalesce into a national party until after 1853, it is important to remember that the Republican Party did not create its free labor ideology from out of nowhere. Republican leaders took up the principles of free labor in 1854 and 1855 that were already held by white Northerners. The Free Soil Party of the 1840s articulated the idea of free labor and free soil in different parts of the United States. In fact, one Illinois editor in September 1848 saw how the Free Soil Party affected the Whig Party:

Are not one-half of the Whigs in favor of Free Soil? If so, are there not substantial reasons upon which to build a hope that this important point can be as soon attained, and with less jeopardy to other very important points, by the Whig party as now organized? Cannot the pen and voice of serious and candid Whigs be as effectually and, on the whole, more widely employed in endeavoring to cultivate this doctrine of Freedom in the party, as in doing so in a new organization?

In Illinois, as in other states, some Whigs felt pressured to embrace the principle of free labor to avoid losing ground to the Free Soil Party. In 1853, a large number of white workers in Illinois were angry with any vestiges of slavery existing within their free state, as it contradicted their idealization of free labor. Their protest against any form of slavery while supporting the exclusion of blacks also fit well with their opposition to slavery expansion.¹⁹

Other Illinois editors, especially from northern Illinois, expressed even stronger objections to the black exclusion law. The editor of *Ottawa Free Trader* praised abolitionist Henry Blodget for presenting a speech to the House in which he vehemently protested the black exclusion law as “wicked.” In another issue of the same newspaper an editor reiterated his strong protest against the black exclusion law:

There is but one consolation connected with the matter, and we confess it is a poor one enough—the law will be a dead letter at least in this part of the state. We should like to see the man that would mount the auctioneer’s block in this town and sell a freeman to the highest bidder, and we should like to see the bidder.

In yet another issue, the same editor articulated a more democratic form of citizenship in protesting the black exclusion law:

Slaves and freemen, equally, may be brought into the state and sold here as slaves for life. Our constitution and Ordinance of 1787 have put an absolute inhibition upon slavery. It cannot exist here. The constitution of the United States guarantees the rights of citizenship to all citizens of other states. Many Chinese in California, and the free blacks of New England are regarded as citizens of those states whether by birth, or naturalization.

On a more rare occurrence the editor of the *Belleville*, a southern Illinois community, provided the same copy of the article quoted above, contradicting the overall pattern of intrastate regional antagonism over the controversy of the black exclusion law. Most other Illinois editors did not advocate such liberal fairness by favoring citizenship status

regardless of race. Newspapers such as the *Rock River Democrat* were the exception, not the rule. But these racially liberal protests against the black exclusion law represented what would later emerge in the Republican Party; a minority of racial egalitarians who protested not only slavery, but also against other laws that discriminated against blacks. This egalitarian minority went further than their free soil and free labor peers in that they advocated racial equality, rather than limiting their protests only insofar as the interests of whites were concerned. Before the Republican Party would emerge as a new national party, there was already a distinct liberal minority that asserted itself by protesting the black exclusion law. The racially liberal minority within the Republican Party did not have its origin with the establishment of this party; it had already existed in Illinois and became more visible with the controversy of the black exclusion law.²⁰

These objections were the exception because the majority of whites conceived of citizenship and nationalism in racial terms. They idealized the white race (particularly Anglo-Saxons) as the epitome of civilized people, and thus the only group truly deserving of citizenship status in United States. They sought to exclude non-whites even though in California and New England states, citizenship was legally obtainable regardless of race. The newspapers quoted above went against the grain of antebellum “scientific” racism. Historian James Bilotta has argued that “scientific” racism emerged from the beginnings of “modern anthropology, zoology, physiology, and ethnology” in the early nineteenth century. The fact that ‘scientific’ racism was held as an article of faith by so many whites made the more racially liberal protests from some newspapers all the more impressive. Yet even though many newspaper editors vehemently protested the black exclusion law,

they could not break out of the cultural boundaries that were meant to separate whites from blacks.²¹

The reason why the free labor and free soil ideology held such a strong appeal when denouncing the black exclusion law can be found in the basic tenets of free labor ideology itself. Foner stated that for a large number of whites in the antebellum North, “economic development, increasing social mobility, and the spread of democratic institutions were all interrelated parts of nineteenth-century ‘progress.’” He also noted that for white Illinoisans who believed in this ideology, the part of the black exclusion law that allowed for selling convicted blacks into slavery was too much of a contradiction to the principle of “progress.” Because free labor ideology focused on the interests of white laborers without really professing any concern for blacks, this approach in denouncing the Illinois black exclusion law was the most widespread among newspaper editors, and politically more safe compared to the more radical advocacy for abolition and racial equality.²²

White Illinoisans were not the only people to take strong positions regarding the black exclusion law; black Illinoisans organized to vehemently protest the new law, along with the entire set of Black Laws in Illinois. John Jones from Chicago was one of the more prominent black activists in Illinois. His public activities stretched from the late antebellum years into the postbellum years. Jones began to acquire a reputation as a determined spokesman for equal rights for blacks in 1849 after his failed, but eloquent opposition to the black exclusion law of Illinois. After the referendum in 1848, Jones worked with other prominent Chicago blacks to establish a correspondence committee to more effectively advocate for the repeal of all of Illinois’ Black Laws. He was also

involved with other blacks in the First Convention of the Colored Citizens of the State of Illinois which met in Chicago in October, 1853. One of their resolutions insisted on the repeal of the unjust Black Laws of Illinois: "*Resolved*, That the constitutional disability under which the colored man labors in this State calls loudly for redress, and the code of *Black Laws* existing in our statutes is unjust to the colored citizen, insulting to humanity, and disgraceful to the State of Illinois."²³ While some white Illinoisans protested against the severity of the black exclusion law for ideological reasons, black Illinoisans had a direct, compelling interest in their protest; they lived in fear of being kidnapped and auctioned off into slavery. Unfortunately for these black activists, in Illinois everyone of their race was denied the franchise, which effectively left the ultimate decisions to white men.

The distinct features of the political discourse in Illinois were obviously influenced by partisan politics. Historian Michael Holt claims that two interrelated factors shaped the national political crisis of the 1850s. First, the collapse of the two-party system based on the Whig and Democratic parties fundamentally reshaped the nature of party competition, causing a sectional realignment. Second, this collapse of party competition caused a decline in popular faith in normal political channels to meet the needs of voters. As Holt stated: "The common fear for the republic also fed the fire of sectional antagonism. Northerners and Southerners both identified powerful and hostile groups in the other section who would destroy their liberty and reduce them to an unequal status." As a result, by the 1850s, each section saw the other as fundamentally anti-republican.²⁴ Illinois newspaper editors were fully aware of the changes occurring

within the Democratic and the Whig parties as they debated their state's new black exclusion law.

In the *Daily Register* of Springfield, a Democratic editor discussed the attempt by the Whig Party to gain political capital with the issue of the black exclusion law:

Hence their present war upon the new Negro law. They think it afford them an opportunity to draw to their support of the entire free-soil and abolition factions of the state, and to keep alive these mischievous doctrines which tend to a dissolution of the Union, to civil war and a total destruction of republican liberty.

The editor then argued that the black exclusion law was legitimate and reasonable:

It is not more "slavery" than is confinement in the penitentiary, nor can it be objected to as an outrage upon the rights of the offender, unless it can be shown that it is wrong to prohibit the immigration of blacks into the state. This is therefore, a humane one towards the slave, and if the abolitionists and Whigs were animated by sentiments of genuine humanity, they would approve of it and support it.

Two days later the same Democratic editor reiterated the argument favoring the black exclusion law, but this time emphasizing that no law-abiding black person would ever be captured and sold into slavery. By the spring of 1853, Illinois Democrats were more concerned with the division within their party than with Whig protests of the black exclusion law. When Stephen A. Douglas returned from his sojourn in Europe in 1853, he found out that the division between New York Democrats in "hard" and "soft" camps was now spreading throughout the national Democratic party due to newly-elected President Pierce's blunders in using his patronage power. Douglas tried to side with the president in spite of Pierce's refusal to appoint some of Douglas's allies into offices. One Democrat called for Illinois Democrats to set aside their differences:

Every attack by Democratic papers upon our delegation in Congress, in reference to appointments, or other purely party matters, whether the object be to break down the assailed ones, in order to make room for new aspirants, or whether the motives be pure, the result is the same. It places weapons in the hands of our

political opponents, and without repairing any slight misstep which may have been made.

But even as the Democratic Party was in the midst of a crisis, Democrats could at least take some comfort in the fact that the Whig Party seemed even worse off, as one editor in Springfield noted:

The name of "whig" if continued, cannot be made sufficiently broad to cover many of the progressive ideas of the day; nor can we hope under it to draw to our aid many who, opposed to the present position of the Democratic Party, are willing to split off from it and join an independent or a new party . . . yet will not assume the name of whigs nor work with us under such name.

Indeed, in the elections of 1852, the Whig party gained a mere three Congressmen and Winfield Scott, their presidential candidate, was utterly crushed by Franklin Pierce.²⁵ Such multiple political defeats triggered a sense of crisis among Illinois Whigs, and compelled them to reexamine their party's viability.

The Emergence of the Republican Party in Illinois, 1854 – 1856

The black exclusion law controversy complicated the anti-slavery fusion movement in Illinois. Historian William Gienapp stated that although Free Democrats united with Whigs and Democrats in states such as Wisconsin and Michigan under the new Republican party, the fusion movement was slower in developing in Illinois. The fusion movement met the greatest resistance in Illinois compared to other states; the only region in Illinois that showed strong support for a new fusion party was in the northern counties. Thus, instead of calling for a state convention, fusionists held preliminary county meetings in different areas of Illinois. On August 1, 1854, Illinois politicians and voters of the First Congressional District convened in Ottawa and favored calling themselves Republicans, adopting the principles of the Wisconsin Republican

convention. Then on October 5, 1854, Illinois Republicans organized their own state convention, meeting in Springfield.²⁶

But the Illinois Republican state convention did not succeed as its most fervent supporters had hoped it would. The Republicans at Springfield held their convention without Lincoln; after he gave a speech protesting the new Kansas-Nebraska Act, he departed after declining the Republicans' invitation. Owen Lovejoy and the other members of the convention failed to establish a more firmly united Republican party. Lincoln represented the conservative strand of the free labor ideology; he was not quite yet ready to openly join the Republican party, as he believed that the party was too strongly tinged by radicalism. But if Lincoln needed more proof that the Republican party would enjoy broader support than the preceding Liberty and Free Soil parties, he received some of that proof in the results of the congressional and state campaign as anti-Nebraska leaders became prominent within the Whig and Democratic parties, winning a majority of the state's congressional seats and becoming a majority in the state Senate while making substantial gains in the House.²⁷ The Republican state convention in Springfield illustrated how Illinois was distinct from other states in how the Republican party developed. Indeed, the years 1854 and 1855 promised to create a renewed storm of controversy of slavery on the national stage, pulling Illinois and other states into it.

Illinois Senator Stephen A. Douglas thought that the organization of territorial government was essential to what he believed was the mission of United States to extend prosperity and democracy in the western hemisphere. Accordingly, on January 4, 1854, Douglas reported his new territorial bill and later, the bill successfully passed. The Kansas-Nebraska Bill would provide the means with which to organize Kansas and

Nebraska into new territories, but Douglas' bill unleashed a storm of controversy by superseding the Missouri Compromise of 1820.²⁸

Meanwhile, the Democratic and Whig parties were grappling with a crisis from within; this was one reason why some fusionist politicians believed that fusion on strong anti-Nebraska grounds could be a feasible way to establish a new party that would become known as the Republican party. Lyman Trumbull was one such politician who was moving towards a stronger anti-Nebraska position.²⁹ The fall Senatorial election in Illinois was happening in the midst of this significant political shift that affected politicians of various parties and positions.

Throughout most of his antebellum political career, up until the late 1850s, Lyman Trumbull was a Democrat. Yet Trumbull was, in some aspects, much more liberal than many other Democrats when it came to race. Trumbull opposed abolitionism, but was morally opposed to the system of slavery. According to historian Mark Krug, after being shocked and appalled by Elijah Lovejoy's murder in 1837, Trumbull, along with Lincoln, Gustave Koerner, and John Palmer, advised blacks that they were entitled to freedom. In some cases, these men successfully defended in court blacks who were initially deprived of their freedom when they escaped from slavery into Illinois. Like Lincoln, Trumbull focused on opposing the Kansas-Nebraska bill. Running as an anti-Nebraska Democratic House candidate for the Eighth District, Trumbull won the seat after publicly denouncing Stephen Douglas' Kansas-Nebraska bill and insisted that popular sovereignty as conceived by Douglas was nothing but a ploy to introduce slavery in Kansas.³⁰ The earlier division among Democrats from president

Pierce's patronage policy paled in comparison to the division concerning the Kansas-Nebraska bill.

While opposing editors lambasted one another, politicians and voters organized into conventions in 1854 that reflected the political dynamics that year. On August 19, 1854 Kane County Whigs held a convention in Geneva. Kane County's Whig convention expressed strong free soil values by including among its resolutions that Nebraska and Kansas territories be restored to the status of free territories and even going so far as to demand a complete repeal of the Fugitive Slave Law. They expressed the extent of their determination with the following statement: "Resolved. That in furtherance of those principles, we will use such constitutional and lawful means as shall seem best adapted to their accomplishment; and that we will support no man for office under the General or State Governments who is not positively and fully committed to the support of these principles, and whose personal character and conduct is not a guaranty that he is reliable." In late August 1854 fusionists held another convention much farther north in Illinois, in Winnebago County. They expressed similar, strong free soil values:

Resolved. That the continued and increasing aggressions of Slavery in our country, are destructive of the dearest rights of a free people, and the vital principles of our government—and that such aggressions cannot be resisted without the *united* political action of all good men. Resolved. That the citizens of the United States hold in their hands a peaceful, constitutional, and efficient remedy against the encroachments of the Slave power—the *ballot box*; and that if that remedy is boldly and wisely applied the principles of liberty and eternal justice will be established.³¹

With words such as "free people" and "citizens," fusionists were referring to whites, not free blacks living in the Northern states or free/enslaved blacks in the Southern states.

The fusion movement in Illinois was not primarily concerned with the plight of black slaves in the Southern states. Instead, fusionists focused on the threat of the extension of

slavery into new western territories, and any negative effect this would have on non-slaveholding white settlers.

The greatest support for a new party came from the northern counties of Illinois, but was not enough to succeed in establishing a new party. According to William Gienapp, the key factors that led to the failure of fusionism in Illinois included Whig hostility, apathy of anti-Nebraska Democrats, the radicalism of some local fusion conventions, and discord over nativist and liquor issues. Lincoln was one example of Whig ambivalence; he was not overtly hostile to the new fusion movement, but remained noncommittal. Another was Trumbull, who at first believed that he could remain within the Democratic party in spite of his serious differences with Douglas and his supporters. Despite these problems, on October 5, 1854, Free Soil leaders organized a Republican state central committee in Springfield. This marked the official launch of the Republican party in Illinois. Less than two weeks later, Republicans organized in Bloomington and expressed particularly strong anti-Southern sentiment:

Resolved. That the citizens of the United States hold in their hands a peaceful, constitutional, and efficient remedy against the encroachment of the Slave power—the ballot box; and if that remedy is boldly and wisely applied the principles of liberty and eternal justice can be established.

Here again, the words “liberty” and “eternal justice” applied to the interests of non-slaveholding white settlers in the territories, not free blacks or blacks enslaved in the South. One of the other resolutions set forth some of their main goals:

Resolved. That we accept this issue, forced upon us by the Slave power and *in defense of freedom will cooperate and be known as Republicans*, pledged to the accomplishment of the following purposes:

To bring the Administration back to the control of first principles; to restore Nebraska and Kansas back to the position of free territories; to modify or repeal the Fugitive Slave Law; to restrict slavery in the states in which it exists; to prohibit the admission of any more slave states into the Union.

Clearly, in Illinois, the new Republican party began as a moderate party in regards to race issues, one of which was slavery. The party was not so conservative as to be willing to compromise the principle of prohibiting the further extension of slavery but it also was not so radical as to embrace abolition, not to mention genuine racial egalitarianism. Who made up this new party based on centrist principles? Another resolution of the same Bloomington convention gives the answer: "Resolved. That we cordially invite persons of all former political parties, whatever, in favor of the object expressed in the above resolutions to unite with us in carrying them into effect."³² Anyone who was moderate enough not to alienate voters with advocacy of racial equality or abolition, yet forward enough to oppose the extension of slavery, was welcomed into the Republican party without regard to former party affiliation.

Meanwhile, Democrats held their own conventions. Illinois Democrats asserted that regional parties were a danger to the Union, and in turn, implied that the Democratic party was for preservation of the Union while the fusion movement was threatening it. Indeed, it was not unusual for Democrats to present themselves as the key party for preserving the union. But there was another appeal that Democrats made. This second tactic involved the Democratic assertion of self-government for territorial settlers. As Peoria Democrats put it, "Resolved, that we recognize the right of the people to make and alter their constitutions of government as the basis of our political systems. That in organizing a territorial government all territories belonging to the United States, the principles of self-government upon which our federal system rests will be best promoted." Democrats argued that the constant agitation of the issue of slavery extension was pointless as it not only threatened the union, but it also denied white settlers their

own autonomy in the territories they settled in. With this second appeal, Democrats could deny Republicans' free labor ideology as an exclusive claim in guarding the interests of white settlers. Stephen A. Douglas became one of the well-known defenders of the principle of territorial sovereignty. In fact, the Peoria County convention members expressed full support for Douglas' Nebraska law when they stated, "Resolved. That we recognize this principle, as carried out and incorporated in the Nebraska-Kansas law, as a cardinal principle of faith in the democratic creed."³³ Insistence on the prime importance of union preservation and strong advocacy for territorial sovereignty were the two main tactics of the Democratic party.

Nevertheless, Douglas' former strong support base in Illinois had begun to crack due to internal party division. Murray McConnel warned Douglas that some Illinois Democrats were uniting with Whigs and free soilers within the state in opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska bill. Meanwhile, John Wentworth's newspaper, the *Democratic Press* in Chicago, protested the new bill. Indeed, prominent Illinois Democrats sought to advance their political careers by opposing Douglas. Trumbull campaigned for the U.S. Senate seat as an opponent to the Kansas-Nebraska bill while William Bissell publicly denounced Douglas' bill and declared he would not run for reelection. John Palmer sought reelection to the legislature's upper house on a similar anti-Nebraska position and former Illinois Democratic governor John Reynolds, influential in southern Illinois, joined the anti-Nebraska Democrats.³⁴ Douglas was in for a serious fight, fending off attacks from new Republicans as well as from opponents from within his own party.

But in 1854, Douglas could still rely on strong support from many Illinois editors on the grounds of preservation of the Union and popular sovereignty.³⁵ Northern

Democrats used such appeals as alternatives to opposing the fusionist movement without losing ground by expressing themselves in full accordance with aggressive advocacy for the extension of slavery such as that expressed by Southern Democrats. In this respect, the racism of free soilers and the racism of Northern Democrats differed. Many free soilers were racist insofar as they wanted to make western territories exclusive for white settlers who owned no slaves; they had no concern for blacks. Northern Democrats were racist insofar as they would permit the extension of slavery into western territories if a majority of settlers in such territories would permit it. The common ground of the idea of white supremacy in the antebellum years still provided room for opposition based on whether one accepted or opposed the possible extension of slavery. Moderate free labor opposition to the extension of slavery preempted the more egalitarian protest from becoming the dominant position of the Republican party. The more moderate Republicans adhered to white supremacy by insisting that their defense of free labor interests were for whites to the exclusion of all blacks. Meanwhile, Democrats who supported Douglas adhered to the same tenets of white supremacy but for them, it was expressed either in their indifference to slavery extension, or actually advocating for its extension.

Illinois Know Nothings played an important role during this year of political conventions. Know Nothings came together out of fear of new immigrants coming into United States, especially Germans and Irish Catholics. One Rock Island editor summarized the Know Nothing position, while denouncing their platform:

The society of Know Nothings, secret in every feature, some acknowledging membership, is a new scheme of distracting the democratic party. It is avowedly organized with a political object—the destruction of foreign and catholic

influence in the United States. Its leaders, even its head, Gen. Scott, found it necessary in the late campaign to disavow their nativism.

The same editor, in a different *Weekly Rock Island Republican* issue, insisted that Know Nothings were anti-democratic. In response to an article he quoted from a Know Nothing newspaper in Henry County, the editor lambasted Know Nothings: "It rebukes to attending our commercial and diplomatic relations with FOREIGN NATIONS, and not to the getting up of secret cowardly midnight Know Nothing meetings to defraud honest naturalized citizens of their rights!" Other Democratic newspapers articulated similarly strong protests against Know Nothings:

Senator Douglas completed his speech in the state house, by a review of the objects and the tendencies of the secret political organization. He showed that its principles are directly subversive of republican institutions, and that they are antagonistic to true patriotism. First, the obligations of the members to support none but protestants for any office, is in violation of the constitution, which says that no "religious test" shall be required as a qualification for office.³⁶

But other editors, even if they themselves were not Know Nothings, sought to use fear of immigrants and/or Catholics for their own political party's gain. A Springfield editor had this in mind in one particular article:

Is this object sought to be accomplished for the good of the Irish or to strengthen the Catholic church? No—it is simply to get votes—and this done, they do not care what follows. What benefit will it be to them, now if they unite with a party whose fielding object is to extend slavery and make it a national institution? Professor Brownson in his *Review*, pictured the present state of things. He said that the American feeling was aroused throughout the country, and the efforts of demagogues to band the Irish, and to make them vote in one direction, would increase the disposition to Native Americanism.³⁷

When it came to dealing with the issue of immigrants and Catholics, both sides were inconsistent at best, and blatantly hypocritical at worst. Illinois Democrats proclaimed the sacred principle of freedom and citizenship rights for white immigrants when denouncing the ideas of Know Nothings, while these same Democrats were willing to

implement Douglas' idea of popular sovereignty, even if it meant introducing slavery into western territories. At the same time, anti-slavery fusionists, Whigs, and anti-Douglas Democrats were not above using the bogeymen of immigrants and Catholics if such an approach advanced their political position among Illinois voters. This was how the dynamics of nativism became entangled with the issue of slavery and influenced the politics of race in Illinois.

Democratic editors in Illinois who supported Douglas did not hold back any harsh words in denouncing the fusion movement. In 1855, some Illinois editors expressed opposition to the nascent Republican party by claiming that the evils of abolitionism combined with the evils of Know-Nothingism would disrupt the Union:

Icabod Coddling and Jesse O. Norton are now engaged in the work of combining the inconsistent elements of abolitionism and know nothingism into one party, to be called the republican party. The objects of this fusion movement, as manifested in the remarks of both Coddling and Norton, is a dissolution of the Union. While the abolitionists hope to abolitonize the whole people of the north, the know-nothings expect by the movement, to disfranchise and proscribe thousands of citizens on account of their place of birth and religion. If the republican movement is successful national prosperity and peace would be at an end.³⁸

Eventually, Know Nothings fused with the new Republican party as the politics of race tied with the issue of slavery began to overcome the issue of white immigrants and Catholics in 1855 and 1856. Know Nothings would not abandon their nativism overnight, but many of them willingly became part of the new Republican party.

In the meantime, Illinois Democrats confidently rallied around the principle of popular sovereignty and Stephen Douglas, believing that the issue of slavery would die with their outright victories in 1856, along with Democratic victories in other states the same year. Illinois Democrats believed that voters would see popular sovereignty as

being more truly democratic and constitutional than fusionists' opposition to extension of slavery. As long as Illinois Democrats could convince more voters that the extension of slavery would not harm the interests of non-slaveholding white settlers, they could gain the advantage at the expense of the new Republican party. For them, popular sovereignty was crucial to preserving democratic government, not the prohibition of extension of slavery through excessive federal government power.³⁹

In 1856 Illinois Democrats continued to attack the Republican party as a hodge-podge of malcontents that included former Democrats, abolitionists, former Whigs, and Know-Nothings. Editors often expressed such statements when they sought to emphasize to foreign-born immigrants the danger of voting for the Republican party. Another editor made a passing remark about the impurity of the Republican party (referring to it negatively as "hybrid") when he discussed recent Democratic county meetings in Illinois:

The democracy of the several counties of the state are buckling on their armor for the coming contest. Meetings have been held in many counties, and in nearly all they are called, for the purpose of appointing delegates to the state convention to be holden on the 1st May. Their hybrid enemy is organizing, marshalling his forces, and drumming into line the fag-ends of all factions, the representatives of every shade of anti-democratic opinion, and democrats are preparing, as it is their duty, to meet and conquer them.

At other times, Illinois Democrats claimed that Republicans were fanatical abolitionists:

Gents: The abolition convention is over, and Wm. Herndon made his effort at speechifying. Most persons who heard him were disappointed. He all along wanted it distinctly understood that he was not an abolitionist; yet he preached doctrines that would suit and did suit the most rabid. The officers were as follows: President, L.M. Green, an avowed abolitionist, who believes that slavery exists everywhere illegally; secretary, I.S. Moore, abolition captain of a squad on resolutions.⁴⁰

Illinois Democrats used the combination of tactics against Republicans that included pointing out any connections between Know-Nothings and Republicans and between

abolitionists and Republicans. They made appeals to preserving equal rights for white immigrants with appeals to racist fears of abolitionism.

Illinois Republicans embraced the centrist position of their party in 1856, rather than the egalitarian position of some of its other members. On February 22, 1856, Republicans organized an Anti-Nebraska convention in Decatur:

We recognize fully the legal rights of the slave states to hold and enjoy their property in slaves under their state laws and within the jurisdiction of those laws. And we further recognize their constitutional right to an enumeration of three-fifths of their slaves in the apportionment of representation, and also their constitutional right to a return of such "persons owing service under the laws of a State," as may escape beyond the jurisdiction of those laws under which said service is held due.

The Illinois editors who participated in this convention went out of their way to assure Southern slaveholders that they did not advocate abolition of slavery where it already existed. But the same editors stood their ground concerning the western territories:

We hold that the right and duty of Congress to consider the application for the admission of any proposed new State, to judge of the effects of such admittance on the present and prospective prosperity, rights and safety of the States of the Union, collectively and severally, and to decide as their wisdom may decide, is a *sacred and inalienable right*.

Up to the eve of the presidential election of 1856, editors supporting the Republican party insisted that Republicans advocated for the interests of white citizens, not that of blacks:

We condemn no law however apparently severe, which bears upon the slaves themselves, because experience has taught us that such laws are necessary; but scorn and execration should greet those statutes or customs which the institution has imposed upon white men and citizens. The grievance of which we complain is not the thralldom of the slave but the citizen.

Other Republican gatherings in 1856 stated more forthrightly than the editorial convention in Decatur their intention to oppose the extension of slavery:

Resolved, That while we are opposed to any interference with the institution of Slavery in the states where it now exists, we are also opposed to any further extension of this "peculiar institution."

2nd, That we believe Congress has the constitutional right to prohibit the introduction of slavery into the territories, and ought to exercise that right.

3rd, That Kansas ought to be admitted into the Union at once with their free Constitution.

Centrist Republicans believed that their position within the party was most viable, as it would appeal to the greater number of dissatisfied Whigs, Democrats, and Know Nothings who could still be convinced to join the new Republican Party. Editorials such as these gave Republicans reason to believe that there were discontented Democrats who would join their new party:

As we opposed Mr. Washburne both times when before the people it may not be amiss to state why we support him now. We will do so. Time has demonstrated that there was not enough virtue and purity among the democratic leaders to repudiate this new doctrine (Kansas-Nebraska bill), and it has therefore become the fundamental principle of the party. We are as much a democrat as ever, but we are opposed to the further extension of slavery and in favor of Free Soil, Free Speech, Free Press and Fremont.⁴¹

When such Democrats expressed support for the anti-Nebraska politicians they formerly opposed, it seemed to reaffirm the centrist position among Illinois Republicans, in their effective appeal to discontented politicians and voters of the other parties.

Illinois Republicans and their allies held a statewide convention in Bloomington on May 29, 1856. They did not take a determined stand for freedom for all people; in their resolutions they referred to freedom for white settlers migrating into the western territories. The insistent defense of freedom of speech and freedom of the press (free soilers often pointed to repressive laws against free speech that slave owners helped pass in their states to stamp out anti-slavery agitation) were an expression of defense of white settlers who opposed living in territories where slavery might exist. Lincoln participated

in this convention, serving as chairperson of the nominating committee, while John Palmer, formerly of the Democratic party, served as convention president. More radical members such as Lovejoy agreed to fall in line with the more moderate members in the interest of party unity. Lovejoy willingly settled for unification on the more moderate opposition to extension of slavery rather than risk undoing what he and his colleagues had worked so hard to accomplish thus far. The convention leaders successfully created a stronger, unified Republican party for Illinois after its members unanimously accepted the resolutions.⁴² The Republican state convention in 1856 was the end product of the pressure from the politics of race. Yet in spite of this moderate platform, Douglas Democrats would continue to persist in painting all Republicans with a broad brush as being abolitionists and one-idea fanatics. The best efforts of moderate Republicans could not entirely defuse the negative, racist backlash.

Republicans not only had to ensure broader support for their new party but they also had to prevent serious division among themselves. No sooner had they successfully concluded their state convention than the contest for the Third Congressional District nomination in July 1856 threatened to split the new Republican party. On July 2, the controversy turned on the district's nomination of Lovejoy. Other Illinois Republicans were furious, as they saw Lovejoy as a radical whose nomination would undermine their party's strength. Republicans from the southern part of this large district at first strongly opposed Lovejoy and tried to pressure for the rescinding of his nomination but, upon realizing his broad support in the district, reluctantly accepted him. Lovejoy won the campaign, and became an Illinois representative in the U.S. House of Representatives. Lovejoy's efforts to go along with the moderate platform of the Republican convention

did not convince all conservative Republicans that he was safe for their party; fortunately for Lovejoy, they could not organize an effective enough resistance against him. These ultra-conservative Republicans were unnerved about Democratic charges that the Republican party was a “nigger-worshipping,” abolitionist party, and they saw Lovejoy as unwittingly adding fuel to this fire.⁴³ This kind of unrelenting pressure helped to divide Republicans into an ultra-conservative minority, a more egalitarian minority, and a moderate majority. Each of these groups reacted differently to the charges put forth by Democrats and each group took a different position within the party.

No doubt, black Illinoisans were truly disappointed with the Republican state convention’s position regarding slavery, and most especially at the absence of any forthright advocacy for equal rights or for the repeal of all of Illinois’ Black Laws. In November 1856, prominent black activists in Illinois organized a State Convention of Colored Citizens of the State of Illinois which met in Alton. Rather than focusing on the national question of extension of slavery into the territories, they focused on repealing Illinois’ Black Laws and called for equality of all Illinoisans regardless of race:

Whereas, We, the people of color of the State of Illinois, are cursed by the blighting influence of oppression, as displayed in the equality of its laws, in depriving us of the rights of oath and franchise. And whereas, we believe these laws to be morally wrong and impolitic. Therefore, we deem it our duty to organize associations to employ all lawful honorable means for the repeal of the Black Laws of the State, and for the final accession of our political rights.⁴⁴

Such determined resolve among black Illinoisans may have won sympathy from more liberal Republicans, but the majority of Republicans were moderate advocates of free white labor who either insisted that blacks belonged to an inferior class or did not publicly express their personal belief in racial equality for politically pragmatic reasons. Black men in Illinois, in spite of being disfranchised, still found ways to try to influence

opinion on slavery, race, and their state's Black Laws through conventions such as the one mentioned above. But their efforts for justice met incredible odds in the face of Northern racism.

The rising level of racism in Illinois was part of a broader development among many Northern states. As historian Leonard Richards has written, "Black men had the legal right to vote in nine northern states in 1815, but only five by 1840. In most northern states, moreover, blacks were denied access to public schools, prohibited from serving on juries or in the militia, excluded from many trades, and barred from scores of public places." It was in this social and cultural context that an Illinois editor in Rockford expressed Northern racist opposition to extension of slavery:

The following conversation occurred a day or two since, in this place between a member of the Republican party and an Old Line Democrat:

(after the Republican found out what parties the Democrat opposed)

R—I call that the nigger party which labors to put niggers (and slaves—the worst class of niggers) into possession of every foot of territory that properly belongs to the free white citizens of the country. I am down on niggerism, and opposed to any party which is its tool, and for this reason I oppose the Democratic as the only real nigger party.

D—Ah! [Exit in disgust]

Such expressions of racist anti-slavery thought would fit well with what historian James Bilotta described as part of the social acceptance of "scientific theories regarding the inferiority of black people" and that "these racist theories conveniently dovetailed with the particular antislavery rationale that they [Free Soilers] were promoting. The effect of repeating the scientific litany that black people were racially inferior and a threat to the white race was to strengthen the argument that slavery must be excluded from the territories." Such blatant racism among some Republicans was disheartening for many blacks, but other blacks held onto the hope that the position of many Republicans could

change to a more racially liberal stance in the near future. Prominent black public figures such as Frederick Douglass acknowledged that Republicans had different reasons for opposing slavery that did not always include genuine concern for blacks, but he still saw that anti-slavery sentiment was the vital element for the Republican party. Yet, many anti-slavery Illinoisans had no qualms about excluding the genuine interests of blacks, such as expressed in this editorial excerpt:

Notwithstanding he was a Fremont man he dared not avow his preference in Georgia, although he was a man in good standing there. He said I hope and pray you will elect Fremont. If you do, you will emancipate thousands of white men who ought to be free. *This man from Georgia, of whom I have just spoken, marveled how we at the North, who are free to speak as we please—free to vote as we please.* He said that the condition of the white laborer in the South is worse than that of a negro, who actually looks down upon him with scorn because he has no master. The fight is not so much for the slave as it is for the white man of the South, who is to be made free.

At other times, Illinois Republicans felt compelled to refute charges that they were a party for equal rights for blacks, such as when this editor replied to a recent article from another newspaper, which disparaged Republicans as supporters of Black Republicanism:

The experience of the past twenty years convinces us that the system of American slavery, which most people are willing to acknowledge is a curse, has spread its withering influences over enough of this country. The black and white races are dissimilar and uncongenial, and their blood and social habits are already too much intermixed for the credit of either. Then why extend such a system?⁴⁵

Republicans sometimes tried to put the Democrats on the defensive charging that Democrats were the ones who sought to have blacks spread across the entire country. Thus, Republicans had their own arsenal of racist rhetoric. Racially liberal Republicans may have been disinclined to use such racist tactics, and some may have even been egalitarian in sentiment, but the centrist Republicans dominated their state party in Illinois in the 1850s. The centrist position was built on the interest of non-slaveholding

white citizens in order to appeal to a broader group of Illinois voters, particularly with the challenge of gaining support from southern Illinois voters. Republicans built stronger support for their party among different constituencies by appealing to united opposition among Northerners to the Slave Power, and Northern Democrats, whom they portrayed as mere lackeys of the Slave Power.⁴⁶ Republicans thus used the combination of tactics of appealing to racism by asserting that Democrats sought to spread blacks throughout the entire country and by accusing Democrats, regardless of geographical section, as being pro-slavery. The use of such tactics allowed Republicans to reassert their claim of being a centrist party in that they merely sought to restrict slavery, and therefore, that they were not radically anti-slavery.

Illinois Republicans also asserted that their resolutions were based on political tradition as set by the first sixty years of government, insisting that this tradition legally reinforced opposition to extension of slavery. The editor of *The Journal*, in a separate issue, provided a copy of an article from the *Quincy Whig* to emphasize the conservative position of the statewide convention:

The ground taken in the platform of this convention is eminently wise. The resolutions are few in number, but they are simple, firm and conservative. If all those hostile to the course of the Compromise breakers, whose leaders disgrace this State in particular, cannot unite with enthusiasm and singleness of purpose upon the ground taken by these resolutions, it would be in vain to seek any common bond of union. The constitutional rights of the South are acknowledged and it is declared that they must and shall be maintained. So called abolitionism is no more recognized by the declared principles of the convention, than the ultra Southern views of the most violent pro-slavery school.⁴⁷

The editor asserted that to oppose the extension of slavery is just and necessary to preserve freedom and the prosperity of the United States. Moderate Republicans tried to promote a conservative image by arguing that their free labor opposition to the extension

of slavery was not unprecedented; rather, their position had legitimacy based on history and constitutional legality.

While the main strategy of most Illinois Republicans consisted of maintaining an outwardly centrist position to appeal to potential new members of their party, and to refute charges that they favored racial equality, Illinois Democrats boasted of national unity among their members and downplayed the more forthright, ardent pro-slavery stance of many Southern Democrats. There was another source of national division among Democrats that strongly influenced politics in Illinois. Once James Buchanan won the presidency in 1856, Douglas mistakenly believed that Buchanan would abide Douglas' suggestions regarding state patronage. Even though Buchanan followed Douglas' advice in filling territorial offices, the newly-elected President ignored Douglas in regards to all other government offices. The President's distance from Douglas worsened the division among Democrats. In Illinois, a group of Democrats blamed Douglas rather than Buchanan for office appointment woes, and created a split among Illinois Democrats between those who supported Buchanan and those who supported Douglas. Yet, in 1856, Douglas still saw no reason to sever his political relations with Buchanan in spite of his disappointment.⁴⁸ It would take another crisis tied to the politics of western territories and slavery to further weaken the Democrats and strengthen the Republicans in Illinois.

Dred Scott, Lecompton, and Illinois Politics, 1857 - 1860

During 1857 the politics of race intensified in Illinois, along with the rest of the nation. In February 1857, United States Supreme Court Justice Roger B. Taney wrote the court's ruling in the *Dred Scott v. Sandford* case. If Taney had intended his ruling to defuse the politics of slavery extension by preserving the interests of the South, he made a serious miscalculation. Instead, Republicans rallied in opposition to the ruling, while Douglas and his Northern Democratic supporters realized that they had to make an active defense of the principle of popular sovereignty.⁴⁹ Illinois Republicans and Illinois Democrats now had to take a strong public stance in regard to Taney's ruling.

The stunning pro-slavery logic of the *Dred Scott* ruling challenged Abraham Lincoln's moderate free soil position. Taney dealt with each of the three questions; he perverted historical facts in answering the first question by claiming that blacks were never part of the "sovereign people" who made the Constitution, thus Scott was not a United States citizen. With the second question, Taney declared that prolonged residence in a free territory did not legally free Scott from slavery. Finally, Taney dealt with the third question by stating that Congress never had any right to prohibit slavery in the territories. The effect of Taney's official opinion did not defuse the issue of slavery; instead, it intensified the controversy, with Republicans taking up the dissenting opinion of the other judges.⁵⁰

Lincoln seemed to have had a genuine concern that a future Supreme Court, based on the *Dred Scott* precedent, could force slavery upon Northern states. The *Dred Scott* ruling directly threatened Lincoln's belief that slavery contradicted inherent, natural rights as expressed in the Declaration of Independence. While he qualified his position

by claiming that blacks were not socially equal to whites, and therefore, not entitled to the same political rights that whites enjoyed, Lincoln never retreated from his belief that blacks were equally entitled to basic, natural rights. In vehemently protesting the *Dred Scott* ruling, Lincoln risked appearing radical. But as long as he consistently distinguished between natural rights and political rights, he could still maintain his moderate standing.⁵¹

Lincoln stated that while he disagreed with the *Dred Scott* decision, he would not advocate illegal resistance to the ruling. His protest was based on the premise of the Declaration of Independence, which stated that all men are created equal in regard to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. This argument could be taken by centrist Republicans to mean that all whites are equal in that white settlers could not truly pursue a life of liberty and happiness if they were forced to live with slavery. Egalitarian Republicans could take the argument further, insisting that all humans are created equal and that *everyone*, regardless of race, had the basic human rights to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. In the aftermath of the *Dred Scott* ruling a Republican editor in Urbana took notice of the fact that Republicans denounced Illinois' Black Laws as being unjust but denied that they sought their repeal:

The Republican party does not now and never has demanded the repeal of those laws [Black Laws]. It is true that certain papers acting with the party, upon their own responsibility, have taken occasion, as we did a few weeks since, to hold up some of the infamous portions, which are so obvious that not even Democrats will enforce them, to public execration.⁵²

Other Illinois Republicans followed Lincoln's example and did not hold back their opposition to the *Dred Scott* ruling:

Though Congress may restrict slavery in the Territories, it by no means follows that they have power to establish it. The general legislative power of Congress

over the Territories, though extended to a great variety of subjects is nevertheless limited by the general principles of our government, and the express prohibitions of the Constitution. It will hardly be pretended that they could establish a hereditary monarchy or an aristocracy there. As little can they create privileged orders of any sort. If they can make slaves at all, they may well make white ones as black. If they deprive one man of his liberty without due process of law, they may so deprive any number, or all, and thereby have an entire colony of slaves.

Republicans, such as the editor above, knew that the *Dred Scott* decision undermined their position on congressional authority over the territories. If Democrats wanted to, they could turn the Republicans' position against them; if Republicans insisted that Congress had authority in the territories concerning slavery, then Congress could use its authority to protect slave-owners' property in the territories. The *Dred Scott* decision forced Republicans to further qualify their position regarding congressional authority in the territories. Republicans took advantage of the controversy of the *Dred Scott* decision by publicizing the inconsistency seemingly forced upon Democrats who sought to preserve their principle of popular sovereignty in the face of a hostile Supreme Court ruling. On June 12, 1857, Douglas spoke to an Illinois grand jury in Springfield, declaring that he accepted the *Dred Scott* decision and that it did not negate his popular sovereignty solution to the slavery issue because he claimed that the right to enter territories with slaves was meaningless if territorial law refused to enforce this decision. However weak Douglas' attempt at reconciling popular sovereignty with the *Dred Scott* ruling, this so-called "Freeport Doctrine" delayed the worsening of the already existing split among Democrats. It was the Lecompton controversy the following year that really ripped at the cohesion of Democrats.⁵³ If Douglas was able to prevent the division among Democrats from worsening over Buchanan's patronage decisions, and then over the *Dred Scott* ruling, his party's division would explode over the Lecompton

constitution controversy, and this time very much at Douglas' own instigation. Finally, Douglas would publicly take a stand in opposition to President Buchanan.

Douglas almost strained himself in insisting that his principle of popular sovereignty was compatible with the *Dred Scott* ruling; at that time, he saw no reason to encourage division among his fellow party members. He was interested in preserving what strength the national Democratic party had left. But the corruption and injustice of the passage of the Lecompton constitution in Kansas was too much for Douglas to swallow. This was a bitter pill that he refused to take, even if the pill was being handed out by President Buchanan. In December 1857, as the Lecompton constitution moved toward passage, Douglas visited President Buchanan in person at the White House and angrily confronted him. Douglas warned the President that he would oppose him in Congress and Buchanan retorted that Douglas had supported him in his presidential campaign and that if Douglas renounced this past support, it could very well end his political career. Douglas was unmoved by Buchanan's implied threat; this was where Douglas would draw the line.⁵⁴

Douglas' commitment to popular sovereignty meant he could not condone the passage of the Lecompton constitution. Douglas had always argued in the past that white settlers of western territories had the constitutional right to decide for themselves on the issue of slavery and that he did not care whether slavery was permitted or not. What he insisted upon was that the voting among the settlers be constitutional and legitimate, free of corruption and unjust bullying. His outrage at the Lecompton constitution was not based on the fact that it would allow slavery. Rather, he denounced Lecompton on grounds that the voting process was illegitimate and defied constitutional law. Illinois

Democrats, along with Democrats across the nation, now had two positions to choose from. They could join the Douglas Democrats in insisting on supporting the letter and the spirit of popular sovereignty, or they could support the Buchanan Democrats who sought to placate Southern Democrats and Northern doughfaces (white Northerners accused of being strong sympathizers with Southern slave owners) by accepting the Lecompton constitution. Ironically, even as this party division ultimately weakened the national Democratic party, it strengthened Douglas' own support base in his own state, as most Illinois Democrats refused to betray their beloved political leader. In the spring and summer of 1858 the Douglas Democrats successfully controlled the party organization at the expense of Buchanan Democrats and at the Democratic state convention in Springfield adopted an unabashed anti-Lecompton platform. In similar conventions in the other districts of Illinois, Buchanan Democrats lost ground to Douglas Democrats. At first it seemed that Douglas had preserved unity among Democrats within Illinois, even if disunity was worsening in other states. As most Democrats came out publicly supporting Douglas, only office-holders and seekers and hardcore conservative Democrats continued to support Buchanan in Illinois.⁵⁵

The Republican party had to decide on its own official position. The combination of the *Dred Scott* ruling and the Lecompton crisis provided a wedge through which some of the more liberal principles of some Republicans began to become more influential. For instance, some Republicans began to seriously consider the feasibility of granting equal political rights to blacks, although not necessarily social equality. Here, an editor lambasted the *Chicago Times* for distorting the principles of the Republican party by claiming that the party advocated social equality for blacks:

The Buchanier press . . . attempt to fasten upon the Republican party the design to establish the social equality of negroes. We proceed to remark that no one can fail to see the villainous misrepresentation—bare-faced lie—of the *Times* in torturing that paragraph into proclamation of the intention of the Republican party for negro *social* equality. The paragraph itself proclaims only political equality, which in no way involves social equality. They have no connection whatever. How ridiculous would be a statute compelling individuals to receive on a social equality—to a participation in their social enjoyments and amusements, others whom they regard as socially inferior!

Republicans came under greater pressure after the *Dred Scott* ruling; it seemed that the Democrats were becoming more aggressive, and had even seemingly gained a strong upper-hand over the Republicans. And on top of that, the Lecompton constitution reared its ugly head. Under this pressure, some of the Republicans intensified their rhetoric against the extension of slavery to the point that some of them found the more liberal ideas more acceptable. But the Republican party was never a monolithic party; not all conservative Illinois Republicans changed their position to seriously consider political equality for blacks. One editor tried to put Democrats on the defensive by pointing out that it was slaveholders, not Republicans, who threatened their society with black equality:

We have frequently referred to the silly theory of negro equality held up to the world by Democratic papers, and by them charged upon the Republican party, and have endeavored to denounce the foul slander in becoming terms. We have heretofore shown, not only that this doctrine is no kin to Republicans, that it is gratuitous interpolation of its creed by foreign hands and lying lips, but that it is the legitimate fruit and inevitable result of a practical use of the doctrines of the self styled Democratic party—in short, that negro equality is Democracy in its matured state.

The editor continued by claiming that slaveholders elevated blacks to social equality by allowing interracial sexual intercourse. The same editor sought to reassure others that the majority of Republicans opposed the equality of blacks by pointing out what had happened recently in Iowa as an example:

Through the intercessions of a few of the friends of negro equality, proper, the Constitutional Convention of Iowa, allowed the people to say whether negroes should vote. The returns show that the few who actually favor such a state of things are the most contemptable in number. We suggest that they (Democrats) advertise for proposals for the biggest lie respecting our party, for the basis of another *argument*.⁵⁶

Illinois Republicans tried to mediate or neutralize the tension between their more liberal colleagues and the party's official, centrist position. Some Republicans fully endorsed the egalitarian idea of political equality for blacks after abolishing slavery, while others acknowledged that idea only to insist that it did not represent their party's official platform. And still other Republicans forthrightly denounced the egalitarian position.

In the U.S. House of Representatives on February 17, 1858, Owen Lovejoy vehemently spoke in opposition to the Dred Scott ruling as well as to admitting Kansas as a slave state:

[Slavery] claims the right to annihilate free schools—for this its very presence achieves—to hamper a free press, to defile the pulpit; to corrupt religion, and to stifle free thought and speech! . . . It claims the right to transform the free laborer, by a process of imperceptible degradation, to a condition only not worse than that of a slave.

Lovejoy repeated free soil rhetoric in opposing the extension of slavery into western territories insofar as it would be detrimental to free white settlers. Lovejoy could not afford to take a more liberal position at the time because he wanted to secure the re-nomination from his congressional district. On June 5, 1858, in Bloomington, David Davis and his supporters, who were deeply conservative Republicans, fiercely contested Lovejoy's renomination. The split between the majority Republicans and the minority Republicans sharpened once again but Davis and his supporters were not that strong of a minority group. In spite of Davis' bid for the third district seat, the Bloomington

convention renominated Lovejoy.⁵⁷ For politically pragmatic reasons, Lovejoy remained officially supportive of the moderate platform of his party.

During the June 1858 Republican state convention, Lincoln accepted the convention's nomination for the state's U.S. senatorial seat and thus to campaign against Douglas. In accepting the nomination, Lincoln presented his famous "house divided" speech. Lincoln's strong antislavery declaration unpleasantly surprised many conservative Republicans; it seemed to them as if Lincoln was slowly moving away from the party's moderate center. These ultra-conservative Republicans were thunderstruck by Lincoln's blistering attacks on President Buchanan, Supreme Court Justice Taney, President Pierce, and Senator Douglas, charging these four powerful men with a conspiracy in bringing about the Dred Scott ruling. Even so, Illinois Republicans such as those from the First Congressional District organized their convention and willingly reiterated Lincoln's themes:

Resolved, That the rejoicings of Buchanan and Douglas and their supporters at the triumph of Slavery extension, and the extension candidate, and the momentary defeat of Free Labor and Freedom's brave champion, Frank Blair, in St. Louis, the notorious result of fraud and illegal voting, are entirely natural and precisely what we should expect, but it is a triumph which will in the end, be worse for them than a defeat, while for us it will prove "the dark hour just before day," to be followed by a bright and glorious morning.⁵⁸

At the same time they tried to maintain a solid party position on the issue of extending slavery into western territories, Illinois Republicans felt a more direct threat to their own state:

The prospects of the new plank in the platform of the Democracy of Illinois seems to be in a flattering condition. The reader will understand by the term "New Plank" the proposition now before the people to admit slavery into Illinois. Since the *Gazette* has been somewhat notorious for advocating slavery among us, the Republican press of the state have very gradually spoken out on the subject, avowing opposition to the hideous proposition.⁵⁹

It seemed to Republicans that the Dred Scott ruling and acceptance of the Lecompton constitution by the Buchanan administration was encouraging Northern Democrats to take a more offensive, pro-slavery position. After all, if Congress could not stop slavery in the territories, then the same may have held true in regard to the states. In the eyes of Illinois Republicans, what could stop Illinois Democrats from reintroducing slavery in their free state? Until the idea of reintroducing slavery in Illinois died, Illinoisans not only had a stake in the controversy of introducing slavery into western territories, but they also had a stake in whether or not slavery would be reintroduced in their own free state; fortunately, the discussion of reintroducing slavery in Illinois subsided. Much more attention was focused on more concrete stakes, those of the senatorial campaign between Lincoln and Douglas in 1858, and the upcoming 1860 presidential campaign.

Illinois voters knew that the senatorial campaign of 1858 was an important contest, but that it was also only the beginning of the opening contest for the presidency of 1860. An editor in Rockford publicized the proceedings of his county's convention in September 1858:

Resolved, That the contest of the parties in this State represented by Lincoln and Douglas is the fore-runner of the National conflict of 1860, and that as Republicans we are fully sensible of the important bearing of the one upon the other.

Resolved, That carrying Slavery into all the Territories then in possession, or thereafter acquired, and fastening it immovably upon every State and the defense of such an extra-judicial monstrosity (reference to Dred Scott ruling), by Stephen A. Douglas, repels the intelligent and patriotic among his own constituents.

During this campaign, the same editor did not hesitate in implying a more egalitarian position in regard to race, while urging voters to get out and support the Republican ticket:

Two weeks from to-day the people of Illinois are to be called upon to give their verdict upon principles deeply involving a great question of justice and human rights.

They are to pass their opinion upon this man (reference to Douglas) who knows no distinction of right or wrong in slavery, and declares, that he "cares not whether it be voted up or voted down;"—who says that men have a right to enslave human beings if they desire to;—a man who declares our immoral Declaration of Independence does not mean that all men have the right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," but only the white race.

The Rockford editor quoted above expressed the more egalitarian position that was more common among northern Illinoisans. The social and economic differences between northern and southern Illinois still had a strong impact upon the politics of race. During the famous seven debates between Lincoln and Douglas, Lincoln insisted that the campaign fundamentally was about whether or not slavery was to be extended into the western territories, and that Republicans saw slavery as a moral wrong, while Douglas and his supporters did not see slavery as a wrong. Douglas countered by claiming that the debates concerned the principle of popular sovereignty and that no moral question regarding slavery itself ought to be discussed. The debates covered northern, central, and southern Illinois and as the two politicians traveled, speaking at one location to the next, the contest was particularly intense in the central counties. Past settlement patterns of Illinois, as discussed above, have created sharp distinctions between the northern and southern regions; the central region was the meeting ground of the different groups of voters, creating an area of more intense competition between politicians⁶⁰

The Douglas Democrats may have enjoyed stronger support than the Buchanan Democrats did in Illinois, but that did not stop Buchanan's supporters from voicing their opinion, nor from organizing their own political meetings. While Douglas had to contend with Republicans, Buchanan Democrats organized their own opposition to Douglas, such

as the political meeting planned for October 20, 1858 in the Fourth Congressional

District:

Senator Douglas says he deemed it his duty as a representative of the State of Illinois to resist with all his energies and with whatever of ability he could command, the effort of the Democratic Party of the Union, through the Representatives of Congress to admit Kansas as a sovereign State. He who has once betrayed the party cannot be trusted with a leadership again—at least while he glories in his treason.

Other Buchanan Democrats organized in the Eighth Congressional District in October

1858:

The National Democracy of the eight congressional district met in convention at Belleville yesterday, and unanimously nominated Hon. Thomas M. Hope for congress. In the evening a mass meeting was held in the court house, which was crowded almost to suffocation. Dr. Charles Leib, of Chicago, spoke for nearly two hours. He devoted himself to the work of skinning Douglas.

Douglas' main challenge came from the southern counties where Buchanan Democrats had retained much of their strength. The Georgia congressman, Alexander H. Stephens, attempted to help close the schism for Douglas by appealing to southern Illinoisans to support Douglas. When Stephens' mission failed, Democrats from the southern border states mounted hustings (speeches/rallies) in southern Illinois in favor of Douglas.⁶¹ The southern region of Illinois was a fierce battleground between the two Democratic camps. Douglas won the senatorial campaign against Lincoln and overcame opposition from Buchanan Democrats. The defeat of Lincoln did not mean that the Republican party lacked sufficient strength; he would move onto even bigger stakes in only two years.

Douglas did not rest on his laurels and wallow in self-congratulatory bliss. While he was very much happy with his victory, he knew that there was much work to be done to try to heal the schism within his own party. For the September issue of *Harper's Magazine*, Douglas publicized what became his famous doctrine on popular sovereignty

in an attempt to show that all Democrats could support popular sovereignty without giving in to the extremes of abolitionism or proslavery aggression. An editor from Belleville appreciated this attempt by Douglas:

Mr. Douglas has written a long article for *Harper's Magazine* of September, which is now out, on the relative metes and bounds of the Federal and local Governments; including the doctrine of popular sovereignty. This paper we have read just read attentively and carefully, with profound satisfaction. In fact Douglas is a magnificent man! He not only has no superiors, but he has no equal in America. From this onward, whether he ever is made President or not, his name will stand fully up with that of Calhoun, Clay, and Webster, as an expounder of constitutional law.

This editor either forgot or ignored the conflict between Calhoun and Douglas in the past, but there was no question that he fully supported popular sovereignty as propounded by Douglas. Douglas also effectively worked to garner support for his candidacy for the presidency in 1860. A Democratic meeting in Decatur on October 1, 1859 fully supported Douglas:

2d. *Resolved*—That on the great issue of that year (reference to Democratic convention in Cincinnati in 1856), the question of slavery in the territories, we maintain now, so sincerely stated and emphatically endorsed by Mr. Buchanan in his letter of acceptance, “that the people of a territory, like those of a State, shall decide for themselves whether slavery shall or shall not exist within their limits. 4th. *Resolved*—That Stephen A. Douglas, by his bold, energetic, manly, and patriotic advocacy of that great principle, “as ancient as free government itself,” places himself still higher in our esteem and increases our desire to see him in charge of the national helm.

Unfortunately, however, Douglas' efforts to heal the divisions within his party while campaigning for the presidency failed. In late 1859 and early 1860 Douglas Democrats and Buchanan Democrats dramatized their bitter division when Douglas supporters in Illinois held their own convention in which they opposed a test of party loyalty based on pro-slavery measures. This opened cracks for the later national Democratic convention in Charleston, South Carolina.⁶²

In contrast, Republican unity seemed to have strengthened with their national convention in Chicago in 1860. The national Republican convention experienced the incredible rise of support for Abraham Lincoln's nomination as the presidential candidate for their party. Even though Seward had put up a good fight in contesting the nomination, the more conservative representatives of states such as Indiana, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Illinois supported Lincoln out of an aversion to Seward's more radical reputation. Horace Greeley's effort to block Seward, and the determined, unified efforts of the Illinois delegation, contributed to Lincoln's successful nomination. While Lyman Trumbull was not personally present at the national convention, he sent clear instructions to political associates who were there "to throw their support to Lincoln." Lincoln won the presidency with the majority of electoral votes, although he failed to win the majority of the popular vote. Douglas, one of the more powerful Democratic leaders in Illinois who had influenced his adopted state's politics for so long, expressed support for Lincoln's legitimate victory. On June 3, 1861, with the country in the midst of the Civil War, Douglas died from serious complications due to rheumatism.⁶³ Abraham Lincoln won the presidency in November 1860 but he knew that he was in the fight of his life, to preserve the United States.

Conclusion

In antebellum Illinois the politics of race resurfaced with a referendum on a new constitution that included the proposed black exclusion law in 1848, and really took center stage in 1853 when the Illinois General Assembly formally finalized black exclusion into law. John A. Logan, a Democrat, advanced his own political career by helping to make black exclusion a reality in 1853. Owen Lovejoy and Abraham Lincoln

held different positions as Republicans in regard to race and slavery, but they could still agree on opposing the extension of slavery into western territories. Lyman Trumbull and Stephen A. Douglas were both Democrats throughout most of their antebellum political career, yet toward the end of the antebellum era, Trumbull moved from being an anti-Nebraska Democrat to a Republican. Douglas, on the other hand, remained a devout Democrat but he made enemies within his own party when he introduced his Kansas-Nebraska bill in 1854, and then when he took a position on the *Dred Scott* ruling and the Lecompton constitution that was at odds with his party's Southern and doughface wings. These prominent Illinois politicians were personifications of how the dynamics of the politics of race played out in their state, shaping the decisions they made and the actions they took. By 1861, the politics of race in Illinois, as in the rest of the nation, was about to explode.

NOTES

- ¹ Benjamin Drew, *The Refugee: Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada Related by Themselves*, (Boston, 1856), 260 – 270, 276 – 280, 301 – 305, 314 – 320.
- ² *General Laws of the State of Illinois Passed by the Eighteenth General Assembly*, (Springfield, 1853), 57, 58. At the same time, the same law did allow for convicted blacks to appeal to a circuit court within a strict time limit, and on condition of paying bond and security that was double the amount of the fine.
- ³ For more information on this convention, see Eugene Berwanger, *The Frontier Against Slavery: Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy*, (Urbana, 1971), 44, 49 – 50 and John Rozett, “Racism and Republican Emergence in Illinois, 1848 – 1860: A Re-Evaluation of Republican Negrophobia,” *Civil War History*, (22: 2, 1976), 101 – 102, 111 – 114; for more information on how this resolution was initially non-binding, see Richard K. Hines, “Settlement, Race Politics and the Civil War: The Political Transformation of Illinois,” (PhD dissertation, Washington State University Press, 2001), 138, 143 – 144.
- ⁴ In fact, Illinois passed a law forbidding interracial marriage between whites and blacks; see Berwanger, *Frontier Against Slavery*, 36.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.
- ⁶ For information on Logan’s proposal, see *Ibid.*, 49; Hines, “Settlement, Race Politics and the Civil War,” (PhD dissertation), 148, 149.
- ⁷ Berwanger, *Frontier Against Slavery* 48; for editorial account of Gillespie, see *Bloomington Intelligencer*, March 9, 1853; for editorial account of Gridley, see *Bloomington Intelligencer*, March 9, 1853; for editorial account of Blodget, see *Ottawa Free Trader*, February 12, 1853.
- ⁸ Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War*, (New York 1995 edition), 9, 16, 23.
- ⁹ For editorial examples of these other issues, see: *Springfield Illinois Journal*, January 6, 1853; *Shoaff’s Family Gazette*, February 4, 1853; *Tri-Weekly Press*, February 12, 1853; *Central Illinois Times*, September 2, 1853; for more information on how the convention movement created cultural differences in Illinois, see James Simeone, *Democracy and Slavery in Frontier Illinois: The Bottomland Republic*, (DeKalb, 2000), 5 – 7, 204, 154 – 155.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.
- ¹¹ *Ottawa Republic*, March 5, 1853.
- ¹² For more information on the development of regional differences in early Illinois, see James E. Davis, *Frontier Illinois*, (Indianapolis, 1998), 159 – 160, 190, 247 – 249.
- ¹³ Hines, “Settlement, Race Politics and the Civil War,” (PhD dissertation), 20.
- ¹⁴ Jean Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-nineteenth Century*, (New York, 1998), 252.
- ¹⁵ *Springfield Illinois State Register*, February 17, 1853; *Illinois State Register*, May 13, 1853.
- ¹⁶ For more information on how whites conceptualized stereotypes of blacks through mass media, see Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America*, (New York, 1990). For more information on stock characters of minstrel shows, see Baker, *Affairs of Party*, 249 – 250; *Springfield Illinois State Register*, September 26, 1853.
- ¹⁷ *Central Illinois Times*, December 2, 1853; *Jonesboro Gazette*, May 4, 1853; for another example, see *Springfield Illinois Journal*, March 4, 1853; *Jonesboro Gazette*, August 31, 1853; *Springfield Illinois State Register*, September 19, 1853; *Illinois State Register*, May 20, 1853.
- ¹⁸ For more information on editorial protest of black exclusion law see Berwanger, *Frontier Against Slavery*, 51; *Bloomington Intelligencer*, March 16, 1853; *Ottawa Free Trader*, March 5, 1853; *Rock River Democrat*, March 1, 1853.
- ¹⁹ *Rockford Forum*, September 6, 1848; for more information, read Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*.
- ²⁰ *Ottawa Free Trader*, February 12, 1853; *Ottawa Free Trader*, February 26, 1853; *Ottawa Free Trader*, March 5, 1853; for an example of an egalitarian liberal prior to the founding of the Republican Party, see Edward Magdol, *Owen Lovejoy: Abolitionist in Congress*, (New York: 1967).

²¹ James Bilotta, *Race and the Rise of the Republican Party, 1848 – 1865*, (Xlibris Corporation, 2002 edition), 25.

For an example of an exception to such racist behavior and thinking, see John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race*, (Cambridge, 2002).

²² For more information on the fundamental values underlying free labor ideology, see Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 38 – 40, 50, 56 – 57.

²³ Charles A. Gliozzo, "John Jones: A Study of a Black Chicagoan," *Illinois Historical Journal*, (80: 3, autumn 1987), 180 – 181; *Proceedings of the Black State Conventions, 1840 – 1865*, (Philadelphia, 1980), 61.

²⁴ Michael Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s*, (New York, 1983 edition), 4 – 6.

²⁵ *Springfield Daily Register*, February 23, 1853; *Ibid.*; *Ibid.*, February 25, 1853; for another example of support of this law, see *Weekly Rock Island Republican*, March 9, 1853; *Springfield Illinois State Register*, September 16, 1853; *Springfield Daily Register*, July 7, 1853; for more information from Johannsen's citations, see Robert Walker Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, (Urbana, 1997), 387 – 389, 372.

²⁶ William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852 – 1856*. (New York, 1987), 122, 106 – 108.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 113 – 115; Magdol, *Owen Lovejoy*, 115, 116; for information on Lincoln's involvement with the Decatur editorial Republican convention, see Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party*, 143, 144.

²⁸ Robert W. Johannsen, "Stephen A. Douglas and the Territories in the Senate," *The Frontier, the Union, and Stephen A. Douglas*, (1989), 104, 105; Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, 414, 415.

²⁹ For an Illinois editor's comments on Trumbull's shift in party allegiance, see *St. Clair Weekly Tribune*, September 30, 1854.

³⁰ Mark M. Krug, *Lyman Trumbull: Conservative Radical*, (New York: A.S. Barnes & Co., 1965), 61 – 64, 89 – 91.

³¹ *Springfield Illinois Journal*, September 1, 1854; *Springfield Illinois Journal*, Sep. 1, 1854; Rockford, *The Rock River Democrat*, September 5, 1854.

³² Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party*, 122, 123; *Urbana Union*, Oct. 19, 1854; *Ibid.*; *Ibid.*

³³ *Peoria Weekly Democratic Press*, September 6, 1854; *Ibid.*; *Peoria Weekly Democratic Press*, Sep. 6, 1854.

³⁴ Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, 448, 451 – 452, 455, 456.

³⁵ *Urbana Union*, Oct. 26, 1854.

³⁶ *Weekly Rock Island Republican*, September 6, 1854; *Weekly Rock Island Republican*, September 13, 1854; *Springfield Illinois State Register*, October 5, 1854.

³⁷ *Springfield Illinois Journal*, September 19, 1854.

³⁸ *Springfield Daily Register*, September 13, 1855.

³⁹ For an example of Democratic expression of the principle of popular sovereignty, see *Springfield Daily Register*, October 17, 1855. Even given the strong potential of Democrats gaining ground on the position of popular sovereignty, they had their own internal party problems – see Holt, *Settlement, Race Politics and the Civil War*, 14 and Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*, 175; *The Daily Argus*, May 29, 1856.

⁴⁰ *Springfield Daily Register*, February 14, 1856; *Springfield Daily Register*, May 27, 1856.

⁴¹ *Rock Island Advertiser*, February 27, 1856; *Ibid.*; *Rock River Democrat*, November 4, 1856; *The Urbana Union*, May 22, 1856; *Rock River Democrat*, September 2, 1856.

⁴² *Springfield The Journal*, May 30, 1856; Magdol, *Owen Lovejoy*, 145, 147.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 154 – 156; For an example of such denigration, see *St. Clair Weekly Tribune*, September 6, 1856.

⁴⁴ *Proceedings, 1840 – 1865*, 80.

⁴⁵ Leonard L. Richards, *The Slave Power: The Free North and Southern Domination, 1780 – 1860*, (Baton Rouge, 2000), 117, 118; for information on minstrelsy's cultural impact on racism, read Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America*, (New York, 1990); *Rock River Democrat*, September 2, 1856; for more information on "scientific" racism, see Bilotta, *Race and the Rise of the Republican Party*, 78; for more information Douglass' reaction to Republican party, see Rozett, "Racism and Republican Emergence in Illinois," *Civil War History*, (22: 2, 1976), 104; *Rock River Democrat*, September 30, 1856; *Urbana, Union*, August 14, 1856; for more information on centrist Republican position, see Holt, *Political Crisis of the 1850s*, 191.

⁴⁶ Michael Holt, "Making and Mobilizing the Republican Party, 1854 – 1860," *The Birth of the Grand Old Party: The Republicans' First Generation*, (2002), 34, 35.

⁴⁷ *Springfield The Journal*, June 6, 1856.

⁴⁸ For examples on how Democrats used idea of popular sovereignty to combat charges of being pro-slavery, see *Springfield Daily Register*, May 27, 1856; *St. Clair Weekly Tribune*, August 9, 1856; *St. Clair Weekly Tribune*, August 23, 1856; Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, 492, 493.

Arthur C. Cole, *The Era of the Civil War, 1848 – 1870*, (Urbana, 1987 edition), 54 – 55; Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, 279, 103.

Ibid., 554 – 556.

⁴⁹ For information on the three questions that concerned the Supreme Court, see James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*, (New York, 1988), 171.

⁵⁰ For more information on Taney's ruling, see *Ibid.*, 174 – 176.

⁵¹ See information on 1852 case, *Lemmon v. The People* and how this case might have led to a later ruling in *Ibid.*, 180, 181; Johannsen, "Lincoln, Liberty, and Equality," *Frontier, Union, and Douglas*, 260, 261.

⁵² Cole, *Era of the Civil War*, 154, 155; *Urbana Union*, September 3, 1857.

⁵³ *Rock River Democrat*, October 27, 1857; for reactions to Democrats' reactions of the Supreme Court ruling, see *Rock River Democrat*, November 24, 1858; Cole, *Era of the Civil War*, 154.

McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 163 – 165.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁵⁵ Cole, *Era of the Civil War*, 161, 162; for an example of resolutions, see *Springfield Illinois State Register*, September 10, 1858; Cole, *Era of the Civil War*, 158, 160; *Peoria Daily Democratic Union*, October 5, 1858.

⁵⁶ *Rock River Democrat*, August 18, 1857; *Urbana Union*, September 17, 1857; *Ibid.*, September 3, 1857.

⁵⁷ Magdol, *Owen Lovejoy*, 178; *Ibid.*, 194 – 196.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 201; *Rock River Democrat*, August 17, 1858.

⁵⁹ *Urbana Union*, August 20, 1857.

⁶⁰ *Rock River Democrat*, September 21, 1858; *Rock River Democrat*, October 19, 1858; Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, 666, 655.

⁶¹ *Peoria Daily Democratic Union*, October 5, 1858; *Ibid.*, October 5, 1858; Cole, *Era of the Civil War*, 178.

⁶² *Belleville Weekly Democrat*, September 3, 1859; *Ibid.*, October 15, 1859; Cole, *Era of the Civil War*, 187, 188.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 191 – 192; Krug, *Lyman Trumbull*, 160; Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, 871, 872.

Chapter 2: Illinois and the Crucible of War

On February 1, 1865, the Illinois House of Representatives voted to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment by a vote of 48 to 28 and the Illinois Senate did the same by a vote of 18 to 6. A few days later, on February 4, the House voted to repeal their state's Black Laws by a vote of 45 to 31 and the Senate did the same by a vote of 14 to 6.¹ The Civil War had wrought dramatic upheaval not only for the Southern states in terms of wartime destruction and disruption, but also in the Northern states in the form of rapid social and economic changes. The late antebellum period in Illinois saw the increasing influence of the politics of race on shifting social attitudes regarding race relations. The pressure of the Civil War affected every Northern state along with the Southern states, and thus, greatly accelerated the shift in Illinois towards broadening social support for extending blacks at least some basic rights. This social change developed through the issues of emancipation, the repeal of Illinois' Black Laws, and the recruitment of black soldiers. The emancipation of black slaves and their actions that demonstrated their own humanity and the courageous actions of black soldiers in the Union army increasingly undermined the racist attitude of white Illinoisans. When emancipated slaves clearly showed that they were not docile dupes of their masters, and took decisive action on their own to assert their freedom, blacks showed white Illinoisans the illegitimacy of racist stereotypes. When black Union soldiers took part in storming entrenched positions of the enemy, or directly participated in battles in other ways, white Illinoisans often took notice. But this shift would not occur without challenges and obstacles.

During the 1860 presidential campaign, racism was not monopolized by Democrats; plenty of Republicans also took up the banner of white supremacy in order to appeal to voters. Republican politician Hinton Rowan Helper had his book, *The Impending Crisis of the South and How to Meet It*, published in 1857 with the endorsement of 68 Republican congressmen. The book lambasted the South and the Democratic party for upholding slavery while at the same time denigrated blacks as being inferior to whites. The book was so popular among Republicans that it was republished and widely circulated during the 1860 campaign. The appeal to white supremacy must have worked to some extent, because during the 1860 campaign Republicans made a fourfold increase in votes over Fremont's number of votes in 1856 in the southern counties of Illinois despite threats of violence from Democrats in that region of the state. This is not to say that Republicans' use of white supremacy was the only factor in this dramatic increase in votes in southern Illinois, but considering the more pro-Southern and hence, more proslavery sentiment of southern Illinois, the appeal to white supremacy certainly must have been one of the key factors.²

In addition to Republican gains in southern Illinois, other regions of Illinois more strongly supported the Republican party and Abraham Lincoln. Even with full support for the Republican party, it was not unusual that racism blended with such support. A Republican editor from Bloomington clipped an article in which the author sarcastically lambasted the "religious worshipping" of Stephen A. Douglas and at the same time, expressed his own racist thoughts:

And the disciples of Stephen spake unto them saying, that they did not care whether niggers were voted upside down, or downside up, it made no difference. They don't care a rod for the Police Magistrate of the territories, but would

pasture their niggers there, on Uncle Sam's farm. And because we wouldn't give the niggers pasture, they waxed with wrath.

The editor's racist conviction, however, seems to conflict with other articles published in the newspaper. The editors copied a speech made by Joseph Bedinger, in which the speaker protested slavery as being utterly unjust after referring to the idealism of the Declaration of Independence:

Hence involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime, can exist only as an overt act of physical or brute force, or an unjust enactment of human law. It is however true that the power of an unjust law, yes, even brute force, may deprive a man of his liberty, but nevertheless his *right* to it is as immutable as the eternal God that gave it. Hence the Constitution cannot recognize slavery except as an unjust and cruel wrong.

Bedinger believed that the general principle of human rights was at stake for everyone if slavery was allowed to expand into the territories. "It seems clear," he said, "that if we concede to the American people the right of imposing slavery upon our fellow man, and the destruction of those unalienable rights common to all men, that our own liberty and the liberty of posterity are no longer safe."³ How can we explain such apparent conflict between racism and egalitarian principles? In any case, such inconsistency or even hypocrisy as shown above is an example of how racism versus egalitarianism created tension within the ranks of the Republican party. This ambiguity was prevalent throughout Illinois.

With Lincoln's electoral victory the national crisis worsened. During the transition period to Lincoln's official inauguration, the Union fell apart as seven Southern states seceded and formed the Confederate States of America. By the middle of April 1861 Confederate forces had opened fire upon Fort Sumter in the harbor of Charleston.

After years of Southern bravado and arrogant threats, rebellion of the Southern states had finally become a reality.

There were extreme reactions among some Illinoisans in the aftermath of these events. Some Illinois Democrats boldly declared that the Southern states were right to secede, as the Republicans had taken extreme measures antagonistic to white Southerners. As expected, sympathy with the Southern states among Illinoisans was particularly strong in the southern region of Illinois. Even radical Illinois abolitionists such as Rev. G. W. Bassett of Ottawa argued that secession of the Southern states was a good thing, because the Northern states would be freed from the stigma of slavery. But most Illinoisans expressed reactions somewhere in the middle, agreeing with Lincoln that the Union must be preserved through appeals of graciousness towards the Southern states in light of the Republican victory without retreating from their principle of excluding slavery from the western territories. Only if that did not work would the North use force against the Southern rebel states. The Illinois delegation in Washington assembled and unanimously resolved that the "Union must and shall be preserved."⁴

Other Illinoisans valued the preservation of the Union, but with compromises. In January 1861 Illinois Republican Congressman William Kellogg (Peoria district), proposed a compromise measure that included an amendment to the U.S. Constitution to preserve slavery. Fellow Illinois Republicans were disgusted with Kellogg's proposition and after repudiating his compromise, read him out of their party. Meanwhile, Illinois Democrats such as Congressman John A. McClernand and Isaac N. Morris led their state convention to deny the constitutional right to secede but remained open to conciliatory measures in order to preserve the Union. Other Illinois Democrats such as James W.

Singleton openly sympathized with the seceding Southern states.⁵ After prominent Illinois Democrats such as John A. Logan and Stephen A. Douglas came out in favor of fighting for the Union, the initial sympathy for the Confederacy among southern Illinoisans cooled off and was replaced with loyalty to the Union once war became a reality. In fact, southern Illinois counties usually surpassed the required quotas of recruits, which challenged Republican charges of copperheadism and disloyalty.⁶ In spite of the regional differences between northern and southern Illinois, and even in spite of serious resistance from some southern Illinoisans who sympathized with the Confederacy, Illinois remained a united Northern state, fighting for the preservation of the Union.

By the summer of 1862, both sides of the Civil War had buckled down; each side realized that the other was deadly serious about winning the war. It was also during this time that Illinoisans held a referendum on a new state constitution. The new state constitution submitted for referendum, which was drafted by a Democratic majority, included amendments reinforcing the state's preexisting Black Laws that prohibited black immigration. The new constitution failed by 16,051 votes, but the separate provisions regarding black exclusion won by a large majority of 107,650. An even larger majority vote of 176,271 killed a proposed amendment granting suffrage to black men.⁷ This virulent northern racism would seriously hurt Illinois Republicans in the fall election of the same year, as these racist Illinoisans expressed strong negative reaction to Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. Illinois' constitutional referendum interplayed with the issues of resettling contrabands (confiscated slaves) into Illinois, controversy over emancipation, and the controversy of recruiting blacks as Union soldiers. The

referendum included a proposal to strengthen enforcement of Illinois' preexisting black exclusion law.

Illinois' Constitutional Referendum

Southern Illinois experienced the immigration of free blacks and contrabands much more directly and more frequently than did northern Illinois. In this context, southern Illinoisans often expressed strong support for the proposed state constitution, such as this editor of the *Advocate* of Waterloo: "Every Democrat, every white man, who believes in equal rights among white men, and who opposes negro immigration to the State and negro equality, will vote for the new Constitution!"⁸ The same editor went to greater lengths in expressing racist motivation for supporting this new constitution:

The new Constitution guards against negro immigration to the State, and generally against negro equality. Illinois Abolitionists is driven to desperate shifts. It sees "the handwriting on the wall," and the Lovejoys and Arnolds, from their seats in Congress . . . are franking lying documents that their negro pets may not be prejudiced on the 17th June by the votes of the white men of Illinois.⁹

Other southern Illinois editors, such as that of the *Weekly Gazette* in Jonesboro, chimed in with similar sentiments, believing that the interests of white Illinoisans were at stake during the referendum: "The Republican party leaders are straining every nerve to dragoon the people to vote against it [proposed constitution]. Remember, a full vote secures you a new constitution, which . . . keeps all sorts of negroes and mulattoes from pouring into the State." In the same issue the editor denied that Republicans had the interest of free white laborers at heart: "They [Republicans] have always professed a perfect horror of negroes, and claimed to be the especial advocates and friends of free white labor. Now, however, we find them, as a party, arrayed against the new

Constitution, which seeks to exclude negroes from our midst, and ennoble and maintain the price of white labor.”¹⁰ While Illinois editors often discussed other issues related to the constitutional referendum, such as new banking laws, and laws concerning internal improvements, southern Illinoisans were strongly motivated by the possible increased migration of free blacks and contrabands into the state.

Illinoisans did not have a monolithic position on the new constitution; while regional culture was an important factor, another obvious factor was political party affiliation. Illinois Democrats in the northern and central regions could be as staunchly racist in supporting the new constitution as were southern Illinoisans, as shown by this central Illinois editor of the *Champaign County Democrat* in Urbana:

The negroes are coming amongst us by thousands; and if the new constitution be not adopted and Abolitionism crushed out, our State will be overrun by the emancipated slaves. Our prisons will not be sufficient to contain the criminals. The truth is, we do not want any negroes in this State. And we are in favor of the adoption of the new constitution.

A Springfield editor of the *Illinois State Register* agreed with House Rep. William Richardson’s racist motivation for supporting the new constitution and printed a copy of a speech made by Richardson:

Throughout the state of Illinois abolitionists are opposing this constitution, and democratic and conservative men are advocating its adoption. Four-fifths, and perhaps nine-tenths, of all the men that carry muskets and knapsacks in the army of the west are opposed to the doctrines of negro equality and abolition.

Even as far north as Ottawa, a Democratic editor of the *Free Trader* was motivated by racism to support the new constitution:

The republicans in that region [Marshall and Putnam counties] deserve commendation at least for candor. They go the pure article, as understood by Sumner, Lovejoy, Wade, and all the bright lights of their party. Here is the ticket, *verbatim*:

“Against new constitution.
 Against the exclusion of negroes and mulattoes.
 For the right of suffrage and office to negroes and mulattoes.”

Racist support for the new constitution knew no boundaries of regional division within Illinois. The politics of race in Illinois influenced its constitutional referendum and in the end, the new constitution was defeated, although a large majority favored the amendment for excluding blacks from migrating into the state.

Reactions to Emancipation, Black Recruitment, and The Thirteenth Amendment

There was only a short reprieve between the racial controversy during the Illinois constitutional question and the controversy of emancipation because, in mid-September, President Lincoln announced his Emancipation Proclamation. Even before the general populace had any knowledge of Lincoln's plan for emancipation, Americans debated the issue. The U.S. Congress passed bills in May 1862 that abolished slavery in all U.S. territories and Washington D.C. and prohibited slavery anywhere the federal government had jurisdiction (such as federal dockyards and forts). An Illinois editor of the *Rock River Democrat* in Rockford expressed his own opinion of the new bill:

It [U.S. Congress] has passed the bill originally introduced by Mr. Arnold, abolishing and prohibiting slavery in all the Territories of the United States. This bill in no way interferes with slavery in any of the States where it exists by local law, its only object being to withdraw the countenance of the Federal Government from the institution of slavery. This is the doctrine we have always held to since we cast our first vote.

Many Illinois editors held a conservative aversion to emancipating Southern blacks, arguing that the preservation of the Union must remain the only priority. Such were the sentiments of an Ottawa editor:

The crime of the Secessionists has not exonerated the mischievous and petticoats class of fanatic Abolitionists from a share of the blame of the war. Abolitionism is no more virtuous or patriotic because the treason of others has been less overt than theirs. The Union people have been fighting the rebellion with an Abolition enemy in their rear Let us save the Union first, and resume, if necessary, our political quarrels afterwards [reference to issue of slavery]. One thing at a time, we say.

An editor of the *Illinois State Register* in Springfield expressed similar fears of emancipation:

We say there are abundant evidences of a determination on the part of ultra republican politicians to assume the chief management of the war. It was seen in Gov. Andrew's insolent letter, wherein he demanded a "policy," meaning an abolition policy, as preliminary to the furnishing of troops to crush out the rebellion. No unprejudiced person can have failed to see in the last few months the foreshadowing of a systematic conspiracy against the conservative course of the president.

An editor of the *Waterloo Advocate* in southern Illinois echoed the same conservative slant in opposing abolishment of slavery:

As to the objects of the war, the President does stand by the Constitution, and he stands by it under a "pressure" to compel him to do otherwise which has required some nerve to resist. It is the "Union as it was" which the President would save, and he would save it under the Constitution.

According to John A. Logan, the pressure of appealing to Illinois men in the southern region of the state to enlist in the army was especially complicated by the issue of abolition:

In sickness or in health, in the camp or on the battlefield, the best place for the young soldier is by the side of the veteran. But there are some who say I can't go this is a war to *free the niggers!* Yet the negroes are getting free pretty fast, it is not done by the army, but they are *freeing themselves* and if this war continues five years not a slave will be left in the whole South. If the question were presented to me as to which should live, the Union or slavery, I would say the Union with my last breath. The Union is worth everything.¹¹

Such conservatives extended full support to President Lincoln in their belief that Lincoln had the same conservative, even racist, abhorrence toward abolishing slavery. While the

Republican party had its own internal tensions to deal with, so did the Democratic party. Democratic politicians such as Logan had to maintain a balance in fully supporting preservation of the Union through war without incidentally advocating for the emancipation of slaves. Such conservatives believed they could support Lincoln's war effort as long as he did not implement any policy of emancipation.

According to historian Allen Guelzo, these editors seriously misunderstood Lincoln's viewpoint on slavery and his intended plan to end it through constitutional means, especially given Lincoln's fear of future pro-slavery rulings based on the precedent of the *Dred Scott* ruling as discussed in previous chapter. Guelzo argues that Lincoln hesitated in confiscating slaves from Confederate slave-owners not because he tolerated slavery, but because Lincoln wanted to abolish slavery in a way that would ensure the continued freedom of freed blacks under any future possible Supreme Court ruling after the end of the war. For this reason, according to Guelzo, Lincoln denied Generals Fremont and Butler their attempts to unilaterally confiscate slaves solely on their own terms. While Lincoln opposed three attempted means to free slaves (contraband, confiscation, and martial law), he proposed a fourth way that he believed would be able to hold its ground constitutionally after the war ended. This fourth means involved gradual emancipation with compensation based on the Delaware proposition as a model.¹² Because Lincoln simply declared that he would save the Union with or without slavery in response to Greeley's famous open letter, conservative Illinois editors mistakenly assumed that Lincoln opposed *any* means of abolishing slavery in the states. Thus, Lincoln's position was misconstrued by Democrats and conservative Republicans as being opposed to emancipation. These people did not realize that Lincoln was

working toward a viable means for such a policy, to ensure that it would endure after the war ended.

This misunderstanding of Lincoln's intentions created problems for both the Democratic and the Republican parties. For the Democrats, the internal tension lay in maintaining unwavering support for the Union during a time of war while also opposing the destruction of slavery in the face of Democrats who favored peace on some of the terms that the rebel states could accept. For the Republicans the internal tension came between racially liberal advocates within the party who were impatient with Lincoln, believing he opposed any form of emancipation and conservative Republicans, who wanted Lincoln to avoid implementing any policy of emancipation. This was one of the dynamics of the politics of race in Illinois; internal party tension that was symptomatic of shifting positions in regards to the status of blacks in a restored United States.

In September 1862 the immediate reaction to Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and of his plan to make it official by January 1, 1863 varied. In northern Illinois, some editors had no qualms in defending Lincoln:

And now because President Lincoln, as Commander-in-Chief of the Army, in prosecuting the war against these enemies of the human race, as well as of our own government, has seen fit to issue a proclamation threatening these rebels you brand him a usurper—you say he is threatening our personal liberties—you say he is going to free the blacks and enslave the whites—you are using every little pettifogging artifice to destroy the confidence of the people.

This was not a cautious, conservative or conditional support of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, for in another issue, the same editor even expressed full support of more egalitarian principles. He did so indirectly in endorsing Owen Lovejoy:

Mr. Lovejoy is a true and strong man, with a fast hold upon the affections of the people, as his vote shows. Henderson ran well among the democrats, but very poorly among the republicans. This is all very natural, as conservatism is another

name for pro-slavery democracy. Let the friends of freedom look with a jealous eye upon all who try to hide their real aims under the guise of conservatism.

With such phrases as “enemies of human race” (implying commonality between whites and blacks), and “friends of freedom,” along with his denunciatory phrase “pro-slavery democracy,” the editor seemed to have supported Lovejoy not only out of party loyalty, but out of adherence to the principle of justice for Southern blacks. President Lincoln’s announcement in September 1862 of his intention to issue his Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863 greatly risked alienating voters just before the state elections in the fall of 1862. But as illustrated above, for some voters, this never changed their viewpoint of Lincoln or other Republican leaders. Another northern Illinois editor in Rockford expressed his full support of Lincoln’s decision:

The great heart of loyal Americans all over this broad land, those who were for the government without *any conditions*, felt a pulsation of life, hope and joy that words cannot express, when they read President Lincoln’s Proclamation. An institution that has caused this unholy rebellion will soon be made to feel the full force of a terrible vengeance. The fiat has gone forth, and the People shout, AMEN!

In the context of the final phase of the fall elections, the Springfield Union Convention in October proclaimed the following as one of its resolutions:

That we cordially endorse the proclamation of freedom and confiscation of the President, issued September 22d, 1862, as a great and important war measure, essential to the salvation of the Union, and we hereby pledge all truly loyal citizens to sustain him in its complete and faithful enforcement.¹³

Racially liberal Republicans supported the Emancipation Proclamation not only as a viable military means to undermine the enemy’s wartime resources and infrastructure, but also on the higher principle of justice for enslaved blacks. While they celebrated meting out vengeance against the South by destroying its institution of slavery, they also lambasted conservatism as being just another word for pro-slavery Democracy.

While more conservative Illinoisans supported the Emancipation Proclamation on the narrow ground of military necessity, (undermining Confederacy's economic capability to wage war) racially liberal Republicans supported it for the additional reason of finally granting justice to enslaved blacks. In discussing the Emancipation Proclamation, an editor in Peoria stated that even though this document gave rebel states a chance to preserve slavery by surrendering before January 1, 1863, the editor hoped that this would not be the case, since it would be better for the slaves to be freed: "That the misguided rebels will avail themselves of the loophole he (Lincoln) generously, even at the eleventh hour, leaves open for them . . . and save their – Ham – is not likely, and scarcely desirable."¹⁴

Other northern Illinois editors, who were staunch Democrats, were taken aback by Lincoln's stunning announcement of his proclamation, such as this Ottawa Democratic editor:

The proclamation as we have said, is "stunning and alarming," because in our honest judgment, it is not only "not warranted by, but subversive of the constitution." Are we not justified then, in applying those terms to a presidential act which abandons that object, and threatens to make it a war to free the negro? The confiscation act proposed to punish traitors. But the slaves would have been constitutionally liberated. The Proclamation, however, directs its aim at slavery as an INSTITUTION of the rebellious states.¹⁵

Toward the end of this article, the editor expressed respect for Lincoln as the nation's leader in time of war, stating that even if the proclamation was questionable, for the sake of the Union, Lincoln's judgment must prevail. In northern Illinois, Democrats may have often felt greater pressure to respect, and even support, President Lincoln's wartime policy, leading many editors in that region to walk the tightrope of questioning Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation without denouncing it in stronger language.

Central Illinois was an intense battleground during the elections of 1862 and Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation added fuel to the fire, with central Illinois editors taking various positions on this issue, such as this Urbana editor:

I fail to see much of a bugaboo in the President's emancipation Proclamation. When we consider that the proclamation can endure no longer than the Government is under martial law, or so long as the rebellion lasts, it only amounts to a temporary emancipation, after which, each state will again resume its original power.

This editor expressed one of the more conservative forms of support for Lincoln by emphasizing that the proclamation was only in effect for the duration of the war, and even expressed the wishful notion that everything will revert back to "normal" after the war since the proclamation would not be permanent. In the aftermath of Lincoln's announcement, some, such as this Springfield editor, denounced the idea of emancipation in racist terms when talking about the increase of blacks in Chicago:

The large importation of negroes, mulattoes, and other lighter shades of the servile tribe, threaten, if continued, to revolutionize the labor market of Chicago. The only idea of a darkey is, that slavery means labor, and freedom from slavery means abstinence from work. He sees no practical difference between the southern owner and the northern master; and shirks the responsibility of doing anything for either, if he can possibly avoid it.

Another Springfield editor, however, wholeheartedly supported Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation:

President Lincoln has at last hurled against rebellion the bolt which he has so long held suspended. The act is the most important and the most memorable of his official career. He now employs the power with which Congress and the Constitution have entitled him. *The President must and will be sustained.*

An editor in Rock Island tried to reconcile his support of Lincoln with his opposition to the president's proclamation, first, by insisting that the proclamation would not

successfully work anyway, and second, that the president issued it due to external pressure from abolitionist politicians:

We print today, Mr. Lincoln's emancipation proclamation in full. The abolitionists will be greatly pleased with it. His proclamation won't set a slave free. The white people must be whipped and subdued before the slaves can be reached. But we are perfectly willing to see it tried. It will have one good effect, at least. It will show the abolitionists whether proclamations will free all the niggers or not. The *Chicago Journal* tells the reason why this proclamation was issued. It was outside "pressure" upon Mr. Lincoln.¹⁶

Some editors in northern and central Illinois opposed the Emancipation Proclamation but, at the same time, tried to retain their support for President Lincoln, especially if they had supported him before, with the mistaken assumption that Lincoln would be too conservative to issue such a proclamation. Again, the internal tension within the Democratic party interplayed with the politics of race; Democrats who opposed the Emancipation Proclamation tried to attack it while asserting their loyalty to the Union not by attacking Lincoln, but by venting their rage on abolitionists outside the administration (which is not to say that there were no Illinois Democrats who did attack Lincoln directly). Other northern and central Illinois editors went further in protesting the proclamation, believing it to be too radical and fearful of the resulting northward migration of freed blacks.¹⁷

Southern Illinoisans experienced firsthand the migration of blacks from the Southern states. An editor in a southern Illinois town, Waterloo, copied the resolutions of the Democratic state convention in Springfield to express his own opposition to the migration of blacks in the aftermath of Lincoln's announcement of his Emancipation Proclamation:

Resolved. That the people of Illinois having inhibited by the State Constitution and law, the entrance of free negroes into this State . . . we respectfully ask the public authorities of Illinois to see that the Constitution and laws are properly enforced on that subject. When the people of Illinois adopted that negro exclusion clause, they meant that the honest laboring men should have no competitor in the black face—that the soil in Illinois should belong to the white man.

Another southern Illinois editor in Fairfield announced a mass meeting concerning blacks in Wayne County: “The citizens of Wayne County respectfully requested to attend a Mass Meeting to be held at Fairfield on Thursday next, for the purpose of adopting measures to prohibit the emigration into and the removal of the Negro out of the limits of Wayne County.” In spite of such strong opposition to the Emancipation Proclamation in southern Illinois, a minority of editors from this region felt brave enough to express their full support for it:

It is stated upon the authority of Ben Perly Poore, who writes from Washington to the Boston Journal, that President Lincoln was induced to issue his emancipation proclamation. Our own private opinion is that President Lincoln was induced to issue the proclamation by his own convictions of justice, the palpable necessity of the measure to the restoration and preservation of the Union, and the earnest appeals of a united people.

The possible migration of blacks into Illinois played a stronger role in causing the protests issued against the Emancipation Proclamation in the state’s southern region. The Republican party suffered multiple, devastating defeats in the election year 1862, losing nine of the fourteen Illinois congressional seats, control of a multitude of state offices, and power in both Illinois houses. Historian Bruce Tap has argued that negrophobia was the main reason for the serious Republican setback in Illinois in 1862. It was strongly connected with Secretary of War Edwin Stanton’s order of September 18, 1862 which allowed freed blacks to migrate northward from Cairo and encouraged them to resettle in other parts of Illinois and the Midwest.¹⁸

Illinoisans who supported black exclusion drew a connection between President Lincoln's preliminary Emancipation Proclamation and the increased migration of blacks into their state.¹⁹ The Democratic state convention's resolution cited above illustrated how the Republican party's efforts to present itself as being for free soil for white settlers could have been undermined. Illinois Democrats could claim that the Republicans lied about having the exclusive interest of white settlers and laborers at heart. For if Stanton would allow contrabands to resettle in other parts of Illinois north of Cairo, and if Lincoln was serious about emancipation, how could Republicans hope to continue to appeal to the majority of racist voters while being antislavery? The more conservative Democrats were not afraid to beat their chests with the claim that the free soil platform of the Republican party was a falsehood.

After January 1, 1863, the date that the Emancipation Proclamation became an accomplished fact, Illinois editors either expressed joy or anger. One editor of Ottawa celebrated what he believed to be the first serious blow against slavery:

Abraham Lincoln, true to his promise, celebrated the New Year, by his proclamation of freedom to the slaves held in the states now in open rebellion. The slave system of the States now in rebellion, is the worst tolerated on the face of the globe. The glad tidings of freedom to a downtrodden race in our land, has been pronounced by the Constitutional head of military power.

Other Illinois editors, such as this editor from Springfield, expressed support for the proclamation not on the principle of freedom for slaves, but for its usefulness as a military necessity: "The proclamation is based purely upon the principle of military necessity. It is an act which, in ordinary times of peace, the President would not assume the right to perform. The downfall of the institution of slavery is not an unexpected result of the war begun and prosecuted for its perpetuation." Other Illinois editors (such as one

from Champaign in this instance), harbored fears of increased migration of freed blacks into the state: "The people from the different parts of the county met at the court house, on Thursday Jan. 1, 1863, for the purpose of considering the most effectual mode of preventing the immigration of negroes and mulattoes to this state." This particular editor saw nothing to celebrate about, and instead, only believed that increased migration of freed slaves needed to be stopped. Some southern Illinois editors were even more violently racist in protesting the Emancipation Proclamation:

Freedom in the abstract is a fine thing, and will do to fight, preach, pray, suffer, starve for; but when Freedom amounts to no more than what the negroes obtain at Helena, it is a different affair, there it means simply freedom to starve, rot, die, and the sooner the better. If our philanthropy is to end in taking them away from their masters, we had better, in mercy to them, decree that as fast as emancipated they shall be shot.

The Emancipation Proclamation, the Second Confiscation bill, and Stanton's order to resettle freed blacks in Illinois not only intensified conflict between Democrats and Republicans, it also increased tension between conservative and racially liberal Republicans.²⁰

It seems clear that Lincoln had a mixture of motives for drafting the Emancipation Proclamation. Lincoln came to believe later in his life in the equality of blacks and whites while also appreciating the political necessity for his Emancipation Proclamation. The practical political strategy (fostering greater international support for Union by broadening war aim to include freedom) behind Lincoln's policy does not exclude any higher principle of egalitarianism; instead, practical politics and egalitarianism complemented one another quite well. According to historian Michael Vorenberg, Lincoln had good reason to believe that taking another step toward abolition was becoming more viable. By 1863, popular sentiment in the northern states shifted to

stronger, broader support for some form of abolition of slavery. First, anti-southern hostility increased dramatically among northerners as the human and financial cost of the war increased. Second, black freedom could provide the military with an advantage in gaining recruits from black men which in turn, converted numerous northern whites to abolitionism as black soldiers proved their courage in battle. Third, the antislavery movement gained support in the border states such as Kentucky and Missouri.²¹

In spite of increased support for an emancipationist war, opposition still existed. According to historian Arthur Cole, from June 1 to October 10, 1863, 2,001 Illinois deserters were arrested and, by the end of the Civil War, 13,046 enlisted Illinois men had deserted the military (although not all may have deserted in racist disgust at emancipation). In January 1863 possible rebel sympathizers who were soldiers in the 109th regiment were arrested in order to prevent a possible mutiny, with most of these soldiers coming from southern Illinois. Those arrested were put under guard at Holly Springs, Mississippi. Opposition even came from within the Republican party in spite of Lincoln's re-nomination in 1864. Republican dissenters who criticized Lincoln included Illinois Governor Richard Yates and Illinois Senator Lyman Trumbull, fully revealing the division between egalitarian Republicans and centrist or conservative Republicans. The more racially liberal German Republicans such as Friedrich Hecker attacked Lincoln during the Illinois Republican convention on May 25, 1864. After Lincoln's re-nomination, bitter Republican opponents organized in Cleveland, Ohio and nominated John C. Fremont while Lincoln won the re-nomination at Baltimore, Maryland on June 7, 1864.²² Such opposition needs to be given its due when considering the late Edward Magdol's argument that Lincoln gained undisputed political advantage by drafting the

Emancipation Proclamation. For some of the egalitarian Republicans, the Emancipation Proclamation was too weak, and for Republicans who were more conservative than Lincoln, the Emancipation Proclamation was too radical. Yet, if Lincoln sought to strengthen an alliance with most of the centrist Republicans and even a minority of the Republicans on both ends of the political spectrum, the Emancipation Proclamation did just that.

Lincoln's campaign in 1864 was riddled with racial rhetoric in Illinois. In one instance, an editor in Ottawa expressed support for Lincoln by charging Democrats in believing whites and blacks were equals:

The democrats would be found favoring negro equality, long before the supporters of Mr. Lincoln's administration would. They even hire negroes for substitutes to go into the army, thus making negroes equal to themselves in that light. It is now proved that all their diatribes against negroes, enjoying their natural rights, was simply because they could not use them for party purpose.

Another editor, from Springfield, expressed his opposition to the administration by claiming that there could never be peace as long as Lincoln insisted on what the editor believed to be unreasonable terms:

Moloch has not yet satiated with blood; shoddy still bawls for "more;" abolitionism is not yet glutted with victims; the negroes are not all free. No peace for this nation yet. And A. Lincoln – "dressed in a little brief authority" – insolently and defiantly refuses the agonizing cries of this afflicted people (white soldiers and their families) for peace.

The same editor clipped a speech from John A. Logan, which he made in 1862 when he was still a devout Democrat; the editor saw Logan of 1864 as a traitor to the Democratic party but used his 1862 speech to lambaste abolitionism:

The abolitionists of the north have constantly warred upon southern institutions by incessant abuse from the pulpit, from the press, on the stump, and in the halls of congress . . . they have in many places, by mobs, resisted the execution of the fugitive slave law. Sir, there is a great duty for us to perform to our country and

to posterity. *Professions of devotion to the Union*, and love for the institutions of our country alone, will not save us.²³

The Democratic party, like the Republican party, experienced internal realignments in light of the politics of race. Logan, a long-time Illinois Democrat, switched to the Republican party in 1864 after returning from the front and actively canvassed in support of Lincoln. The impressive Republican victory in the Illinois and national elections of 1864 reversed the Republican setback of 1862 in Illinois, ushering in a long period of Republican dominance in a state that was formerly a Democratic stronghold. According to Michael Vorenberg, the national Republican convention in Baltimore in 1864 reinforced the predominant conservative principle of abolishing slavery without any promise for equal rights for blacks.²⁴ Conservative Republicans took seriously the charge from Democrats that the Republican platform of free soil for whites was merely a cynical lie with which to appeal to voters during elections. By asserting that they supported abolition without extending equal rights to blacks, such conservative Republicans hoped to salvage their appeal to racist voters. The politics of race reshaped both the Democratic and Republican parties and, by the time of the presidential campaign of 1864, the politics of race had shifted from the controversy of the Emancipation Proclamation to the proposed Thirteenth Amendment and to the recruiting of black men into the Union army.

Through conventions of their own, Illinois blacks took direct action in attempting to influence the politics of race. But they also found another way to influence the course of debate concerning blacks; black men would take up arms and fight as Union soldiers. On October 7, 1863, the federal government authorized John Armstrong Bross, a Union officer, to recruit Illinois black men and on April 25, 1864, the 29th U.S. Colored Infantry

was officially mustered with Bross appointed Lieutenant Colonel of the regiment. The regiment left Quincy, Illinois for the defense of Washington on April 26, 1864 and would later fight at Petersburg and Appomattox.²⁵ Far from being passive, hapless people lying down to wait for the whims of white politicians to decide their fate, blacks in Illinois and in all other states took various forms of action, appreciating the high stakes involved in the Civil War. But the recruiting of black men as Union soldiers sparked an intense debate as part of the broader politics of race in Illinois.

In spite of the prevalent racism among whites, North and South, there were instances of unflinching support among some white northern editors for recruiting black men into the Union army, such as expressed by an editor in Ottawa: "The most eloquent, perhaps, was Corporal Prince Lambkin. His historical references were very interesting. He reminded them [fellow black recruits] that he had practiced this war ever since Fremont's time, to which some of the crowd assented." Another editor, from Bloomington, ridiculed opposition of recruiting blacks when the opposition claimed it would lead the Confederacy to create black regiments:

Some wisecrack . . . explicates on the back policy of the government arming negroes, on the ground that it would cause the rebels to put three hundred and fifty thousand of their slaves into the field. Did it ever strike the writer that there was a good reason why the rebels have not so done, and will not now arm their slaves? The rebels know full well that once put muskets into the hands of such a number of slaves . . . the doom of the Confederacy is sealed.

Unlike other whites, this editor was not so obtuse as to miss the meaning that the Civil War held for blacks; it was a war for freedom. This same editor praised the efforts and courage of black soldiers who fought at Port Hudson in 1863: "The 2nd Louisiana negro regiment, Colonel Daniels, distinguished itself, especially in charging upon the enemy's siege guns, losing in killed and wounded over 600 men." Such editors appreciated the

higher stakes of the war, realizing what motivated the nearly two hundred thousand black men to join the Union army. These editors also fully embraced the idea that both races were entitled to natural rights as human beings even if some of these same editors drew the line by excluding blacks from having political rights as full citizens. The more racially liberal Republicans advocated for such recruitment, Owen Lovejoy being one of them. Lovejoy fully supported arming black men as Union soldiers for the duration of the Civil War. Indeed, as early as July, 1862, in a speech in Milwaukee, Lovejoy expressed his position, publicly urging President Lincoln to support such a policy. Other prominent Illinois politicians such as Richard Yates and John Sherman agreed with Lovejoy.²⁶ The courage that black soldiers displayed in battles such as at Fort Wagner, Port Hudson, and Petersburg strengthened the position of liberal Republicans who favored continued recruitment of black men as Union soldiers. By arming themselves and serving in the Union army, blacks influenced the politics of race in northern states such as Illinois.

While there were advocates in favor of recruiting blacks into the Union army, there were plenty who opposed such a policy. An editor from Rock Island voiced his own opinion by clipping a Quincy article concerning a riot involving black soldiers in Quincy, Illinois where an editor claimed black soldiers were the unprovoked aggressors:

It is with considerable regret that we find ourselves called upon this morning to chronicle the riotous proceedings of a portion of the negro troops now located in this city [Quincy]. As they [white carriage passengers] were passing the negro Barracks . . . they were assaulted by a whole company of negro soldiers . . . and made a narrow escape with their lives. Without a word of provocation from the party, the darkies commenced and kept up their attack until they had driven them out of their reach.

This was the same editor who expressed opposition to the abolishment of slavery. If he opposed abolition, he most assuredly opposed recruiting blacks into the Union army and used accounts, however factual or contrived they may be, such as the one above to reinforce his racist argument against such recruitment. Another editor, in the southern Illinois town of Jonesboro, expressed racist disdain at recruiting blacks: "The political generals are all abolitionists and military failures. Fremont has resigned in the face of the enemy; Hunter is doing nothing save to drill a nigger brigade, the 'fellow-soldiers' of white men."²⁷ Editors who protested the recruitment of blacks into the Union army often used racist stereotypes of blacks, or tarred and feathered officers and politicians who advocated such recruitment as being deluded, misguided men at best, and negrophiliac northern traitors to the Union at worst. While the controversy of recruiting blacks as Union soldiers raged during and after the presidential campaign of 1864, Americans engaged in a passionate debate about the federal government making plans to abolish slavery in its entirety.

There were a number of Illinois editors who fully supported abolishing slavery, such as this editor of Ottawa:

We have but little faith in the plan of Gen. Banks in Louisiana. The system of serfdom will not work well in Louisiana, or any other part of our Territory. The Negro must be a freeman or a slave. We cannot, under the Emancipation Proclamation, enslave him again; and being a freeman and the only loyal element in Louisiana, we should treat him as a freeman.

Under Nathaniel Banks, Louisiana's wartime reconstruction saw the development of a rift between conservative faction of planters who sought to preserve as much of the status quo as possible that existed under slavery, and the more dynamic, liberal faction of lawyers, doctors, and entrepreneurs who sought a completely new state constitution. The

greater problem was that under Banks, quasi-slavery still existed in parts of Louisiana.

The same editor later celebrated the final passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, and then its submission to the states:

The simple truth, is that law [Thirteenth Amendment] is needed, not to destroy but to save right; not to murder, but to guard liberty; not to crush, but to lift up and encourage the poor.

Since the great amendment to the constitution has passed – as announced in our news column, prohibiting slavery in all our land – it only remains for States to ratify the law, at once. Let this be done, as we hope and pray it may be.

Some editors who initially opposed abolition had shifted their opinion in the summer and fall of 1864, such as an editor of Rock Island:

Heretofore when democrats have charged that Mr. Lincoln was making war not to restore the Union and the constitution, they have been denounced as slanderers. It can be denied no longer. The issue is made by him, and is peace and Union, or War and the Nigger. It must be the nigger – the whole nigger – or nothing. The white people of this country should be ground to the dust for the sake of the niggers.

In his February 1, 1865 issue, the editor clipped a speech made by a well-known Democrat, Murray McConnel, who spoke out in full support of the Thirteenth Amendment. Then in a later issue, the editor expressed his changed opinion more directly:

The southern slave owners have done their best to destroy the democratic party, and destroy the government our fathers, and democrats owe them no good will, no favors. They commenced the war, and we hope they will get all they want of the war, until they are ready to make terms of peace honorable to the north, and return to their allegiance.

In the same article, after making his statement, the editor clipped various statements made by Democratic politicians who spoke out in opposition to slavery and in favor of its abolishment. An editor in Springfield celebrated federal passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, equating future Union victory in the war with freedom for Southern blacks:

The National House of Representatives, on yesterday, finally adopted that measure [Thirteenth Amendment] This announcement will send a thrill of joy to the hearts of the friends of freedom throughout all Chirstendom. It will crush out the last hope of rebellion, and prove another and effectual warning to the enemies of human liberty abroad who are conspiring for the overthrow of our Government.

The same editor later celebrated Illinois' repeal of its own Black Laws and, after listing this as one of his state's noble accomplishments, praised the Illinois legislature in general: "It has become the fashion in certain quarters to assail the Legislature of 1865 with the utmost vituperative and indiscriminate abuse. Yet, if that Legislature had done nothing more than the acts we have just mentioned, it would have performed enough to render its memory honored."²⁸

On February 1, 1865, the Illinois General Assembly ratified the Thirteenth Amendment and then, only a few days later, the representatives repealed their state's infamous Black Laws.²⁹ The positive reactions of support for both the Thirteenth Amendment's ratification and Illinois' repeal of its Black Laws demonstrated the continuing shift in the politics of race in Illinois. With the Thirteenth Amendment, the federal government took the initiative and Illinois followed its lead, realizing the importance of destroying an economic institution that led to civil war, and also the importance of freeing enslaved blacks. Then Illinois took its own initiative in repealing its black exclusion laws, with a growing number of Illinoisans overcoming their fear of increased migration of blacks into their state. This represented a rapid shift toward accepting the egalitarians principle of racial equality to the extent of abolishing slavery and granting free blacks in Illinois the freedom to live where they wanted to settle. But this development in the politics of race faced the tenacious tradition of white supremacy; the shift was nowhere near complete, and it was not even certain if this racially liberal

shift would continue to develop after the Civil War ended. Yet, the pressure of the Civil War on the Northern states brought changes that otherwise would have taken a much longer period of time.

Other Illinois editors vehemently protested the abolition of slavery and one editor from Waterloo in southern Illinois protested the repeal of Illinois' black exclusion law soon after the submission to the states of the Thirteenth Amendment:

Thus had a Republican Legislature elevated the negro to the jury box and the witness stand, and opened our doors to a flood of black immigration. The American citizens of African descent have celebrated their triumph over the whites today. Last night at their 'nigger meeting' there was, as I am informed, a general jubilee on the subject of their elevation by legislative enactment.

The editor did not directly connect his protest against the repeal of the state's black exclusion law with any opposition he had to the federal abolition of slavery. Yet, in southern Illinois, these two issues went hand-in-hand, as many white Illinoisans in the state's southern region had long held fears of increased black migration. In their eyes, repeal of the black exclusion law in conjunction with the Thirteenth Amendment would create such an increase in migration. This fearful conclusion was not exclusive to southern Illinois; an editor in Springfield also mourned the repeal of the black exclusion law in light of federal abolition when he clipped a speech by John Logan, who opposed the repeal:

Our readers are aware that the black laws have been repealed and the "nigger" hoisted to an elevation equal with the white man. His (Logan's) speech was listened to with marked attention, but unfortunately, without marked results: "This is an occasion upon which I confess, that while I feel sad I yet rejoice. I feel sad that this iniquitous measure is inevitably to become a law on tomorrow; and I rejoice that then I will have the pleasure of attending the funeral of the republican party, upon the passage of the bill. The action of that party tonight will forever sink them, politically, in this state."

Logan, who was originally a Democrat, switched to the Republican party and supported Lincoln's re-nomination in 1864, and then switched back to the Democratic party afterward, wishing the death of the Republican party in Illinois. And this Springfield editor completely agreed with Logan's sentiments.³⁰

Conclusion

The two different sides of the debate concerning federal abolition in Illinois and the repeal of Illinois' Black Laws was symptomatic of the dynamic political change that began in 1854 and accelerated during and after the Civil War. The passage of the Thirteenth Amendment did not alleviate conflict between liberal and moderate Republicans. Debate increased over the issue of whether to grant black men equal voting rights and, by this time, Lincoln had become somewhat more liberal regarding this issue. But in other aspects, Lincoln reasserted his conservative plan for a speedy reconstruction of the defeated Confederate states. More Republicans such as Lincoln retreated from their 1864 platform of refusing to extend equal rights to blacks, yet still sought to form a reconstruction policy that would not be too radical. This led some racially liberal Republicans to withdraw support for Lincoln, and determined to give Congress a stronger prerogative in reconstruction at the expense of the president. The liberal egalitarian movement was gaining momentum as a result of emancipation and the recruitment of black men into the Union army. Emancipated slaves, through their own actions, demonstrated their human desire for freedom and compelled a growing number of white Illinoisans to seriously question their racist attitude. Black Union soldiers took up arms and proved to white Illinoisans that their courage and determination could be just as

strong as white Union soldiers, and it made the cause of freedom as one of the causes of the Civil War all the more powerful in its appeal. An increasing number of white Illinoisans could see that the cause of Union could go hand in hand with the cause for freedom; something that blacks had already understood from the beginning.

If blacks were denied equal political rights to directly affect the outcome of abolition, they found other ways to be heard. As Michael Vorenberg has discussed, by early 1864 blacks knew that the Thirteenth Amendment by itself would not secure or guarantee them essential rights they would need in order to enjoy their freedom. They looked at the northern states and saw that free blacks there had long suffered under other forms of discrimination and repression even if they did not literally wear shackles as slaves. As a result, blacks sought three objectives: first, equality before the law, which required desegregation and equal access to courts and other institutions; second, equal opportunity for economic self-sufficiency through land ownership; and third, equal voting rights for black men which blacks considered essential in securing their freedom. Recalling Illinois' black exclusion law, blacks were well justified in their perceptive thinking. In the northern states that officially granted blacks equal voting rights, they were still denied the actual enjoyment of such rights through the violence of white mobs in northern cities.³¹ Even if blacks realized the importance of securing basic rights in addition to emancipation, in exercising those rights they faced the violent reaction of white mobs. But what if the federal government could legislate amendments granting such equal rights, and then find a way to enforce them? This potential to do justice nationally, and not just in the South, would reach its height in the early post-bellum years, after the guns of the Civil War had finally quieted. Such federal legislation would affect

not only the South, but northern states like Illinois. Thus, despite the growing legitimacy of the liberal view on race, political controversy over race in Illinois did not subside with the end of the Civil War and federal abolition of slavery; it would continue during the early years of Reconstruction.

NOTES

¹ *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Twenty-Fourth General Assembly of the State of Illinois*, (Springfield, 1865), 490, 554; *Journal of the Senate of the Twenty-Fourth General Assembly of the State of Illinois*, (Springfield, 1865), 320, 581.

² For more information on how Republicans used racism, see James Bilotta, *Race and the Rise of the Republican Party, 1848 – 1865* (New York, 1992 edition), 366, 378 – 384; Arthur C. Cole, *The Era of the Civil War, 1848 – 1870*, (Urbana, 1987 edition), 200. For information on other appeals Republicans made, see Michael Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s*, (New York, 1983 edition), 216. For more information on Republican advocacy for industrialization, see Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, 1990), 247 – 250.

³ *Bloomington Daily Pantagraph*, June 12, 1860; *Ibid.*, October 5, 1860; *Ibid.*

⁴ Cole, *Era of the Civil War*, 253 – 255.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 256.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 279.

⁷ Bruce Tap, “Race, Rhetoric, and Emancipation: The Election of 1862 in Illinois,” in the *Civil War History*, 39 (1993), 105.

⁸ *Waterloo Advocate*, June 6, 1862.

⁹ *Ibid.*, June 13, 1862.

¹⁰ *Jonesboro Weekly Gazette*, May 31, 1862; *Ibid.*

¹¹ For more information on these laws, see McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 496 – 497; *Rockford Rock River Democrat*, May 20, 1862; *Ottawa Free Trader*, September 6, 1862; *Springfield Illinois State Register*, September 18, 1862; *Waterloo Advocate*, September 12, 1862; *Springfield Daily State Journal*, September 11, 1862.

¹² For more information on Lincoln’s legal reasoning with abolition, see Allen C. Guelzo, *Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America*, (New York, 2004), 43, 55; for more information on Lincoln’s legalistic approach in abolishment, see *Ibid.*, 60, 65.

¹³ *Rock Island Weekly Union*, November 5, 1862; *Ibid.*, November 19, 1862; *Rockford Rock River Democrat*, September 30, 1862; *Ibid.*, October 7, 1862.

¹⁴ Ottawa, *The Republican*, January 2, 1863; *Peoria Daily Transcript*, September 23, 1862; for other examples of such liberal principles regarding enslaved blacks before and after the Emancipation Proclamation, see *Bloomington Daily Pantagraph*, October 5, 1860 and Ottawa, *The Republican*, January 7, 1865.

¹⁵ *Ottawa Free Trader*, September 28, 1862.

¹⁶ Urbana, *Champaign County Democrat*, October 9, 1862; *Springfield Illinois State Register*, October 11, 1862; *Springfield Daily State Journal*, September 24, 1862; *Rock Island Daily Argus*, September 24, 1862; For other examples, see Urbana, *Champaign County Democrat*, June 5, 1862; *Ottawa Free Trader*, September 6, 1862.

¹⁷ For other examples of fears of radicalism of emancipation, see *Waterloo Advocate*, September 12, 1862; *Ottawa Free Trader*, September 28, 1862; Urbana, *Champaign County Democrat*, October 9, 1862; *Jonesboro Weekly Gazette*, September 27, 1862; *Springfield Illinois State Register*, January 25, 1865 (concerning radicalism of emancipation through Thirteenth Amendment).

¹⁸ *Waterloo Advocate*, September 26, 1862; *Jonesboro Weekly Gazette*, September 27, 1862; *Belleville Weekly Advocate*, October 3, 1862; for more information on the negrophobic factor, see Tap, “Race, Rhetoric, and Emancipation,” 117, 124 – 125.

¹⁹ For more information on negrophobia’s impact on Illinois elections, see *Ibid.*, 101 – 102; for more information on voters connecting emancipation with immigration, see *Ibid.*, 109.

²⁰ Ottawa, *The Republican*, January 2, 1863; *Springfield Daily Illinois State Journal*, January 8, 1863; *Rock Island Daily Argus*, January 2, 1863; *Waterloo Advocate*, January 2, 1863.

For more information on Second Confiscation bill’s impact on conflict between liberal and conservative Republicans, see Mark M. Krug, *Lyman Trumbull: Conservative Radical*, (New York, 1965), 203 – 204; for more information on various Republican reactions to Emancipation Proclamation and a proposed abolition amendment, see *Ibid.*, 219; Edward Magdol, *Owen Lovejoy: Abolitionist in Congress*, (New Brunswick, 1967), 339 – 340.

²¹ Michael Vorenberg, *Final Freedom: The Civil War, the Abolition of Slavery, and the Thirteenth Amendment*, (New York, 2001), 36 – 37.

²² For more information on such extreme opposition to the Union war effort, see Arthur C. Cole, *The Era of the Civil War, 1848 – 1870*, (Urbana, 1987 edition), 306; for more information on internal Republican opposition to Lincoln, see *Ibid.*, 314 – 317.

²³ *Ottawa Free Trader*, October 8, 1864; *Springfield Illinois State Register*, August 27, 1864; *Ibid.*, October 5, 1864.

²⁴ Cole, *Era of the Civil War*, 327 – 329; Vorenberg, *Final Freedom*, 123 – 124.

²⁵ For the details of this black regiment's history, see Dorothy L. Drinkard, *Illinois Freedom Fighters: A Civil War Saga of the 29th Infantry, United States Colored Troops*, (Simon & Schuster Custom Publishing, 1998), Chap. 2.

²⁶ *Ottawa Republican*, January 7, 1865; *Bloomington Weekly Pantagraph*, August 13, 1862; *Ibid.*, June 8, 1863; Magdol, Owen Lovejoy, 344.

²⁷ *Rock Island Daily Argus*, April 8, 1864; *Jonesboro Weekly Gazette*, July 26, 1862.

²⁸ *Ottawa Republican*, January 7, 1865; for more information about Louisiana under Banks, see McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 703 – 705; *Ottawa Republican*, February 4, 1865; *Rock Island Weekly Argus*, August 3, 1864; *Ibid.*, February 8, 1865; *Springfield Daily State Journal*, February 1, 1865; *Ibid.*, February 17, 1865.

²⁹ Cole, *Era of the Civil War*, 388.

³⁰ *Waterloo Advocate*, February 10, 1865; *Springfield Illinois State Register*, February 8, 1865; *Ottawa Free Trader*, February 4, 1865.

³¹ Vorenberg, *Final Freedom*, 81 – 84; Jean Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-nineteenth Century*, (New York, 1998), 244 – 249.

Chapter 3: The Politics of Race and the Principle of Justice

During the latter part of the Civil War, Lincoln, his cabinet, and Congressmen struggled to formulate a policy of reconstructing the Confederate states once the war would end with Union victory. The possibility offered by Lincoln's early Reconstruction policy was cut short by his assassination in April 1865. When Andrew Johnson succeeded Lincoln as president, the conflict between the president and U.S. Congress over Southern Reconstruction would have a direct effect on the politics of race in Illinois. Illinois, along with other Northern states, experienced a period of social readjustment during and after the Civil War in regards to government policies concerning race; this explains the dramatic change from Illinois' anti-black stance to a more egalitarian position. We can examine this readjustment further by looking at the politics of race in Illinois during the proposal and passage of the Fourteenth and then the Fifteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution.

President Johnson sought to reassert the traditional Jacksonian racism in creating his own Reconstruction policy; Jacksonian racism defined as politicians' appeal to mass white male voters' racist attitude, and the idealism of broadening democratic participation at the exclusion of black men. Johnson believed that abolition of slavery finally destroyed the traditional Southern aristocracy and that in its place free labor would supplant itself in the South. However, his vision of free labor was in line with most conservative Republicans, in that it completely disregarded the tenuous situation in which former black slaves lived. In angry response to Johnson's lenient Reconstruction policy, more liberal Republicans in U.S. Congress reacted by totally rejecting Johnson's executive policy decisions, and in their place, enacted a more radical policy resting on

extending equal suffrage to black men. Eric Foner explicates the details of Johnson's lenient Reconstruction policy, and how his decisions thoroughly alienated moderate and racially liberal Republicans in U.S. Congress. Johnson hated the elite culture of wealthy slave owners but he also had a strong racist hatred of blacks.¹

The conflict between Johnson and congressional Republicans affected the entire spectrum of Republicans at the national, as well as at the state, levels including Illinois. Illinois Republicans came out in opposition to Johnson when he first vetoed Trumbull's Freedmen's Bureau bill on March 19, 1866 and then vetoed the Civil Rights bill on March 27, 1866. Meanwhile, Illinois Democrats organized "Johnson clubs" in areas from Chicago to Cairo and they even included a minority of Republicans who still clung to Andrew Johnson because they thought he endorsed the same Reconstruction policy as expressed by Lincoln. Republican Congressman A. J. Kuykendall of Cairo was one such conservative Republican who supported Johnson by voting against the Freedmen's Bureau and Civil Rights bills. Trumbull and other moderate Republicans initially supported President Johnson and his plan for speedy readmission of the Southern states, and it was the moderate Republicans, not the racially liberal Republicans, who dominated U.S. Congress. As long as moderate Republicans believed that Johnson's policy would secure basic rights and the freedom of freed blacks in good faith, they would oppose egalitarian Republicans' advocacy for a more thorough Reconstruction policy. But Johnson undermined his support base among moderate Republicans when he vetoed Trumbull's Freedmen's Bureau and Civil Rights bills, leading an increasing number of moderate Republicans to finally ally with their racially liberal colleagues in developing an entirely different Reconstruction policy.²

Illinois politicians became directly involved in the conflict with Johnson. On April 4, 1866, Trumbull made a speech in the U.S. Senate declaring that President Johnson had deceived him and those who supported the Freedmen's Bureau and Civil Rights bills because when Trumbull had counseled with Johnson about these bills, the president had given no indication that he would oppose them. Illinois Governor Richard Oglesby denounced Johnson's vetoes in a speech at a mass rally in Chicago and Gustave Koerner of Illinois wrote to Trumbull arguing that the Southern states should not be readmitted without real guarantees of good faith. Yet, even as moderate Republicans such as Trumbull joined ranks with their racially liberal colleagues in U.S. Congress, debate and conflict still emerged when it came to specific, proposed bills and amendments and later, radical Republicans would "tar and feather" Trumbull with harsh words after Trumbull refused to vote for impeaching Johnson in 1868 (although the majority did vote for impeachment anyway, but failed to convict).³ This national political conflict provided the background for how the politics of race in Illinois would play out, and this conflict only intensified with the introduction of the proposed Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. These two proposed amendments brought into question whether or not race relations would be redefined only in the Southern states, or in all the states of the nation. Illinois had to choose between merely forcing equal rights between blacks and whites onto Southern states, or taking the higher principle of making equal rights protection *national*.

But before the final Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments passed, as early as 1865, Northern states had referenda on whether or not to extend equal suffrage to black men. Eric Foner points out that even though the 1865 referenda failed, the minority

support for such an amendment was dramatically stronger than it had ever been in the antebellum years. For example, 43 percent of voters in Connecticut, 45 in Minnesota, and 47 percent in Wisconsin supported granting black men equal suffrage. This shift also occurred in Illinois, when in January, 1865, both Illinois chambers of the General Assembly considered bills to repeal the state's Black Laws, with each bill guaranteeing freedom of movement and equal access to Illinois courts. Petitions for such repeal included one presented on January 5th by Senator Francis Eastman, signed by seven thousand *white* men. On January 24th, 1865, the Illinois Senate passed the repeal of the Black Laws by a vote of thirteen to ten, and then on February 3rd, the House agreed to the repeal by a vote of 49 to 30. On February 7th, Governor Richard Oglesby signed the bill into law. Such a shift represented a dramatic reversal; in 1861, Illinois was the first state to ratify a proposed constitutional amendment that would have prevented the federal government from abolishing slavery in states where it already existed. Then in 1863, Governor Richard Yates prorogued the state legislature when its members threatened to pass denouncing resolutions of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation.⁴

Republicans believed that freed blacks would redeem themselves and enjoy their new freedom by emerging as independent laborers, helping the South recover economically while Southern blacks uplifted themselves through labor and, at some point, through property ownership earned through labor. As long as they could successfully compromise with one another, moderate and conservative Republicans could unite with racially liberal Republicans in their anger towards Johnson's Reconstruction policy and envision a new policy that would allow blacks to uplift themselves even at the cost of greater federal government intervention. Richardson explains that Republicans

viewed the proposed Fourteenth Amendment as a compromise piece of legislation between moderate and racially liberal Republicans because the amendment's wording recognized the need to protect the rights of blacks while also allowing only minimum federal government intervention. At first, the Republican vision of reshaping race relations focused only on the Southern states, disregarding the plight of blacks residing in Northern states. As historian Heather Cox Richardson said, "In their vision of the future, Northern Republicans kept their sights on the South and the fate of Southern freedmen, largely ignoring Northern black workers."⁵ This interplay of tension and compromise between moderate, conservative, and racially liberal Republicans in U.S. Congress was replayed at the state level and Illinois was no exception. The national politics of race not only concerned the Southern states and freed blacks, but also Illinois and its black residents.

A mixture of pragmatic politics and principled advocacy for racial egalitarianism went hand-in-hand for those who supported the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment. An Ottawa editor expressed support for this amendment revealing both motivations in the same article:

Andrew Johnson is the leader of the present Southern effort to regain by political management what the South lost in the battlefield. In Congress, as representing the National sentiment and purpose, is now our hope. While that stands we have *political machinery* to work with. Adjourn Congress then. Let every member turn himself into a witness, and drill master, and let our bugle call be *no State admitted at present, and none ever admitted which has the word "white," or the recognition of race in the Statute books.*

This editor was concerned about preventing the Democratic party from regaining control of the federal government, and believed that the Fourteenth Amendment would lead Southern states to either enfranchise black men (or sacrifice representation numbers) with

the knowledge that they would most likely vote for Republican politicians. Yet, at the same time, the editor expressed the egalitarian ideal by insisting that states remove racial distinction from their statute books. The same editor expressed his egalitarian position even more strongly after President Johnson vetoed the proposed amendment (which was overridden):

That Andrew Johnson is a political hypocrite, is too obvious for any but a fool or a knave to dispute. First, Mr. Johnson has all his life professed to be a democrat of the Jefferson school. This means that all men are created equal, with the inalienable rights of life, LIBERTY and the pursuit of happiness—including beyond all question, the right to vote on their own laws. To empower people of one complexion to rule over another, is of all other things the most anti-democratic.

An editor from Galena discussed the pragmatic political reason to support the Fourteenth Amendment:

Representatives are to be apportioned in proportion to the number of persons in the State, unless the Legislature chooses to abridge the right of suffrage; in that case the representation will be decreased proportionately. This is right. To call a person an animal when he asks to vote, but a man when making up the basis of representation is a folly. We like the amendments, and hope they will pass the Senate and receive the signature of the President.

Yet again, an Illinois editor combined the ideal of equality with political pragmatism in the same breath. This editor expressed the principle of equality when he insisted that it was unjust to dehumanize blacks as animals while using them as a means of representation. Another editor from Peoria made a similar blend of arguments:

The amendment contains a feature the Democracy do not like—a feature that despoils the Southern wing of its party of much of its strength. For this reason, and this alone, it has no charms for them. Should not the constitutional amendment pass, the full number of the negroes will be counted in the appointment. By this means the South would be possessed of a strength to which it is not justly entitled, unless it enfranchises the colored race.⁶

Clearly, Illinoisans who supported the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment had two main reasons to do so – maintaining Republican power in the federal government and out of a new commitment to racial equality. It was possible to advocate the Fourteenth Amendment purely for pragmatic political reasons without harboring any sincere concern for the plight of blacks. But, as the above quoted editors demonstrate, the principle of racial equality was strong enough to be put forth as a serious, legitimate reason itself for passing the Fourteenth Amendment. An egalitarian argument such as this would have suffered from much more repression in the face of a more overwhelming opposition to viewing blacks as equals during the antebellum years. Racial liberals such as Lovejoy, who argued for equal rights for blacks during the antebellum years were a smaller minority compared to the post-bellum years. Yet, even as the principle of racial equality grew in strength, it continued to contend with a society in which whites were still predominantly racist in outlook.

In Springfield, one editor clung to the old tactic used before and during the Civil War, painting those who advocated the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment as being disunionists:

The infamous reconstruction amendments and bills, as reported by the central directory, were discussed on Wednesday and Thursday in the senate. It is supposed the discussion will occupy several days, and no immediate action is presently expected. The disunionists have their hands full, and before concluding, it is believed that the whole matter, as it came from the house, will be torn into fragments.

One southern Illinois editor of Fairfield complained that the Civil Rights bill provided blacks with unfair, preferential treatment at the expense of whites:

The attorneys of Milley have filed her petition asking that the venue in the cause might be changed by virtue of the Civil Rights Bill to the U.S. District Court at Springfield. No white man or woman would be allowed such a privilege. It

virtually acquits Milley. The witnesses are poor and cannot follow the case to Springfield.

In the same issue, the editor derided abolitionists by using the word "abolitionist" as an acronym and listing derogatory words or phrases that began with a letter in that word. For example, "A" stood for "Amalgamation" and "N" stood for "Nigger on the brain." Although in another issue the editor provided equal space in clipping an article against the amendment and then an article in favor of the amendment, it is clear which clipped article the editor agreed with:

That the amendments are, by some means or other, to be thrust into the Constitution, and made a formal part of it is no doubt the intention of those who seem at this moment to hold the political destiny of the country in their hands. When it is done, the question will remain an unceasing cause of agitation. What will be the result? A fundamental wrong embodied in the Constitution, will rankle there until it is removed.

Opposition to the proposed amendment was not exclusive to central and southern Illinois; there were Illinoisans in the state's northern region who protested its passage as well, such as this editor from Ottawa:

Mr. Sumner's amendment to the bill reported by the Reconstruction Committee we cannot endorse, for it compels a portion of the States to adopt a principle which is not binding upon all. The head and tail of the radical scheme is to force negro suffrage upon the South, while in the same matter the North is left free to act as it pleases.

The editor refrained from expressing blatant racist protest against the proposed Fourteenth Amendment and, in another issue, elaborated on the principle of opposition based on fairness to *all* states, by binding this to Northern states as well as Southern states:

There was not one of the 120 members in the House, or the 32 in the Senate who voted for the above amendments, but had time and again declared himself in favor of forcing negro suffrage upon the South. In fact it is all there is left of the negro that is bankable as political capital. The odiousness of the provision consists in

the fact that it makes suffrage the basis of representation for the southern states, and population for the northern. And this is done to enforce negro and not equal suffrage at the South.

Even though the editor went on to describe the Republican party as a one-idea party that was obsessed with blacks and remarked that this retreat from *national* suffrage extension to black men meant the beginning of the party's decline, for the most part the editor's protest emphasized the partial and unfair principle that would had been imposed on the Southern states. On January 15, 1867, the Illinois House of Representatives voted to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment by a vote of 60 to 25 and the Illinois Senate voted for its ratification by a vote of 23 to 0.⁷

The heart of the Fourteenth Amendment was its redefinition of national citizenship, regardless of race. The more racially liberal Illinoisans could advocate for the Fourteenth Amendment without necessarily arguing that black men were thus entitled to equal *political* rights. Yet, the Fourteenth Amendment was a product of the political realignment among Republicans, which in turn, affected the politics of race in Illinois. The egalitarians had gained ground in the U.S. Congress and Illinois.

However, blacks were not satisfied with viewing the Fourteenth Amendment as the final accomplishment for equal rights. In the South during and immediately after the Civil War, freed blacks took various forms of direct action to put their newfound freedom into practice, such as traveling to reunite with family members, establishing their own churches, and sending their children to school. Foner argues that there were important regional differences in regard to black conventions held in the South, and also that the black conventions of 1865 were distinctive from those of 1866. Blacks who organized conventions in the South in 1865 emphasized equality before the law and suffrage, while

black convention members in 1866 emphasized property redistribution to improve opportunities for black ownership of land. Southern freed people were not the only blacks to take up the struggle for equal rights; blacks in Illinois had their own struggle in the context of their state's politics of race. Before the actual proposal and then passage of the Fifteenth Amendment, black Illinoisans were among those who argued for equal suffrage. As early as August 1865, the Wood River Baptist Association, led by a black Illinoisan, Richard de Baptiste, published an appeal for suffrage and then on October 16, 1866, De Baptiste and Jones participated in a committee of twenty-three leading Illinois blacks to organize a state convention in Galena. They published "An Address to the People of the State of Illinois," which argued for rights of suffrage, equal education, and access to courts for blacks. One of their statements declared, "It is necessary for us to take measures looking to the removal of such disabilities as now affect us by State Laws, and without the repeal of which any favorable action on the part of Congress can be of but little avail."⁸ Later, in spite of the naïve belief among some white Illinoisans that the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment was the pinnacle of justice for blacks, the redefinition of citizenship that included blacks forced open the door to the issue of equal suffrage for black men.

After the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment the politics of race continued to shift in Illinois. In 1867, the Republican party faced substantial disintegration in some of the local and county elections in Illinois. They experienced reversals in counties such as Peoria, Fulton, and Mason, among others. One of the reasons for this reversal was that the success of imposing more radical Reconstruction policy on the Southern states led an increasing number of moderate and conservative Republicans to fear that the radicalism

of white Northern laborers and of Southern freed blacks would create too much change, too quickly. During the Illinois Republican convention in Chicago in May 1867, the delegates unanimously nominated Ulysses S. Grant. Not even the racist and anti-elitist appeal of Illinois Democrats could undermine the broad support Grant, the Union's preeminent war hero, enjoyed during the presidential election. In the end, Grant won the electoral votes of Illinois by a majority of popular vote of over 50,000 and the same state successfully elected Republican John Palmer as the governor.

Meanwhile, the politics of race took a new turn in 1867, when the Republican-dominated Congress passed the Military Reconstruction Act, requiring Southerners to organize new conventions to rewrite their states' constitutions. This act required black men to vote as delegates, and for the new constitutions to include equal voting rights for black men. Heather Cox Richardson argues that moderate and conservative Republicans who supported *regional* manhood suffrage saw the Military Reconstruction Act as a means with which to preempt the more racially liberal proposition to redistribute property in the South for poor whites and freed blacks. Moderate and conservative Republicans saw this as a means to prevent the undermining of their traditional outlook in regard to an orderly, stable society based on class harmony. Richardson also notes that Grant's election to the presidency in 1868 signaled a victory for moderate and conservative Republicans. Grant's election prevented the endorsement of more racially liberal Republicans' advocacy for protecting the interests of the working class through greater government regulation. Brooks Simpson presents a similar argument: by the late 1860s, conservative and moderate Republicans began to exert greater influence over the direction of their own party. He claims that, by the late 1860s, an increasing number of

Republicans favored withdrawal from Reconstruction in favor of focusing on other issues, such as structural reform, reassertion of executive independence, implementing civil service reform, and free trade.⁹

This was the political environment in which Grant won the presidential election. Yet Grant still sought to find a way to implement policy that would advance his goal of protecting the rights of blacks while fostering sectional reconciliation and Republican party dominance. He had to juggle the interests of his party with those of black equality and sectional reconciliation. This led to enforcement policies that propped up Republican state governments in the South that would not survive on their own in the face of political terrorism.¹⁰ While the election of Grant as president did not immediately end the Republican struggle to implement Reconstruction policy for the interest of freed blacks, it certainly signaled the beginning of the transition; the Fifteenth Amendment would be the greatest accomplishment of the racially liberal Republicans and their moderate supporters in the face of this transition.

Although Illinoisans elected John Palmer as Republican governor, they retained the more conservative Lyman Trumbull in the U.S. Congress as their representative. Remarkably, in spite of President Johnson's prompt vetoes of Trumbull's earlier bills, and in spite of his belligerent moves against Illinois federal office holders who supported Trumbull, Trumbull was one of the U.S. senators who voted against impeaching Johnson in 1868. In fact, he would vote against impeachment in spite of overwhelming pressure from Illinois Republican leaders and voters to remove Johnson from office. Ralph Roske notes that the more extreme liberal Republicans were outraged by what they saw as Trumbull's treason against his own party. At the national Republican convention in

Chicago in May 1868, these racially liberal Republicans sought to read Trumbull out of the party, but failed to achieve this objective. The dynamic relations between racially liberal and conservative Republicans were in flux; no one could confidently foresee just how these relations would settle.¹¹

With the state party conventions in 1868, attention turned to the proposed Fifteenth Amendment, which would grant all black men the right to vote. Illinois Democrats met in April 1868 and demanded that suffrage legislation be left to the states, and insisted that Illinois restrict the vote to white men. The later Republican convention simply ignored both issues because even though the convention's nominee, John M. Palmer, favored equal rights, the party platform failed to endorse either a constitutional convention or suffrage for black men. Still, after the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment in the U.S. Congress, Palmer successfully appealed to the Illinois legislature to ratify it, and it did so on March 5, 1869 with the House of Representatives ratifying in vote of 54 to 28 and Senate voting for ratification at vote of 18 to 7.¹² The politics of race in Illinois focused on the issue of suffrage for black men at the time that the relations between racially liberal and conservative Republicans were still shifting and had not yet solidified. This tentative situation gave racially liberal Republicans such as Palmer enough room to successfully argue for suffrage for black men, not only in the South, but including Northern states such as Illinois in a *national* extension of suffrage.

The passage of the Fifteenth Amendment was not as complete a victory for racial equality as it may have appeared at first glance. Northern states wanted to retain restrictions such as literacy and poll tax requirements, while Western states such as California feared a broader amendment would compel inclusion of Chinese immigrants

as voters. The more racially liberal Republicans enthusiastically celebrated the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment even as others held cautious reservations that this amendment would permanently protect the rights of freed blacks in the South. Some of the celebrants believed it would end the politics of race altogether, ushering in a utopian era in which white Southerners would acquiesce in equal rights for blacks. The limited wording of the Fifteenth Amendment likely appealed to the more conservative Republicans, thus enabling liberal Republicans to garner enough votes and support for the amendment. Mark Krug points out that Trumbull never became an advocate for universal suffrage for black men and when such amendments were proposed in the U.S. Senate, he either voted against them or simply refrained from speaking in favor of such an amendment while voting for it. While he did argue in favor of the Civil Rights bill, he also sought to reassure others that this did not mean federal regulation of political rights of individuals and that it had nothing to do with suffrage. When a resolution called for a new proposed Fifteenth Amendment that would grant universal suffrage in February 1869, Trumbull voted against part of the resolution that would have positively affirmed the right of black men to vote.¹³ Racially liberal Illinois Republicans such as Palmer, who was governor of his state, and moderate Illinois Republicans such as Trumbull, who was a U.S. senator, were at odds with one another over the issue of suffrage unless such a proposed amendment contained more limited language. Thus, the result was that the Fifteenth Amendment prohibited discrimination in regard to voting based on race, but did not explicitly contain wording that insisted on protecting the voting rights of black men. During the discussion of and voting on the Fifteenth Amendment, the state's newspapers once again played an active role in the politics of race.

Some Illinoisans went so far in favoring the Fifteenth Amendment that they even suggested that blacks could one day become socially equal to whites. Such was the opinion of this Rock Island editor:

The opponents of the negro race, through all the course of legislation which has been necessary to restore them to their civil and political rights, constantly held up before the people the horrors of a social equality and appealed to the prejudices of the white against the colored race. Yet nothing is clearer than that legislation cannot affect the social relations of life. We choose our own associates.

We do not say that it is unsuperable. On the contrary, we think that in time, with a great change of circumstances, it may be overcome.

Repeal then, we say, all restrictive laws that are based on distinctions of color, give full opportunity for the industrial, educational and moral elevation of the negroes, and treat individuals according to their personal qualities.

It is remarkable that a white editor in Illinois stated such a progressive, open-minded position to the extent that he would embrace equality in *all* shapes and forms, including social equality. In fact, his assertion included the ideal of treating individuals according to the content of their character, something that was usually only echoed by blacks such as Frederick Douglass and, in the twentieth-century, Martin Luther King Jr. After the Fifteenth Amendment's passage in U.S. Congress, the same editor strongly encouraged Illinois to ratify it:

We say to our legislators, ratify, and ratify at once. If we cannot take the lead in this matter, let us at least avoid being the last one to act. It is evident that by next fall, at furthest, the requisite number of states will have ratified this amendment, and the subject of negro suffrage will be disposed of forever.

Another editor, from Springfield, expressed full support for the Fifteenth Amendment:

Universal suffrage, without regard to race, color or previous condition of slavery, is the only solution for all time to come of the questions which have so long and so grievously vexed us as a nation. Our Government is a Republic. It boasts of its Democracy; and if Democracy means anything it means a government of *all* the people.

We think we can even now see the glorious consummation of the struggle of equal political rights against caste. The end, we believe, cannot long be delayed.

The same editor even forthrightly acknowledged that, for pragmatic reasons, the Fifteenth Amendment's limited scope would be acceptable if this was the only way to gain ratification among the Northern states:

So far as we are concerned, we have no objection to the clause against denying the right to "hold office." It is true that it is open to the objection that it does not prevent the States from adopting some other test—that of education or property, for instance—and on that account it would not, if adopted finally, make irreversibly secure the class of citizens for whose protection it was proposed. But the chances of its adoption by the States for this very reason are more probable.

Illinois Republican leaders such as Senator Richard Yates argued in favor of universal suffrage:

Mr. President, I introduced the first bill into the Senate of the United States to enforce suffrage in every state, North as well as South, East as well as West, by Congressional enactment. I assumed that by the amendment to the constitution abolishing slavery the slaves being made free became citizens entitled to all the rights, civil and political, of other American citizens. On this ground I also asserted the broad and bold proposition that being a citizen, although he was black, he was entitled to vote just as much as though he were white.¹⁴

Proponents of the Fifteenth Amendment often advocated its passage and ratification on the moral principle of equality, recognizing blacks as equals, even if some of the same proponents believed that they had to accept the limits of the amendment out of fear that anything more would have been politically unacceptable. Those who appreciated the pragmatism of the amendment's language believed that conservative Republicans would not have allowed for anything more progressive. Even as these people spoke in favor of the Fifteenth Amendment others, motivated by racism, bitterly opposed its passage and ratification.

An editor from Rock Island went so far as to use satirical, derogatory remarks when talking about the proponents of universal suffrage:

The subject of ventilating the halls of congress has enlisted the attention of the house of representatives. It is suggested, however, that a more economical and thorough method of ventilating the concern can be found at the ballot box in the election of honest democratic congressmen. But if pumping the bad air out of the hulk of a congress and injecting constant currents of pure atmosphere into the nostrils of those who now sit there will improve their morals, it will be a good investment.

Seeing that this article was written shortly after the U.S. Congress passed the Fifteenth Amendment, and that the *Argus* was a white supremacist Democratic newspaper, this satirical article could very well had been written in disgust with the recent legislative action. Even after Illinois ratified the Fifteenth Amendment, the same editor protested bitterly:

The proposed amendment to the constitution is brief, but if the country is to be afflicted for any considerable time with a Radical Congress, it will, we predict, prove to be the most prolific source of mischief ever put in so few words. With the liberal construction which the Radicals put upon all grants of power, and their tendency to centralization, it will prove, in its full bloom, the death warrant of the rights of the States.

In Southern Illinois, opposition to the Fifteenth Amendment was more widespread, and this Jacksonville editor was no exception:

The radical constitutional amendment, giving to the negro the right to vote and hold office in all the states, has been passed by the radical congress. Doubtless the republican majority in the legislature of this state will follow suit, irrespective of the will of the popular masses. How long, oh Lord will this nation be further afflicted with corrupt and rotten radical rule?

After Illinois ratified the Fifteenth Amendment, the same editor emphasized the argument of states' rights in opposing federally-legislated universal suffrage:

The question of the rights of the States to regulate suffrage is, in fact, the question whether the continuance of our form of government depends upon the preservation of the States or upon their destruction. If the States are to be preserved, no proposition is more self-evident than this: That they should be left in full possession of all that is essential to their independent existence.

Another southern Illinois editor from Jonesboro emphasized a similar argument:

The 15th article is sufficiently general to suit the most radical notions about human rights. All colors, all races, all conditions, all creeds are thrown upon the same level, to make the most of themselves. By this amendment, state rights go under, and centralization of power in the general government makes another large stride. The hope left is that the states will have too much common sense to allow such absurdities to prevail.¹⁵

Here, the editor expressed a powerful racist thought when he noted what he thought would be the horror of everyone being “thrown upon the same level” regardless of race. The politics of race in Illinois continued to thrive on the conflict between the broadening acceptance of racial equality and the predominant white supremacist culture. The opponents of the Fifteenth Amendment were essentially the same people who had opposed repealing Illinois’ black exclusion laws, the U.S. government’s contraband policy during the Civil War, emancipation and then the Thirteenth Amendment, the use of black men in the Union army, and finally, civil rights for blacks.

Conclusion

In Illinois, the politics of race directly affected the political shift within the Republican party. Lovejoy, Lincoln, Yates, and other Illinois Republicans sought to shape their party in favor of liberalism or conservatism, depending on that person’s particular interests and principles. Democrats became directly involved in the politics of race as well. Logan and Trumbull changed party loyalties more than once during and after the Civil War. In fact, many racially liberal Republicans never forgave Trumbull for his leniency toward Johnson. During the December 1871 session of U.S. Congress, some Republicans spread a rumor that Trumbull was planning to switch back to the Democratic party even though Trumbull at the time had no such intention.¹⁶ Ultimately, however, Trumbull did revert back to the Democratic party in the face of unrelenting

hostility from a group of Republicans who never forgave him. Douglas, who never did change party loyalty, still had to contend with the dynamics of the politics of race. And the political leaders of Illinois were not the only players in this struggle; Illinois editors and voters found their own ways to participate in the politics of race in attempting to influence the uncertain shift toward racial equality. As long as the politics of race sustained a flux in the relations between conservative and racially liberal Republicans, no one was certain how much longer the Northern states would take a serious interest in Reconstruction and, in turn, ensure that the rights of Southern freed blacks would be honored. How blacks would fare in the uncertain future depended not only on the will of the federal government to intervene in the Southern states when it was necessary, but also in how Northern states such as Illinois honored the rights of Northern blacks.

NOTES

¹ For information on some issues Congress faced, see Jean H. Baker, "Defining Postwar Republicanism: Congressional Republicans and the Boundaries of Citizenship," in Robert Engs and Randall Miller, eds., *The Birth of the Grand Old Party: The Republicans' First Generation*, (Philadelphia, 2002), 131 – 134; Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America*, (New York, 1990), 256 – 258; for details on Johnson's Reconstruction policy, see Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863 – 1877*, (New York, 1988), 176 – 184.

² Arthur C. Cole, *The Era of the Civil War, 1848 – 1870*, (University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1987 edition), 395 – 397; for more information on this conflict between liberal and conservative Republicans, see Mark M. Krug, *Lyman Trumbull: Conservative Radical*, (New York, 1965), 233 – 234; *Ibid.*, 239 – 241.

³ For more details about Illinois Republican reactions to Johnson, conflict between conservative and liberal Republicans, and Trumbull's refusal to impeach Johnson, see *Ibid.*, 242 – 244, 250 – 252, 261 – 262.

⁴ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 223; Roger D. Bridges, "Equality Deferred: Civil Rights for Illinois Blacks, 1865 – 1885," 85 – 87, in *Illinois Historical Journal*, 74: 2 (summer 1981); *Ibid.*, 83 – 84.

⁵ For information on the compromise between moderate and liberal Republicans, Reconstruction economic policy, basic rights protection, and Fourteenth Amendment, see Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865 – 1901*, (Cambridge, 2001), 13, 21 – 23, 31 – 34, 38.

⁶ For details on conflict between Johnson and Congress and how this brought about Fourteenth Amendment, see Foner, *Reconstruction*, 246 – 251; for details on the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment and issues tied to it, see *Ibid.*, 251 – 261; *Ottawa Republican*, May 3, 1866; *Ottawa Republican*, January 17, 1867; *Galena Weekly Gazette*, May 22, 1866; *Peoria Weekly Transcript*, July 19, 1866.

⁷ *Springfield Illinois State Register*, May 26, 1866; *Wayne County Press*, June 7, 1866; *Ibid.*; *Ibid.*, June 28, 1866; *Ottawa Free Trader*, June 2, 1866; *Ibid.*, June 16, 1866; *Journal of the Senate of the Twenty-Fourth General Assembly of the State of Illinois*, (Springfield, 1865), 111; *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Twenty-Fourth General Assembly of the State of Illinois*, (Springfield, 1865), 155.

⁸ For more information about how blacks traveled and established their own institutions in the South during and immediately after the Civil War, see Foner, *Reconstruction*, 77 – 88; for more information on the distinctions between the 1865 black conventions and the 1866 black conventions, see *Ibid.*, 100 – 119; Bridges, "Equality Deferred," in *Illinois Historical Journal*, 88.

⁹ For more information on conservative Republican fears see Richardson, *Death of Reconstruction*, 63 – 65; for more on the politics of race and its ties with the elections of 1867 – 1868 see Cole, *Era of the Civil War*, 408 – 414; for more on the political effect of the Military Reconstruction Act see Richardson, *Death of Reconstruction*, 47 – 48.

¹⁰ For more information on moderate and conservative Republican support for Grant see *Ibid.*, 77 – 80; for more information on this political transition in regards to Reconstruction, see Brooks D. Simpson, "The Reforging of a Republican Majority," in *Birth of Grand Old Party*, 152 – 156.

¹¹ For more information on Trumbull and Johnson's narrow escape from impeachment see Krug, *Lyman Trumbull*, 261 – 262; Ralph Roske, *His Own Counsel: The Life and Times of Lyman Trumbull*, (University of Nevada Press, Reno, 1979), 150 – 151.

¹² For further information on the issue of suffrage for black men in Illinois see Bridges, *Equality Deferred*, in *Illinois Historical Journal*, 90 – 93; for statistics on the votes, see *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Twenty-Sixth General Assembly*, vol. 2, 741 and *Journal of the Senate of the Twenty-Sixth General Assembly*, vol. 2, 262.

¹³ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 446 – 449; Krug, *Lyman Trumbull*, 274 – 275.

¹⁴ *Rock Island Weekly Union*, February 20, 1869; *Ibid.*, March 6, 1869; *Springfield Illinois State Journal*, February 2, 1869; *Ibid.*, March 1, 1869; *Rock Island Weekly Union*, March 6, 1869.

¹⁵ *Rock Island Daily Argus*, March 1, 1869; *Ibid.*, March 10, 1869; *Jacksonville Weekly Sentinel*, March 5, 1869; *Ibid.*, March 12, 1869; *Jonesboro Gazette*, February 13, 1869.

¹⁶ Roske, *His Own Counsel*, 159 – 160.

Conclusion

The editorials of Illinois newspapers reflected the larger social and political shift that occurred from the antebellum years to the post bellum years. Racial liberals who were in the very forefront of social justice and racial equality during the antebellum years in protesting slavery, such as Owen Lovejoy, were a small minority during that period. But, by the post bellum years, such racial liberals enjoyed a dramatically broader base of support. Illinois editors, whether they consciously realized it or not, faced a challenging shift in some very basic social values in light of the politics of race. On February 12, 1853, Illinois enacted its notorious black exclusion law and then soon after President Lincoln made public his Emancipation Proclamation, the Illinois legislature threatened to condemn this policy but was prevented from doing so by Governor Richard Yates. From 1865 onward, Illinois went through a dramatic shift. On February 1, 1865, the state ratified the Thirteenth Amendment and then on February 4, repealed its Black Laws; then on January 15, 1867, it embraced the redefinition of citizenship that would include blacks by ratifying the Fourteenth Amendment; and on March 5, 1869, Illinois ratified the Fifteenth Amendment, with full knowledge that this amendment would have *national* breadth, not just affecting the Southern states in extending black male suffrage. Yet, this shift towards the principle of racial equality did not occur without its setbacks and challenges; nor did it occur because of a lack of a white supremacist viewpoint in Illinois. It occurred *in spite* of the prevalence of white supremacist thinking.

Nevertheless, over time the liberalism of racial equality had strengthened not only within the Republican party in Illinois, but also among Illinois Democrats. When the Illinois General Assembly ratified the Fifteenth Amendment in 1869, Illinois Democrats

in the northern counties openly supported its ratification, in spite of racist opposition among Illinois Democrats in the state's central and southern regions.¹ After the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, Illinois continued to confront the challenges of extending equality to black Illinoisans during an era when white supremacy was well entrenched. In 1870, Illinois held a constitutional convention and the end result was a state constitution that made no reference to race in any respect. Delegates approved this constitution on May 13, 1870, and voters accepted it through referendum in July, 1870. Two of the tests for this new constitution were whether or not blacks would enjoy their right to public education, and whether Republicans would recognize the loyalty of black voters by distributing patronage and offices more equitably, regardless of race.² But blacks continued to struggle to ensure free practice of their rights as citizens of Illinois, both, in terms of education and political patronage. Remarkably, the Illinois Republican legislature continued to sustain interest in equal rights for black Illinoisans through the mid 1880s. On June 3, 1885, the Illinois legislature passed the state's first civil rights law, which guaranteed Illinois blacks equal access to all public facilities and public transportation. As historian Roger Bridges argues, Illinois Republicans carried this out not from a stand on equal rights, but rather from political necessity and pressure, as black voters had threatened to turn to supporting Illinois Democrats who promised greater impartial political patronage.³ Nevertheless, what was remarkable was that Illinois Republicans sustained an interest in equal rights for blacks longer compared to some other Northern states' Republicans, and especially the Republicans in the U.S. Congress and presidency. Reconstruction had long since died in the South by 1885, and the Southern states had redeemed themselves (restoring white supremacist rule through a

reign of terror that later evolved into Jim Crow laws). By this time that, in contrast to Illinois Republicans, other Republican leaders had lost interest in the issue of equal rights for blacks.

David Roediger has argued that the prevalent white supremacist culture of the Northern states had to go through a readjustment after the Civil War with the destruction of slavery. Before, slavery provided white workers with a convenient opposite contrast to the ideology of free-labor for white men. With the destruction of slavery in the South, white workers preserved the stereotypes of blacks as being lazy and worthless in order to continue to provide some comforting sense among themselves of superiority. Roediger claims that when radical Republicans failed to support legislation favoring workers, such as the eight hour work day, this alienation combined with Northern racism to doom any strong alliance of black and white workers.⁴ Brooks Simpson emphasizes the Compromise of 1877 tied to the election of Rutherford B. Hayes. He notes that Republicans agreed to abandon the policy of intervention even though such abandonment was already underway while Southern Democrats promised concessions of their own. In 1878 and afterwards, Democrats in the House and Senate tried to diminish federal government power even further by attaching riders to appropriation bills. Yet, even as Republicans revived the tactic of the bloody shirt, they did so more with anti-Southern sentiment than due to any strong, sincere interest in equal rights for blacks.⁵ Different historians have taken different emphases or arguments in explaining how Reconstruction failed. It is very likely that a combination of many of the factors discussed by these historians explain Reconstruction's failure. David Blight offers one of the factors that goes to the very fundamental values of white Americans as they made the transition to

living in the post-bellum era. He argues that the perplexing dilemma for Americans after the Civil War ended was how to reconcile the desire for national unity with the important principle of equal rights for freed blacks. Tragically, too many white Americans during Reconstruction and afterwards found it easier to forget the moral issues of the Civil War and instead remembered the superficial sentiments of reunion between white supremacists, North and South. Blight eloquently and concisely got to the heart of the matter when he said, "The tragedy of the Reconstruction is rooted in this American paradox; the imperative of healing and the imperative of justice could not, ultimately, cohabit the same house. The one was the prisoner of memory, the other a creature of law."⁶

Illinois was one of the few Northern states to go so far as to enact into law social equality in terms of access to public facilities and public transportation. And Illinois did so several years after Reconstruction had ended in dismal failure in the Southern states and Northern Republicans were increasingly turning their backs on the interest of equal rights for blacks. The fact that Illinois accomplished this in the face of disheartening factors and challenges that led to Reconstruction's failure discussed above, makes the civil rights legislation all the more impressive. The tiny minority group who not only opposed slavery but advocated equal rights for blacks during the antebellum period in Illinois confronted opposition that was overwhelmingly racist and sometimes violent. Yet, these racial liberals had broadened their support base and strengthened their values long after the Civil War had ended. Blacks in Illinois would continue to face discrimination and segregation, as Martin Luther King Jr's. protest in the mid-twentieth century, in a suburb of Chicago attested to. Just like in the South, in the Northern states,

blacks faced retrenchment of a conservatism that disregarded the issue of equal rights. But at least in Illinois, blacks had laws on the books that they could turn to in their ongoing struggle to gain greater inclusion as citizens of Illinois without having to face (with some rare exceptions) the widespread mob violence and the more overbearing Jim Crow laws of the Southern states.

NOTES

1. Arthur Cole, *The Era of the Civil War, 1848 – 1870*, (Urbana, 1987 edition), 417 – 418.

² For more information on how blacks tested the rights granted to them in the new Illinois constitution, read Roger D. Bridges, “Equality Deferred: Civil Rights for Illinois Blacks, 1865 – 1885,” in *Illinois Historical Journal*, (74: 2, summer 1981), 83 – 108, 95 – 107.

³ *Ibid.*, 105 – 107.

⁴ David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, (New York, 1999), 176 – 181.

⁵ Brooks D. Simpson, “The Reforging of a Republican Majority,” in Robert Engs and Randall M. Miller, editors, *The Birth of the Grand Old Party: The Republicans’ First Generation*, (Philadelphia, 2002) 163 – 166. For a class analysis on the failure of Reconstruction, see Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America*, (New York, 1990), 300 – 302. For information on how Republicans compromised with Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, and even with the Enforcement Acts, see Jean H. Baker, “Defining Postwar Republicanism: Congressional Republicans and the Boundaries of Citizenship,” in Engs and Miller, editors, *Birth of Grand Old Party*, 137 – 139.

⁶ For more information on this perplexing conflict of values, see David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, (Cambridge, 2001), 31 – 32, 54 – 57; Blight’s quote, 57.

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