

EGYPTIAN DARKNESS: ANTEBELLUM RECONSTRUCTION AND SOUTHERN
ILLINOIS IN THE REPUBLICAN IMAGINATION, 1854-1861

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ABSTRACT

Eric Michael Burke: *Egyptian Darkness: Antebellum Reconstruction and Southern Illinois in the Republican Imagination, 1854-1861*
(Under the direction of Harry L. Watson)

Historians have identified an antebellum Republican “critique of the South” outlining the detrimental effects of slavery on white Southern society and the vital importance of “reconstructing” the white South in the image of the free labor agrarian North following the eventual collapse of slavery. The efforts to follow through with this transformation have historiographically been relegated to efforts of radical Republicans to reconstruct the ex-Confederacy between 1863 and 1877. This paper argues that Republican strategies and efforts to “reconstruct” the white South were evident during the late antebellum period (1848-1861) applied to the southern counties of Illinois which were inhabited chiefly by Southern “poor white” migrants. These efforts to dispel the “Egyptian darkness” of southern Illinois can be seen as an early laboratory of Republican reconstruction strategies.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

At four o'clock on June 23, 1861, the final northbound train of the day crawled out of the swampy confines of Cairo, Illinois carrying *London Times* correspondent William Howard Russell away from the “cheerless, miserable place” in which he had sojourned over the previous four days. Four months had transpired since he first arrived in New York City to begin a grand tour of the now fractured United States. His journey had led through the urban centers of the northeast, the newborn Confederate States of America, and now carried him northward again through the fabled “North-west.” Thus far his return to the “Free States” had been less than impressive. Although his travels throughout the slave South had poignantly illustrated to him the severely detrimental effects of the “peculiar institution” on both black and white Americans, he had quite enjoyed partaking as a guest in the luxurious lifestyle of the elite slaveholding class. Now, finding himself crammed into an uncomfortable passenger car alongside scores of “wild-looking banditti” masquerading as soldiers and “a few unfortunate women, undergoing deportation to some less moral neighborhood,” he began to wonder if the United States really was “the most enlightened nation in the world,” as it so often claimed to be.¹

Perhaps in an effort to avoid conversation, Russell peered out of his window into the “wild, flat sea of waving grass, dotted by patch-like Indian corn enclosures” that, together with spotty “forests of dead trees,” comprised the southern Illinois landscape. The first station –

¹ William Howard Russell, *My Diary North and South* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1863), 131.

Mound City – “a mere heap of earth” dotted with “a few log huts and hovels” seemed out of place resting alongside the internationally-renowned Illinois Central Railroad. As if able to read his mind, the “jolly-looking, corpulent man” seated next to Russell explained at once how the character of the settlers that dwelled in such out-of-the-way places were acknowledged to be “awful warnings to the emigrants not to stick in the south part of Illinois.” Further down the track, the larger stations at Jonesboro, Cobden, and Carbondale confirmed such notions. Surrounded by corn fields “which bore a peculiarly blighted and harassed look,” none of the communities looked to be “very flourishing nor very civilized.”²

Although, he admitted, it was slightly unfair to “judge the condition of a people from the windows of a railway carriage,” he nevertheless did just that within the pages of his travel diary. “The external aspect of the settlements along the line, far superior to that of slave hamlets, does not equal my expectations,” he noted. Beyond a telling volume of “drinking saloons” (four were visible from the tracks in Cobden alone), where Russell was sure “the highest citizen in the place” hobnobbed familiarly with “the worst rowdy in the place,” there seemed little to distinguish “one of these civilising centres which the Americans assert to be the homes of the most cultivated and intelligent communities in the world.” Taking the opportunity to poke fun at the shortcomings of democracy, he added that, “though they do carry a vote for each adult man, 'locations' here would not appear very enviable in the eyes of the most miserable Dorestshire small farmer.” Indeed, he added, there was “a level modicum of comfort, which may be consistent with the greatest good of the greatest number,” as purported by proponents of republican government, “but which makes the standard of the highest in point of well-being very low indeed.” As far as Russell could tell, noticing a wooden placard left over from the recent

2 Ibid., 131-132.

election reading: “Vote for Lincoln and Hamlin, for Union and Freedom” defaced with “bitter words” and “offensive additions,” the degeneracy visible from his car window was proof of just that.³

Receiving equal amounts of attention and opprobrium from American readers upon its publication in the United States in 1863, the anti-republican rhetoric and critical outlook on democratic government expressed in Russell's *My Diary North and South* rankled a still nascent American nationalism made all the more sensitive after two years of bloody civil war. Though the Northern press filled with anti-Russell denunciations and radically negative reviews of the work, none exhibited more concerted effort and attention than did that of University of Michigan professor Andrew Dickson White. Running to a full thirty-seven pages, White's “A Letter to William Howard Russell” lambasted the English reporter for his “I told you so' style” and less than subtle critiques of republican government. More importantly, White's rebuttal was a defense of all he and his fellow Republicans saw in the present and, more importantly, future of the United States.⁴

White suggested the reporter's judgment had been clouded by the haze of Old World pretension which uncovered itself in his condescending “*de haut en bas*” tone. Moreover, White maintained, Russell built his resulting analysis on erroneous assumptions rather than empirical fact. “You have reasoned from your theory of what every republic *must be*,” White argued, “rather than from your observation of what the American Republic really *is*.” In Russell's evident preferment of Southern planter life over that of the free communities of “hardy farmers” he witnessed in the North, White saw an aristocratic Englishman gravitating toward “the men most

3 Ibid., 132.

4 Andrew Dickson White, *A letter to William Howard Russell, LL.D. on passages in his “Diary North and South”* (London: Henry Stevens, 1863), 12.

resembling members of the London Clubs” – slaveholding planter elites of the South – and the snobbish aristocratic culture to which he was familiar. And this, White insisted, was where Russell was all wrong. “American civilization is as yet far from what we hope for,” he admitted. But, warts and all, true Americans would always “prefer the most stormy democracy to the most sunny despotism.” Free citizens of the free states naturally were disgusted at the mere suggestion of servility to any lord but the law. They held their “dearest privilege” to be “that of asking questions” and “took pains to examine” any answer that seemed suspect. To do otherwise, would smack of dependence, subjugation, or worse – slavery. Such servility, Republicans charged, had been forced on the country at large – but most especially on the blacks and white non-slaveholders of the South – by an oligarchic slaveholder cabal. Nothing short of the total overthrow of that faction, ostensibly achieved by the election of 1860 but now threatened anew by Southern secession, could preserve the virtues of self-government not only in the United States, but throughout the world. Only then, they argued, could the reconstruction of a free democratic republic along the lines originally outlined by the Founders begin.⁵

Little of Russell's narrative attracted White's attention like that of his comparisons of the slave and free states. “Your mistakes,” he offered, “can be best illustrated by...the account of your journey from the Southern extremity of Illinois to Chicago.” Suggesting that, had Russell made the most casual consultation of a map, he would have noticed that southern Illinois “is deeply wedged into slave-owning regions” and that “the great body of its early inhabitants came from the Slave States.” Moreover, “had you asked any of your neighbours on the railway, they would

5 White, *Letter*, 18; 12; 14; 17; 18; This characterization of Republican aims across the era is drawn collectively from Eric Foner's *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (Oxford, 1995), William Gienapp's *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* (Oxford, 1988), James Oakes's *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865* (New York, 2014), and Susan-Mary Grant's *North Over South: Northern Nationalism and American Identity in the Antebellum Era* (Lawrence, 2000).

have told you that on account of the mental and moral darkness arising from Slave State influences, Southern Illinois had been known throughout the Union under the nickname of 'Egypt'," he explained. "Yet this is the district you choose as representative of the North!" Whatever "Egypt" was, White's refutation seemed to suggest, it certainly was not "the North." But if not, what was it?⁶

For at least the preceding decade and a half, Egypt had posed an intellectual and political problem for Northern advocates and proponents of free labor and later Republican ideology like Professor White. Racked with endemic levels of illiteracy, poverty, and anti-intellectualism, fiercely Democratic, pro-slavery, and anti-black (to an extent surprising even to highly prejudiced contemporaries), southern Illinois seemed to fly in the face of what historian Eric Foner has identified as the chief component of prevailing Republican ideology: namely, that antebellum Northern society "exemplified the best aspects of the free labor ideology" and that both "equal opportunity for social mobility and economic independence...[were]...not dreams but living realities." Indeed, the intellectual agenda of the antebellum Republican Party was never one of reforming the perceived social order of the antebellum North, but rather of spreading the virtues of such a free labor system so as to embrace the entirety of the Republic. Most controversially, such a "reconstruction" of American society in the image of the free North would necessarily require the eventual destruction of Southern slavery and a "Republicanization" or "Northernization" of a post-slavery white South following the institution's eventual demise. Intellectual musings, public discourse, and considerably less informed popular prophecy abounded throughout the antebellum North concerning how such a Southern transformation would either take place on its own, or might, if necessary, be nudged into fruition by Northerners

⁶ White, *Letter*, 24.

in the aftermath of gradual (or, far less popularly, immediate) abolition.⁷

Populated by predominately white settlers of upland Southern origins, ostensibly stripped of their physical connections to slavery, even if apparently still bound to the institution ideologically, Egypt lent itself to Republican postulating about the potential long-term effects of slavery on a future post-slavery and free labor Southern society. It also offered a kind of experimental lab for Republican strategists and reformers in which to test theories of transformation and reconstruction, many of which would – though unbeknownst to any of them – soon be similarly implemented within a post-slavery South following the bloody crucible of civil war. For nearly two decades, Republican editors and ideologues wrestled with uncovering the origin and function of the “mental and moral darkness” that overspread southern Illinois, while at the same time forwarding strategies for its alleviation.

Simultaneously, Egypt ominously represented the long reach of the all-powerful “Slaveocracy.” Nearly religiously devoted to the party of Jackson, which Republicans routinely referred to as having been hijacked by the “Slave Power” cabal, Egypt seemed itself enslaved to Southern Democrats who wanted anything but the good of southern Illinoisans. Such blind loyalty and political intransigence of Egyptians baffled and annoyed Republicans endlessly, while the perceived backwardness of the region's inhabitants suggested the resiliency of a slave society's continued detrimental effects on a white population, even after the institution had been removed. Further, the perceived servility of southern Illinoisans – most especially those notoriously engaged in “slave-catching” – toward the beckoning call of slaveholders disgusted Republicans who argued that Southerners were somehow manipulating the hearts and minds of freeborn white men and women to their own injury.

⁷ Foner, *Free Soil*, 29, 52-53; Richard N. Current, *Northernizing the South* (Athens, 1983), 17-83; David Brion Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress* (Oxford, 1984), 262; Grant, *North Over South*, 5-6; “Indiana Correspondence,” *The Egyptian Republic*, November 17, 1859.

The “Egyptian Darkness” that shrouded the antebellum southern Illinois of the Republican imagination across the two decades prior to the outbreak of civil war started as a problem to be explained, evolved into a problem to be solved, and later degenerated into a problem to be reluctantly accepted and contained. In this way, the saga of Egypt and the antebellum Northern public discourse regarding the perceived problems of the region, their origins, and how to solve them, offer a unique glimpse into how antebellum Republicans grappled with questions of a forthcoming “reconstruction” of the white South in a future post-slavery free labor society, while also offering a dubious forecast for the probable failure of such endeavors in postbellum America.

CHAPTER 2

FROM THE LAND OF GOSHEN TO DARK EGYPT

The “Egypt” of Illinois had not always been shrouded in darkness within the Northern imagination. Traveling to the Illinois Country in 1799, Baptist missionary John Badgley was likely the first American to apply a Biblically-inspired moniker to the richly fertile land he saw stretched out beneath the bluffs south and east of what is today St. Louis. Struck by the beauty and arable potential of the region, Badgley dubbed it the “Land of Goshen,” in reference to the finest agricultural lands of Lower Egypt allegedly granted by Joseph to the wayward sons of Jacob when they arrived from famine-ravaged Hebron. The Egyptian analogy was bolstered by the ready access to the two primary navigational and commercial arteries of the North American continent: the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, as well as by the pyramidal ruins of the ancient civilization at Cahokia.⁸

As the Illinois Country flooded with American migrants during the first decades of the nineteenth century, settlers took up the thematic tradition begun by Badgley in naming the village of Cairo at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. The towns of Dongola, Karnak, and Thebes would follow in Cairo's wake, but only after the region solidified its reputation as a “land of milk and honey” during the brutal Illinois “Winter of the Deep Snow” across 1830-31. Pioneer survivors of the abnormally trying time told stories of an intense snowfall that blanketed the northern and central portions of the state for seven full months,

⁸ “Egypt,” Andrew D. Duff, *Shawneetown Gazette* in *The Golconda Weekly*, November 23, 1871; Gen. 46-47 AV.

delaying the 1831 growing season until early summer, only to be blunted by an early frost and yet another brutal winter. Lying on a more southerly latitude, and in a slightly more hospitable climate, southern Illinois was consequently the only region of the infant state successful in producing a corn harvest during the period. Northern Illinoisans were forced to pilgrimage “down to Egypt,” again in the Biblical manner of Jacob, to find sustenance and evade starvation. One resident of southern Illinois later recalled “more than a hundred wagons” passing into the region during the spring of 1832, exclaiming along the route how they were “going to Egypt for corn,” and had “heard there is corn in Egypt, and have come to buy for ourselves and little one[s].” The name stuck. In fact, the usage became so pervasive that many later forgot the nickname had even existed prior. “No living man ever heard the term Egypt applied [to] this part of Illinois prior to the spring of 1832,” one Egyptian later remarked. “Little did they imagine in thus complimenting this part of the state as the granary of Illinois,” he added, “they were laying the foundation for a gross slander upon the intelligence of the people of the very country which they, in the goodness and gratitude of their hearts, intended to honor and praise.”⁹

The influx of population that spilled into the bountiful lands of Egypt across the first half of the nineteenth century were disproportionately natives of the upland South: a region encompassing the states of Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and North Carolina. These emigrants left their homes for a wide variety of reasons, usually including availability of land and the prevailing reports of profound fertility and promise in the bottomlands of southern Illinois. Often settlers cited the institution of slavery as a significant factor in motivating their departure from the South. Others, however, were so fond of the institution that they rapidly attempted to re-establish it on Illinois soil shortly after their arrival – several even bringing their slaves along

9 Ibid.

with them despite prohibitive territorial laws. Not until the first state constitution was forged after fiery debate in 1818 was slavery legally stricken from Egypt, though it continued to thrive in other “indentured” forms for several succeeding decades.¹⁰

For all practical purposes, during the first decade of the state's history, southern Illinois was Illinois. Expansion of immigrants into central and northern Illinois during the era operated at what geographer Douglas Meyer has described as a “snail's pace.” The desperately hard ground of the expansive prairies blunted the ability of newcomers to exploit a large portion of the state's land area, confining them to the rich alluvial bottomlands of Egypt prior to the introduction of the steel plow. This pattern changed dramatically with the coming of the National Road and then the railroad across the first half of the century. As the new *entrepot* of Chicago grew in the wake of the completion of the Erie Canal, a new wave of settlers from New England and the Middle Atlantic states, alongside large numbers of European immigrants, flooded into northern Illinois and expanded southward into the prairies of the new central counties. From a population of only slightly more than 12,000 in 1810, the state grew explosively to more than 1,700,000 by 1860 – much if not most of this from in-migration into the newly opened northern and central portions of the state.¹¹

Quickly becoming well acquainted with the upland Southerners with whom they shared the new state, New Englander “Yankees” and Middle Atlantic migrants crossed paths with the Egyptians on many occasions, but none so public as on the floor of the state legislature. The temperature of political rhetoric ran feverishly high across the early decades of the nineteenth-

¹⁰ Douglas K. Meyer, *Making the Heartland Quilt: A Geographical History of Settlement and Migration in Early-Nineteenth-Century Illinois* (Carbondale, 2000), 136; Allan G. Bogue, *From Prairie to Corn Belt: Farming on the Illinois and Iowa Prairies in the Nineteenth Century* (Lanham, 2011), 18.; Comprehensive treatment of slavery in southern Illinois is found within Darrel Dexter's *Bondage in Egypt: Slavery in Southern Illinois* (Cape Girardeau, 2010).

¹¹ Meyer, *Making the Heartland Quilt*, 120; James E. Davis, *Frontier Illinois* (Bloomington, 1998), 127, 356.

century as Illinois legislators debated, among many other things, the possible introduction of slavery into the state and the exclusion of free blacks from the same. The latter of these issues became a particularly explosive topic during the constitutional debates of 1847. Passionate about the importance of keeping African-Americans out of the southern environs of the state, Egyptian state legislators argued vehemently for an exclusionary act that would keep Egypt from ostensibly being flooded with slaves manumitted (or fleeing) from neighboring Kentucky and Missouri. As the debates raged, a sectional rift quickly grew in the chamber, the Egyptian representatives beginning to refer to themselves as “we, at the south” and their constituents as “the people of the south.” Having enjoyed demographic dominance throughout the majority of the state's history, Egyptian legislators quickly began to feel besieged as the population center of the state moved northward toward mid-century, and their concerns over Egypt's eventual slip from hegemony in the state intensified.¹²

For their part, the “Yankee” migrants filling northern Illinois carried westward with them the predominate view of Southerners and their particular cultural traits as “a world apart.” The vast majority having never visited the slave South, New Englanders were forced to operate on pervasive stereotypes of the lounging planter, dazzlingly bedecked belle, degraded poor white farmer, and simple if obedient slave to fill the gaps in their awareness. In part because of this general ignorance, and also because of the struggles involved in defining a coherent American national identity in the face of at least two disparate strains of incipient American nationalism, Northerners held a wide variety of opinions regarding the South and its inhabitants in the early

12 Debates over slavery and “negro exclusion” laws are addressed in both Eugene Berwanger's *The Frontier Against Slavery: Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy* (Urbana, 1967) and James Simeone's *Democracy and Slavery in Frontier Illinois: The Bottomland Republic* (DeKalb, 2000); Arthur C. Cole (ed.), *The Illinois Constitutional Debates of 1847*, Vol. XIV, Illinois State Historical Library (Springfield, 1919), 755, 860; The general northward trend of the population center of Illinois is discussed within Arthur Cole's *The Era of the Civil War, 1848-1870* (Springfield, 1919).

antebellum period. “Northerners often did not know how to react to the South,” historian Susan-Mary Grant argues, “whether to praise it or damn it, admire it or fear it.” Lured by the luxurious and highly cultured lifestyle exhibited by the planters Northerners imagined as filling the South, most nevertheless were struck by the rumored ignorance and backwardness of white non-slaveholders and the barbaric tales of slavery that marked all imagined notions of the “sunny South.” Though sectional relations were often fearfully strained at the national level, consistent compromise and the maintenance of national (not sectional) political parties created a kind of equilibrium that ensured that the Northern critique of the South never became uniformly negative during the majority of the first half of the century.¹³

This ambivalence toward the South was mirrored in Northern observations and critiques of Egypt and its “southern” inhabitants during the early antebellum era. As late as 1854, a writer to the *New-York Tribune* described southern Illinois as advancing “in making farms, cultivating the soil, accumulating property – in social order, good morals, and even temperance” at more or less the same “rapid” pace as had western New York during its period of early settlement.

Though sectional friction increased sharply across the era, many northern editors portrayed Egypt as a land to which upland Southerners were actively escaping from the growing evils of slavery, and could be seen to “till the earth and follow the mechanic arts without being degraded by the competition of chattels.”¹⁴

But such ambivalence to the South, and to Egypt, could not last in a national political atmosphere trending rapidly toward the intensification of sectional rift and the inescapable

13 Grant, *North Over South*, 59; Ambivalent and neutral “world apart” portrayals of Southern life in antebellum Northern rhetoric is also present within Howard R. Floan's *The South in Northern Eyes, 1831 to 1861* (Austin, 1958).

14 “Southern Illinois,” J. M. P., *New-York Tribune*, August 4, 1854; “Slavery and the Union – Threats of Dissolution,” *New-York Tribune* in *The Vermont Watchman and State Journal*, December 27, 1849.

debate over the future of the western territories after 1848 and, ultimately, of slavery's continued existence in America. As national and inter-sectional political parties in the North dissolved from stress and internal fracture, the highly sectional Republican Party took their place – founded upon a firm antipathy toward the institution of slavery, its extension into the territories, and its fundamentally detrimental effect upon the progress and advancement of the Republic more generally. Along with this came a transformed “Republican critique of the South” that was anything but ambivalent.¹⁵

Central to this new hostile critique was the notion that Southern life was cursed by an endemic “degradation of labor” burdening both slaves and white non-slaveholders. Systematically kept in profound ignorance by the slaveholding class and lacking any hope for social mobility, Republicans argued, both groups suffered tremendously in the realm of possible avenues for advancement. The South was mired in decadence and idleness, marred by its perceived hostility to free common education, internal improvements, and free labor ideology. Damningly critical analysis of Southern underdevelopment, ignorance, and general backwardness filled the Northern press throughout the 1850s, marked most notably by popular travel accounts written by Frederick Law Olmsted and William Cullen Bryant, but also apparent in fictional works like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Most, if not all, of these accounts focused on the centrality of the “peculiar institution” in effecting all of the problems, shortcomings, and evils of Southern life by highlighting how its translation into the “degradation of labor” blunted Southern progress and buried the majority of Southern white yeomanry and pitiful black slaves under the weight of the aristocratic planter elite's social prerogatives and political monopoly. Granted, such

¹⁵ The highly sectional nature of the early Republican Party is outlined in great detail within both Eric Foner's canonical *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men* (1970) cited above, as well as in William E. Gienapp's *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* (New York, 1987); The phrase “Republican critique of the South” is drawn from Foner, *Free Soil*, 40.

views were profoundly over-generalized, far too simplistic, and even patently erroneous and incorrect in many if not most cases, but the accuracy of such claims mattered far less than the inclination of Republicans to embrace them as fact.¹⁶

As Republican ideology and its corresponding negative “critique of the South” filtered westward to Illinois, Northerners quickly began to find utility in its application to the apparent character of southern Illinois. Egyptians were, after all, if not Southerners themselves by 1850, by and large the descendants of Southern pioneer families. But it wasn't until the results of the Seventh United States Census in 1850 brought the apparently profoundly degraded character of Egypt to the national eye that the critique seemed most apt. The most casual of glances at the statistical report illustrated clearly the disproportionate level of adult illiteracy in nearly all of the southern counties of the state. Although 11% of all white adult (over the age of 20) Illinoisans could not read or write, nearly 30% of Egyptians fell into the same category. This statistic was made all the more striking by the fact that fewer than 8% of Illinoisans living in all other counties of the state reported illiteracy. In Hamilton, Jackson, and Union counties nearly half of all adult white Egyptians could not read or write. Also reporting markedly low proportions of non-English speaking foreign immigrants in the region did not help Egypt's case. Farm values plummeted with latitude from north to south alongside the number of functioning public schools enumerated. When combined with the consistently solid Democratic vote and incredibly heated anti-black and often pro-slavery rhetoric issuing from Egyptians in both the state and national legislatures, Republicans and anti-slavery advocates nationally began to see and characterize southern Illinois as a “benighted region.” Now, seizing on yet a third Biblical reference, Republicans turned to the ninth plague described in the dismal passage of Exodus during which “the Lord said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that darkness will spread over

¹⁶ Foner, *Free Soil*, 40-72; Grant, *North Over South*, 81-110.

Egypt – darkness that can be felt.'...[and] Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt.” The influence of slavery and its corresponding “degradation of labor” had somehow followed Southern migrants into Illinois and onto the free soil of the North, Republicans argued, and with it the “Land of Goshen” had been transformed into “Dark Egypt.”¹⁷

17 J. D. B. DeBow, *The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850, Embracing a Statistical View of Each of the States and Territories, Arranged By Counties, Towns, Etc.* (Washington, 1853); *The American Missionary Magazine*, Volume I, March 1857, No. 3, p.63-64; Exod. 10:21 AV; Frank L. Klement, *The Copperheads in the Middle West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 25.

CHAPTER 3

THIS MODERN EGYPT

As the sectional crisis enflamed during the 1850s, Republican editors and ideologues increasingly turned toward fiery invective condemning the slave South and its inherently regressive nature in an attempt to portray slavery as an encumbrance to national progress and a future American social order mirroring that of the antebellum agrarian North. Paired with this was equally reviling criticism aimed at those portions of the Free States which seemed most directly touched by “Slave State influences.” Of these, perhaps none received as much concerted and wide-ranging attention as did Egypt. A broad survey of editorial columns in twenty-eight different Republican organs stretching from Irasburgh, Vermont to White Cloud, Kansas, and representing a variety of circulation rates ranging from the widely read *New-York Tribune* to the local *Holmes County Republican* and agriculturally-oriented *Prairie Farmer*, offers a glimpse at how “Dark Egypt” was portrayed in the Republican press across the decade. Some portrayals were built into both legitimate and likely fabricated travel accounts mirroring those regarding the slave South itself. Others were embedded in wider critiques of the “Slave Power” and its bid to engulf the entire Republic within its regressive embrace. Most followed a general template including a thick description of the “Egyptian Darkness,” explanations for its existence and function, as well as prescriptions for remedying its evils and “redeeming” Egypt in the near future. Perhaps unable to restrain themselves, however, most editors did not shy away from sharp satire designed to entertain as much as inform.

“Egyptians are an entirely different race from any other known people on the globe,” one Republican editor explained. While southern Illinoisans were “in some respects similar to other people – that is they have legs, arms, noses, teeth, and toe-nails,” they were distinctive in that they had “no brains.” Although they appeared to harbor the same “affections, feelings, passions, [and] senses” as other Americans: “if you prick them they will smart; if you strike them they will respond; if you insult them they will fight,” as another editor described, when it came to “the advantages of education” and “the influence of religion,” they were oblivious. “They dwell in mud hovels and live on roots,” a Kansas Republican wrote, “and have no knowledge of what is transpiring twenty miles distant.” Egyptians “despise the spelling book and ignore the Bible,” and subsisted largely on “dead cattle, swine and wild poultry,” allegedly supplemented occasionally with the cannibalistic fare of “stewed nigger and fricased [sic] Injun.” All of this was of course maintained while abiding religiously by the motto that the Democratic Party platform was “the true gospel.” Admittedly, such a picture “may be somewhat exaggerated,” one Wisconsin editor commented on the prevailing Egyptian stereotype, “but is nevertheless true, in all essential details, of a large class of the inhabitants of this modern Egypt.”¹⁸

The Egyptian of the Republican imagination was not simply transplanted from the slave South into Illinois. In many cases, he or she was produced in the “Sucker State” itself. “Egyptian Darkness” began as “sun-burnt, tow-headed childhood” in its larval form. Though “thirsting for knowledge” as all children would naturally do, Republicans argued, lacking ample educational resources in a region of profound illiteracy and resistant to public education, there remained no productive employment for Egyptian youths beyond picking blackberries and idly “watching the

18 “The Illinois Egyptians,” *Holmes County Republican*, May 14, 1857; “Southern Illinois Alias Egypt,” *Rochester Democrat* in *The Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, October 26, 1857; “Startling Disclosure!,” *White Cloud Kansas Chief*, July 19, 1860; “Southern Illinois,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 9, 1856; “Sam in Egypt,” *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, May 29, 1855.

rattlesnake that thrusts its head out from behind the log.” This condition would inevitably lead to “no prospect for the future, but that of idleness with ignorance, or industry without intelligence.” Indeed, the perpetual “darkness” often seemed “more like death than it is like sleep.”¹⁹

If male, the degenerate childhood eventually “vegetates into ignorant, listless manhood,” filled with a “dull and profitless” life marked by “peculiar and shiftless” agriculture and ideological thralldom to both the “Slave Power” and Democratic Party. If female, a daughter of Egypt – known also as a “bare-footed angel” – adult life would differ only slightly from that of her male counterparts. Egyptian women were notorious for their propensity to “drink whiskey, chew tobacker, and swear like the old Harry,” allegedly even taking it upon themselves to alarmingly “take part in all Presidential elections.” Regularly observed working in the cornfields alongside their brothers and fathers, the women of southern Illinois embraced a “filial affection for mother earth,” if their regularly filthy bare feet suggested “an absence of soap and water quite excruciating to people fastidious about dirt.”²⁰

Despite the lack of slaveholders in Egypt, the region was “in principle, emphatically a land of Slavery,” the *Chicago Tribune* explained, “and bids fair to claim the prominent position in history as the hunting ground of the runaway negro.” Just as territorial Kansas was “polluted by the records of high-handed villainy perpetrated by the disciples of the pro-Slavery school, so the history of Egypt is stained by the most consummate meanness and rascality by members of the same party.” Perhaps no Republican stereotype applied to Egypt was quite so widely

19 “Sam' in Egypt,” *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, May 29, 1855; Rev. Albert Smith, “A Plea for Southern Illinois” in *An Argument (In Sundry Short Papers,) For Securing Christian Education in Southern Illinois Through the Establishment of Du Quoine Female Seminary, At a Cost of Fifty Thousand Dollars* (New York: James D. Torrey, 1856), 16.

20 “Sam' in Egypt,” *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, May 29, 1855; “Egypt and the Egyptians,” *The Potter Journal*, July 8, 1858; “Women in the Field,” *Prairie Farmer*, June 21, 1859; “The Illinois Egyptians,” *Holmes County Republican*, May 14, 1857; “Southern Illinois Alias Egypt,” *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, October 26, 1857.

acknowledged or indeed as damning as that of the “human bloodhound” slave-catching “kidnapper” who ostensibly made a living patrolling the Egyptian countryside, brutalizing fugitive slaves and free blacks found on the roads at night, and storming passenger trains by day, bowie knife and pistol in hand, fueled by nothing but an interest in the “recompense of reward” for his immoral and inhumane efforts. No class of Egyptian provoked the contempt of Republicans more. Beyond the ignoble “petty treason” of such activities, it was the apparent servility of slave-catchers to the oligarchic Southern slaveholder that most rankled Republican observers. “Down South they keep DOGS to catch runaway niggers,” one exasperated Republican editor in southern Illinois remarked, “but in our country the *democrats* do it.”²¹

Most of these characteristics could be easily explained by Republicans. After all, the inhabitants of the southern counties “were for the most part the poor whites from the adjacent slave States,” one traveler remarked, describing the same as “a class who cannot be exceeded in ignorance by any living type of humanity.” “Driven by starvation” and the oppression borne of the slaveholding oligarchy, the wayward emigrants had “sought a home, or rather *a place to stay*” across the Ohio River, and had found one in southern Illinois. With them they brought far more than the few meager belongings they had owned in Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, or North Carolina. “Too poor to own niggers...they transplanted into Illinois all their ignorance, shiftlessness, school-house hating, tobacco-grinding, whisky-drinking habits,” one bitter editor remarked. “It is unquestionable that the immigration from the South has brought into the free States more ignorance, poverty, and thriftlessness, than an equal amount of the immigration from Europe,” prominent Republican George Weston argued. “Where it forms a marked feature of the

21 “The Jonesboro Kidnappers, Notes from the Hunting Grounds,” *Chicago Press and Tribune*, November 4, 1859; “Illinois Republicanism and Religion,” *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, April 28, 1848; “War, War, War,” *The Egyptian Republican*, November 17, 1859; Further discussion of Republican opinions of slave-catchers, see Stanley W. Campbell's *The Slave Catchers: Enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law, 1850-1860* (Chapel Hill, 1968).

population, as in Southern Illinois, a long time must elapse before it is brought up to the general standard of intelligence and enterprise in the free states.”²²

Most incredibly to Republicans, the escape of the Egyptians from the oppression of slaveholders had been marked “with one of the strangest phenomena of the human mind,” as the *Chicago Tribune* explained. “Those who have been most oppressed,” the editor wrote, “at once seek to become oppressors as soon as the opportunity offers.” Although Egyptians were the same Southerners “who years ago were most crushed by slavery,” upon self-emancipation from such a burden, “as soon as they recover from its effects in our free state, [they] become its warmest supporters.” Though more thoroughly cultured “high-minded [and] intelligent” Southern migrants found no difficulty in adopting the guiding principles of the free states and Republicanism alike, the “poorer classes” rapidly became “the steady supporters of the iron despotism that crushed out their manhood.”²³

In no way was Egyptian support for the “peculiar institution” quite so evident to Republicans as it was in their apparent blind loyalty to the Democratic Party and, inextricably connected in the Republican mind, the supposed virtues of Southern slavery. “Politically, they vote one way and all the time,” one Republican editor observed. “Too poor to own slaves in a slave State, they still regard the institution as from Heaven, and they would vote to re-open the slave trade and establish the practice in Illinois, unanimously.” Scriptural defenses of slavery poured from the Egyptian pulpit, even as pro-slavery tracts filled Democratic newspapers across

22 “Letters from Egypt,” *Prairie Farmer*, November 11, 1858; “Modern Political Egypts,” *Daily Cleveland Herald*, November 10, 1856; George M. Weston, “The Poor Whites of the South,” in *Republican Campaign Documents of 1856, a Collection of the Most Important Speeches and Documents Issued by the Republican Association of Washington, During the Presidential Campaign of 1856* (Washington, D. C., 1857), 7.

23 “Letters from Egypt,” *Prairie Farmer*, November 25, 1858; “Emigration from the Slave to the Free States,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 21, 1858.

the southern end of the state.²⁴

Rumors of election fraud in Egypt to an extent remarkable even in an era filled with such chicanery abounded in the Republican press during every major state and national election of the era. “The party leaders have only to ascertain how large a majority is necessary to overbalance the enlightened portions of the State,” an Ohio Republican explained, “and Egypt honors the draft.” Republicans routinely cried foul when Democratic organs occasionally admitted similar frauds. “They form a circle around depositing their ballots one after another in quick succession, and repeating until 8 o'clock next morning,” another Republican claimed, “when if they have votes enough to over balance any northern majority which may be given, they cease; otherwise they keep on voting until the requisite number is obtained.” “Thus is the right of suffrage made a farce,” another remarked angrily.²⁵

Republicans offered no shortage of explanations for the supposed causes of the blighting darkness that covered Egypt. If indeed “Slave State influences” were to blame for Egypt's apparent continued degradation, how did such diabolical effects function? By what process did these “influences” operate? Many Republicans turned first to the ignorance and illiteracy that allegedly prevailed among the region's whites. “One word explains it all,” one Ohioan pronounced, “*Ignorance!* Let these people of modern 'Egypt' become intelligent, and no earthly power could make them vote with the pro-slavery party.” Hostility toward free public education borne of the onus of maintaining social order in a slave society had apparently followed the Egyptians to Illinois and was being actively reproduced on free soil. Antipathy toward common schooling reproduced chronic illiteracy in Egyptian offspring, and thus perpetuated the

24 “Modern Political Egypts,” *Daily Cleveland Herald*, November 10, 1856.

25 “Modern Political Egypts,” *Daily Cleveland Herald*, November 10, 1856; “The Illinois Egyptians,” *Holmes County Republican*, May 14, 1857; “Owning the Fraud,” *New Hampshire Statesman*, January 3, 1857.

“darkness” that blanketed all. In turn, the effects of such illiteracy, Republicans argued, became immediately visible in the results of every election. Complaining that consistent Democratic majorities in Egypt must be the result of misrepresentation of the Republican platform amongst an uninformed and illiterate public, several Republican organs went so far as to publish Egyptian election results juxtaposed with each county's adult illiterate population as enumerated in the 1850 Federal Census. “They do not possess the means of informing themselves – two-thirds of the voters there not knowing one letter from the other,” one editor explained. “Wholesale misrepresentation” of Republican aims, editors railed, had converted conservative Republicanism into fanatical abolitionism in the minds of misinformed Egyptians. As further proof of this, several insisted after the failed election of 1856, of the relatively insignificant Republican minority in Egypt, “there cannot be found a Fremonter, who is not able to read and understand the platform of his party” in sharp contrast to his Democratic opponents. Indeed, the problem was not so much with “reading matter of the proper sort, for that could be furnished,” the *Chicago Tribune* explained. “But it is [the] ability to read when the matter is put into their hands! 'The Gods themselves,' says the proverb, 'are powerless against human stupidity.’”²⁶

There was absolutely no question in the minds of Republicans that such “stupidity” had been directly imported from the Slave States. Even Hinton Rowan Helper, in his notorious *The Impending Crisis of the South: How to Meet It* (1857), had included amongst the volume's extensive statistical tables a chart illustrating the strikingly disproportionate rates of illiteracy in the Slave States as compared to Free. Forced to contend with the fact that “Illinois and Indiana are the only Free States which, in point of education, are surpassed by any of the Slave States,”

26 “Election News,” *Wyandot Pioneer*, November 13, 1856; Discussion of the sociocultural aspects of Southern hostility toward common schools and free public education is outlined in Harry L. Watson, “The Man with the Dirty Black Beard: Race, Class, and Schools in the Antebellum South,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 32, 1 (Spring 2012), 1-26; “Effects of Ignorance,” *Lewisburg Chronicle*, November 26, 1858; “Just So,” *Holmes County Republican*, December 4, 1856; “ILLINOIS POLITICS,” *New-York Daily Tribune*, July 12, 1858; “Southern Illinois,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 9, 1856.

he simply explained that “this disgraceful fact is owing, principally, to the influx of foreigners, and to immigrants from the Slave States.” If such assumptions were correct, it would follow that somehow lack of “Yankee” influence in Egypt had played a major role in the current situation. Lacking the full suite of New England virtues – ingenuity, enterprise, independence, piety, intellect, among others – Egyptians groped through the darkness much like their Southern forefathers. Even still, without somehow first “Northernizing” Egyptian society, any influx of New England migrants might be at risk of indoctrination into Egyptian culture and thus become enslaved to the Slaveocracy themselves. “Though the advantages of a New England education may help to resist the tendencies to barbarism,” one Vermonter warned, “they will not always save the New Englander even.” “No person and no family can live in any community, and prevent an assimilation of character,” another advocate of Egyptian reform stressed. “If you do not draw the community up to you, they will certainly drag you down to them.”²⁷

Democratic Egyptians did not silently absorb the calumny heaped upon their region and population. “They have utterly mistaken the character of the people whom they have so shamefully slandered,” Egyptian Democratic editor John Merritt of the *Salem Advocate* explained in reference to the Republican press. “It is true, they [Egyptians] may not possess the ostentatious or superficial outside show of intelligence” found in more northerly latitudes, “but our citizens know enough to love their country,” he argued. “They have good old fashioned sense enough to distinguish a nigger worshipper from a real patriot.” During the 1850s, Merritt transformed the *Advocate* into a veritable bulwark against those he deemed “red-mouthed, black-hearted Abolitionists” who thought of themselves as “self-constituted instructors in general intelligence.” As far as he and (if the many “letters to the editor” that filled his columns are to be

²⁷ Hinton Rowan Helper, *The Impending Crisis of the South: How to Meet It* (New York, 1857), 407; “Untitled,” *Burlington Free Press*, May 4, 1855; Smith, “A Plea for Southern Illinois,” 18.

believed) most of his readership was concerned, there was no substantive difference between a Republican and a radical abolitionist. Republican editors simply sought the “poisoning of our pure political atmosphere with noxious exhalations from the putrid corpse of niggerism,” he regularly warned, judiciously filling his columns with Democratic rhetoric and Biblical defenses of slavery “lest the poison of Black Republicanism” that filled the Republican press “should be diffused without an antidote.”²⁸

Merritt and his Democratic allies at prominent regional organs like the *Jonesboro Gazette* (Union County) and *Daily Missouri Republican* (St. Louis, Missouri) did their best to dispel the “acrid bile” emanating from the Northern press “that exhausts its vocabulary of ribaldry in characterizing the people whose money it covets.” Indeed, following the completion of the Illinois Central Railroad, linking Egypt to northern Illinois in the latter part of the decade, the “incalculable” natural resources which had originally warranted the region's nickname as the “Land of Goshen” had become the focus of many Chicago merchants. Egyptian “industry freights daily the cars of Illinois railroads, enriching Chicago merchants,” the *Daily Missouri Republican* announced in 1856. “Their trade augments the profits of Chicago traffickers, and among them are swarms of agents seeking to divert to the Lake City the produce of thousands of agriculturalists.” As the market for Egyptian wheat, corn, fruit, and coal expanded precipitately in the late 1850s, the interest in “Yankee” commercial investment in the region grew. Unfortunately for Egyptians, the increased attention only seemed to generate ever more maligning critique. “In return,” the *Republican* lamented, Chicago “sent back degrading pictures of their political, social and moral condition.”²⁹

28 “Two Daniels come to Judgement,” *Salem Advocate*, April 5, 1860; “The Black Republican Convention,” *Salem Advocate*, March 29, 1860.

29 “The Chicago Tribune and its Slanders upon Southern Illinois,” *Daily Missouri Republican*, November 13, 1856; “Egypt,” *Salem Advocate*, April 5, 1860.

In stark contrast to Republican characterizations, local Democratic editors regularly depicted Egyptians as “industrious, virtuous and according to their opportunities, intelligent” patriotic Americans surrounded by “schools and churches in abundance.” “They are famed for something better than learning,” Merritt explained. “They are famous for love of country, attachment to the Constitution and good sense more valuable than simple bookology.” In fact, according to Egyptian Democrats, it was the loyal nationalism and “love of country” coveted by Egyptians that had brought about largely spurious claims of “Slave State influences” shaping the region's political outlook. These claims, unsurprisingly to Democrats, emanated from a political party they deemed the single greatest threat to the Union. Egyptian support for popular sovereignty in the territories (and thus the potential for future slave states in the Union) arose not due to “Slave State influences” within the population, but rather because of the population's being “strongly in favor of an immediate settlement of this much-vexed question” of slave expansion. By avoiding friction in regards to the nationally tempestuous issue, Egyptians were “thus preventing red-eyed fanaticism” from “blasting patriotism and brotherly love wherever it meets them – leaving nothing in its track but heart-burning, ungovernable and unconquerable prejudices, and cankering wounds which no time can heal.” “Brotherly love” between sections was of paramount importance, Egyptians posited, if the white-man's Union was to be preserved. Swallowing the damning critiques levied by the *Chicago Tribune* and other Republican organs against them and their neighbors for their supposedly having been tainted by Southern heritage, however, did not suggest a general Republican interest in maintaining it.³⁰

Still, even Democratic journals were not beyond occasionally poking fun at the more “backward” inhabitants of the region, or acknowledging, however embarrassingly, the threads of truth woven within Republican critique. Even the staunchly Democratic *Republican*, normally a

³⁰ Ibid., “Untitled,” *Jonesboro Gazette*, February 20, 1858.

loyal defender of Egypt, could not pass up the opportunity to occasionally reprint pointed satire from Republicans it deemed “too good to be lost.” Having recently overheard a conversation in the spring of 1856 in which an individual inquiring to a group of men after an old friend was informed that “he had died long since, and gone to hell,” the editor recalled the quick reply of a certain “Mr. Republican” in the gathering. “That can’t be true,” he explained, “for if it was, he would have had to have gone through Jonesboro [in Egypt], and I have been living there for fifteen years, and have never seen him.”³¹

Despite Democratic claims to the contrary, and perhaps most alarmingly for Republicans, the “hell” of “Lower Egypt” represented more than a politically, morally, and economically degenerate backwater ripe for critical satire. The problem of “Egyptian Darkness” also stood as an example of what continued Slave Power dominance might mean for the future Republic. It suggested that, even if slavery could effectively be proven to be, as the Republican mantra went, “sectional,” while freedom was “national,” the detrimental and degrading social effects of the institution, to say nothing of its political influence, could outstretch even the envisioned future “Cordon of Freedom” designed to “hem it in” and strangle it to death. In fact, Egypt became a case study for Republicans in what the Slave Power could achieve if left unchallenged. Looking west to Kansas in the winter of 1856, Horace Greeley mused within his *New-York Daily Tribune* of how “Kansas might have been a new Southern Illinois” had “the covetous Missouri slaveholding planters” not caused such a public political stir and drawn a flood of Free-Labor immigrants into the territory. “Now it is much more likely to prove another Ohio Reserve,” he added. Greeley’s use of Egypt as a case reveals the Republican assumption that the Slave Power was fully capable of silently and swiftly extending its influence even onto free soil. Moreover, if unshakable political preeminence was the true goal of slaveholders – and with it the assured

31 “Illinois Correspondence,” *Daily Missouri Republican*, April 18, 1856.

safety of slavery for all perpetuity – the Democratic stronghold of Egypt was proof that even if territories entered the Union as free states, so long as they were populated by southern migrants (regardless of slave ownership), the ideological and political grip of the Slave Power would place their votes irretrievably beyond the reach of any attempts at Republican redemption. That is, at least, until Republicans could determine how best to break the Slave Power's hold on Egypt. This they meant to do. In anticipation of the coming emancipation of white Egyptians from their enslavement to the Slave Power, Republican George Weston rejoiced that while “the Constitution permits the South to recapture their fugitive blacks, happily it does not permit them to recapture their fugitive whites.” “God forbid,” he added, “that any avenue should be closed, by which they may escape out of the horrible pit of their bondage.”³²

32 Republican arguments for the “sectional” nature of slavery and the “national” character of free-soil, as well as the “Cordon of Freedom” strategy is most clearly outlined within Oakes, *Freedom National* as cited above; “Untitled,” *New-York Daily Tribune*, December 26, 1856; Weston, “The Poor Whites of the South,” 7.

CHAPTER 4

RECONSTRUCTING EGYPT

“What shall we do about the reports respecting 'Egypt'?” a Republican reformer inquired in 1855. All things considered, “the only hope for morality and humanity” seemed to be if “the other portions of the State [of Illinois] will first overpower, and then elevate 'Egypt.’” A year later, the continued Democratic majority in southern Illinois played its part in defeating the Republican attempt to elect John Frémont to the Presidency and moved party members to find a solution to the endemic problem. In a letter to Greeley's *New-York Tribune* four days after the election, one lonely Egyptian Republican discussed “What Republicans Should Do,” outlining a strategy for “regenerating” those portions of the Free States still lacking Republican support – his own southern Illinois foremost among them. First, he explained, every “friend of the cause [should] get up a club in his neighborhood” designed to generate subscription lists for Republican and Free Soil periodicals. Secondly, “circulating tracts, narrative and argumentative, showing that Slavery is wrong in theory and injurious in practice to the material, intellectual and moral thrift of servant and master” should be a prioritized tactic. Finally, those who could shoulder the cost should proliferate “such works of Fiction and Fact” as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Frederick Olmsted's biting critical narratives of his travels in the slave South. “By such quiet but unceasing vigilant effort,” the writer explained, “the cause of Freedom will prevail.”³³

33 Smith, “A Plea for Southern Illinois,” 17; “WHAT REPUBLICANS SHOULD DO,” W. C. F., *New-York Daily Tribune*, November 17, 1856.

For every practical strategist focused on the redemption of Egypt for Republicanism however, there were optimists who read into the relatively insignificant increases in Republican votes from previous Free-Soil returns and saw a transformation already unfolding before their eyes. “The Locofoco darkness of Egypt is being dissipated by the press, the school, and the locomotive,” one Ohio Republican rejoiced. “They are the great enlighteners of the people.” Indeed, the proliferation of national Republican papers into the counties of Egypt as well as a smattering of newly established and already besieged Republican presses within Egypt itself increased the presence of Free-Soil rhetoric issuing from the region between 1856 and 1860. State legislation mandating free common schools passed in 1855 and promised the eventual development of educational opportunities for Egypt's sons and daughters, even if the law was constructed so as to place the onus of funding disproportionately on the wealthier northern counties. “The money paid by the North in aid of popular education will tell at last,” the *Chicago Tribune* tempered. “Let us double the tax and aggravate the inequality of apportionment, that Egypt may be more speedily redeemed.”³⁴

As ignorance, illiteracy and general “Slave State influences” had always been identified as the chief culprits behind the perpetuation of the “darkness,” public education of the next generation of southern Illinoisans paired with boosterism aimed at potential Northern migrants became primary focal points for Republican reformers. “Egyptian Republicans say that to have men of their stamp about them they must *import* or *raise* them,” one writer to Greeley's *Tribune* announced in 1858. The completion of the Illinois Central Railroad in 1856 and, more importantly, its sale of adjacent lands along the track's Egyptian stretch had the effect of generating a marked influx of Northeastern (from the New England and Middle-Atlantic states)

³⁴ “Illinois Republicans Awake,” *Cleveland Morning Leader*, February 9, 1860; “Apportionment of the School Fund,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 8, 1857.

and foreign migrants – the chief sources of immigrants to Illinois throughout the 1850s. These migrants were assumed to have brought with them traditionally “Yankee” values and their farms, homesteads, and villages became “bright spots” on the Egyptian landscape. New “railroad towns,” populated chiefly by Northeasterners and returning predominately Republican majorities in every election, while never coming close to representing a majority in the region, seemed promising for the future of Egypt. One of these new towns, Centralia, in Marion County, was seen fit to hold the Illinois State Agricultural Fair in the fall of 1858, many hoping that the event would have the “immediate effect of awakening the spirit of improvement throughout so fine an agricultural region.” Another *entrepot* of “Yankee” influence was Du Quoin in Perry County, where a seminary for Egyptian women, designed to inculcate them with “Eastern” values and send them boldly into the “Egyptian Darkness” as common school teachers, was funded by New England benefactors and erected atop a large hill overlooking the railroad. The American Missionary Association also sent agents and colporteurs bearing abolitionist literature and anti-slavery religious pamphlets into Egypt, as if in response to the calls of Greeley's Egyptian strategist. “New elements of population are being infused,” one northern Illinois Republican wrote of Egypt. “The young are growing up to give and receive new impressions free from political party or prejudice, and the old are dropping away one by one.” Slowly but surely, another remarked, “the work of regenerating this so-called Democratic State [Illinois] has already commenced.”³⁵

35 “ILLINOIS POLITICS,” *New-York Daily Tribune*, July 12, 1858; DeBow, *The Seventh Census of the United States*, 117-119; Joseph C. G. Kennedy, *Population of the United States; Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census, under the Direction of the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington, 1864), 105; Illinois residents claiming nativity in the free-states of the Northeast (including both New England and the Middle Atlantic) increased by 138,151 between 1850 and 1860. Illinoisans claiming foreign born residency increased by 214,050 during the same period. Northwestern natives increased by 109,196, while slave-state natives increased by only 31,380 – marking the slowest rate of increase. The relative increase of nativity demographics in each county or region is difficult to ascertain, as are the older geographic origins of families coming to Illinois from elsewhere in the Northwest; Paul W. Gates discusses similar later demographic shifts in Egypt between 1860 and 1870 within *The Illinois Central Railroad and its Colonization Work* (Cambridge, 1934), 247-253; “More about Egypt

The immediate results seemed too good to be true. “Go ahead is the motto of the times” one editor wrote of Egypt, “and those who would succeed must keep pace with it.” The region was “now in the rapid transition state. The last ten years has witnessed a steady improvement in wealth, intelligence and enterprise, but in the last two years the pace of improvement has quickened into a trot and promises soon to be a gallop.” By 1860, one Ohioan observed of Egypt that in places where in 1856 “it was almost impossible to raise a mass meeting of three hundred Republicans,” the same locales “now turn out for Old Abe by thousands.” Much of this seemed to Republicans likely due to the expansion of free schools. “In '56 every county in Egypt went, with an overwhelming majority, Democratic,” another Ohio Republican explained in the summer of 1860, “but within the last four years our free schools have been gradually making inroads into the very heart of this Democratic empire, and the strong-holds of Democracy have given way to the light of knowledge combined with Republicanism.”³⁶

Predictably though, Republican efforts to transform the region via “the press, the school, and the locomotive” met with resistance on all fronts. Firstly, although local insurgent Republican presses were established throughout Egypt – most notably the *Egyptian Republic* (Centralia) and *Southern Illinoisan* (Shawneetown) – such enterprises came under immediate and ceaseless attack from the plurality of Democratic sheets enjoying far greater circulation. To make matters worse for Republicans, major party mouthpieces like the *Chicago Tribune*, published in the northern part the state, often failed to reach the geographical confines of Egypt. “It is

and the Egyptians,” *The Potter Journal*, July 15, 1858; “Letters from Egypt,” *Prairie Farmer*, October 9, 1858; “Where will the State Fair be held?,” *Illinois Farmer*, March 1, 1856; *An Argument (In Sundry Short Papers,) For Securing Christian Education in Southern Illinois Through the Establishment of Du Quoine Female Seminary, At a Cost of Fifty Thousand Dollars*. New York: James D. Torrey, 1856; Edgar F. Raines, Jr., “The American Missionary Association in Southern Illinois, 1856-1862: A Case History in the Abolition Movement,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 65, 3 (Autumn, 1972), 246-268; “Southern Illinois,” *Ottawa Free Trader*, June 9, 1855; “Chicago Correspondence,” *Cleveland Morning Leader*, February 3, 1860.

36 “Southern Illinois,” *Ottawa Free Trader*, June 9, 1855; “Political Affairs in Southern Illinois,” *Delaware Gazette*, July 20, 1860.

impossible to get a Chicago daily paper south of Sandoval,” one Perry County Republican lamented. “The boys on the cars do not supply themselves with a sufficient number when starting from Chicago...[and are] sold out by the time the trains reached Kankakee.” As a result of this shortsightedness, Egyptians were “obliged to take the [Democratic] *Missouri Republican*.” “Cannot you remedy this evil?” he pleaded with the *Tribune*.³⁷

Democratic organs effectively linked the nascent Republican Party of southern Illinois to radical abolitionism in the public eye. “Fellow Citizens are you aware in what light these learned and respectable men regard you?” John Merritt sarcastically inquired of his *Advocate* readers in a biting assault on Republican efforts in Marion County. “Why, they love the 'nigger' better than you.” Republican critics “call you ignorant and vicious and lazy” but would happily “make the negro their equal.” Insurgent Republican editors did their best to dispel the allegations of radicalism and worked toward “disabusing the minds of the people” of their connection with “Abolitionists, Sectionalists, and [being] in favor of 'negro-equality,’” but to little avail. The *Egyptian Republic* only stoked the fires of criticism when it added to its “Republicanization” agenda in 1858 by promising to provide a free copy of Hinton Helper's *The Impending Crisis of the South* to every new Egyptian subscriber. The *Republic* “insists that it is not an Abolition paper,” Merritt remarked. By virtue of “circulating the Abolition and incendiary book and its adjunct, the *Abolition Republic*,” it was clear to all that the “smell of wool is on your paper and its kinks are apparent in every column.”³⁸

Though Democratic resistance to Republican incursions usually took a rhetorical form, as

37 “From Egypt,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 15, 1860.

38 “Two Daniels come to Judgement,” *Salem Advocate*, April 5, 1860; “Good News from Lower Egypt,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 22, 1860; “Consistent,” *Salem Advocate*, February 16, 1860. To be sure, Republicans noted some success in “disabusing” some Egyptians of their inaccurate conflation of the relatively conservative Republican platform with the creed of radical abolitionists. Still, the true breadth of this “success” (or lack thereof) became evident on election day.

the 1860 campaign season approached a climactic close, occasionally physical violence erupted in Egypt. In late September, a Republican “Wide-Awake” procession in Jefferson County was assaulted by “a mob of drunken Douglasites,” resulting in the stabbing of one unfortunate Democrat amidst a “Wide-Awake” counterassault. “He [the Wide-Awake] gave the ruffian seven cuts,” one “Observer” remarked, noting that the “confederates of the ruffian got themselves severely drubbed in the melee that ensued.” In the immediate aftermath, a “scene of the greatest excitement prevailed throughout the evening” in the county seat of Mount Vernon. “The lives of a number of Republicans were threatened, and a general pitched battle at times seemed almost inevitable,” the correspondent reported. Although the attack might have won a tactical victory – the Republican committee decided to forego its planned evening festivities – the strategic costs of such brutality were clear enough. “One old gentleman, after witnessing the attack upon the meeting,” the same observer proudly pointed out, “said in my hearing, 'that he had voted the Democratic ticket for forty years, but that now he was done'...Many other Democrats, I am credibly informed, made similar declarations.”³⁹

By 1858, “the locomotive” was firmly established on the Egyptian scene as the “great enlightener” Republicans had anticipated, and adolescent “railroad towns” filled with predominately Northeastern Republican migrants. This new geographic and demographic divide between “new” and “old” Egypt produced considerable friction that periodically caused physical altercations. Once it had been established within Democratic circles that agents of the notorious “Underground Railroad” were utilizing the Illinois Central as a veritable “above-ground railroad,” those interested in capturing fugitives often made a habit of frequenting the new depots and car sheds across the region. Sharing the platform with motley gangs of “nigger catchers” brandishing bowie knives and pistols in their belts was an unsettling experience for the bourgeois

³⁹ “Assault Upon a Republican Meeting,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 21, 1860.

sensibilities of recent Northern immigrants. Standing idly-by while such men raided the trains and violently seized black men found aboard proved too much to take. On multiple occasions during the winter of 1859, confrontations on railroad platforms across the region marked by invective-charged threats, weapons brandishing, fisticuffs, and even exchanges of gunfire erupted in what one Republican editor came to refer to as “negro skirmishes.” The Northeastern middle class inhabitants of the new “railroad towns” routinely did their best to stall or prevent the capture of men whom they charged “nigger catchers” could not possibly confirm to be “fugitive” or “free,” much to the chagrin and vexation of their Democratic opponents who began to refer to the budding “railroad towns” as “Abolition holes.”⁴⁰

As for the railroad's anticipated impact on the economic character of the region and its “benighted” inhabitants, Egyptians showed a frustratingly (for Republicans) sluggish and measured approach to shifting from a predominately subsistence to a market economy. Although many if not most Egyptian farmers began to grow a surplus of wheat or corn for market, their gradual and cautious embrace of market orientation mirrored that of the “hog and hominy” Hoosier farmers of southern Indiana. Their reluctance to go “all-in” was reinforced by the concerns of Democratic editors like John Merritt who cautioned against too hasty a commercial economic turn. Concerned with the growing commercialization of pork production in the region by 1860, Merritt feared “that every one of those hogs” shipped northward to Chicago “will be wanting to furnish our county the coming year, [and] we have no Pork.” Looking ahead, Egyptians would “have to buy Bacon and Lard, oh! What a country!!” he lamented. The same general trajectory marked the corn trade. “The year 1860, inaugurates a new era in the trade of this County,” Merritt reported in January of 1860. “This is the first year that we have Corn to

40 “Illinois Republicans Awake,” *Cleveland Morning Leader*, February 9, 1860; “Still Another Harper's Ferry Affair, at Richview, Illinois,” *Egyptian Republic*, December 1, 1859; “Laughable and Shameful,” *Egyptian Republic*, December 1, 1859; “Almost another Harper's Ferry Affair,” *Salem Advocate*, November 24, 1859.

sell, and purchasers are here from abroad.” Even still, with the “more than average deficiency in the Corn Crop of this County this season,” Merritt cautioned that farmers would “want every bushel and even if we have a surplus – the experience of the last five years should fetch every farmer that he ought to Crib Corn sufficient to supply him for two years.” Fulfilling the subsistence needs of one's family must come first, as the time-tested conservative strategy had always proven. The commercialization of Egypt, and therefore its economic binding to markets like those in the “hot bed of treasonable *Abolition and corruption*, Chicago,” should not be completely avoided, but embraced strategically and with great prudence.⁴¹

Finally, there was the “free school.” Although the common school legislation passed by the state government in 1855 had the effect of forcibly creating a common-school system in Egypt and boosting the regional attendance rate to higher than even the state average by 1859, the effect of such changes on the central concern of Republican reformers – dispelling the endemic illiteracy rates in the region – is difficult to gauge. Many Egyptian census enumerators, perhaps out of a fear of contributing to the ongoing slander of southern Illinois, seem to have consciously avoided the illiteracy column of the schedule in the summer of 1859. Still, even by 1870 Egypt continued to trail a considerable distance behind the rest of the state in literacy rates, suggesting that no appreciable gains had been achieved in that department by the time of the anticipated Republican millennium in 1860.⁴²

As illiteracy was one of the clearly quantifiable dimensions of the “Egyptian Darkness” made obvious by the 1850 census reports, even Democrats were forced to admit that a “cloud of

41 Richard Franklin Nation, *At Home in the Hoosier Hills: Agriculture, Politics, and Religion in Southern Indiana, 1810-1870* (Bloomington, 2005); “Hogs! Hogs!! Hogs!!! Hogs!!!!” *Salem Advocate*, January 5, 1860; “Corn! Corn!! Corn!” *Salem Advocate*, January 12, 1860; “A Murder in Southern Illinois,” *Nashville Democrat* reprinted in *Chicago Tribune*, July 16, 1857.

42 1860 United States Federal Census; 1870 United States Federal Census. William H. Powell, *Second Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State of Illinois, For the Years 1857-58* (Springfield, 1859).

Egyptian Darkness” had, prior to 1860, hung like a pall over education in southern Illinois. The editors of the Democratic *Jonesboro Gazette* soberly recalled in the spring of 1859 how “when we look back through the long vista of years in which this fair portion of the State, in respect to education, has, comparatively speaking, remained dark and benighted,” they were struck with a “feeling of sadness” that was only “cheered with a brighter prospect when it contemplates the happy change which has taken place.” The 1855 School Law largely disconnected the question of common schools from its previous partisan connotation, allowing Egyptian Democrats to embrace efforts to promote public education without sacrificing their traditional conservative values.⁴³

In fact, it was those very conservative values that served to color the character of Egyptian education while simultaneously blunting any possibility of “Republicanization.” As the average salaries for public school teachers rose across Egypt in the late 1850s, the region filled with “Yankee” teachers bearing impressive credentials. These teachers often met with considerable resistance. The *Cass County Republican* published a report in 1858 of a geography teacher in one of Union County's new free schools. “You see I had succeeded, after many attempts, in getting up a geography class in my school up in Union county,” he explained, “and it became necessary to demonstrate the rotundity of the earth, and to show its annual and diurnal revolutions in causing the succession of day and night.” Though his students were enamored by his instruction, they “of course took the matter home to their parents, by whom it was at once determined that ‘they were not agoing to have their children teached such Black Republican abolition trash, no how,” and the teacher was ignominiously routed from the school. “Since then,” he explained, “I have left them alone in the belief that this earth is flat and that the sun and moon go from east to west over it, and under it once during each day and night.” Still, even he

43 “Education,” *Jonesboro Gazette*, April 9, 1859.

remained hopeful. “The rising generation will learn better,” he anticipated, and “they will yet be made to see that the earth is round, and that slavery is a blight and a curse, as well to those who impose, as to those who endure it.”⁴⁴

Republican reports of the unfolding “transformation,” “regeneration,” “Republicanization,” and “Northernization” of Egypt between 1856 and 1860, though largely ignoring Democratic resistance, evinced more than mere wishful thinking. It offers to historians precisely what it offered to Republicans themselves: a prescription for thinking and talking about the reconstruction of non-slaveholding white Southern society in a region where slavery had already been abolished. The reconstruction of Egypt (both as a result of transformational strategies and self-regeneration) in Republican eyes stood as a prophecy of things to come at the national level. The vast majority of Republicans would have been greatly alarmed and perhaps even dumbfounded at the idea that an opportunity would be at hand in less than a half-decade to replicate the “regeneration” project in Egypt throughout a post-slavery South. Even still, examining their thoughts, opinions, and concerns regarding the antebellum effort to both actively toil toward and observe the transformation of southern Illinois uncovers some of the earliest seeds of this central facet of Republican aims and suggests that the intellectual elements of the “Reconstruction” project so often exclusively ascribed to the postbellum period had important roots in the prewar years.

Anticipation of hard evidence marking Egypt's successful reconstruction and redemption reached its highest temperature in October and November of 1860. As the election approached that, for Republicans, marked the culmination of all their national transformative efforts for a half-decade, the nation waited anxiously. Perhaps seeing and hearing only what it wanted to see and hear, the *Chicago Tribune* filled its columns with such promising headlines as “Light in

⁴⁴ “Egypt,” *The Cass County Republican*, December 9, 1858; Powell, *Second Biennial Report*.

Egypt,” “Progress in Egypt,” “Central Egypt in Motion,” “Great News from Egypt,” “Advance of Republicanism in Egypt,” and “Egypt to be Redeemed.” In a separate column entitled “Movements of the People,” the *Tribune* chronicled the many Wide-Awake and Republican Mass Meetings that were held throughout the southern portion of the state during the final months of the campaign season. Indeed, “Egypt is not yet past hope,” one Ohio Republican excitedly maintained.⁴⁵

45 “Light in Egypt,” *Chicago Tribune*, May, 7, 1860; “Progress in Egypt,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 21, 1860; “Central Egypt in Motion,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 22, 1860; “Great News in Egypt,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 7, 1860; “Advance of Republicanism in Egypt,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 15, 1860; “Egypt to be Redeemed,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 10, 1860; “Movements of the People,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 29, July 3, 21, 24, 25, 1860; “Untitled,” *Orleans Independent Standard*, August 17, 1860.

CONCLUSION

DEEPLY TAINTED WITH DISAFFECTION

In the end, it evidently was indeed “past hope.” Though marked increases in Republican voters in the northern tier of Egyptian counties illustrated the brightest fruits of Republican efforts and demographic transformation in the region, only one (Edwards) of the twenty-three counties customarily referred to as “Egypt” during the era returned a Republican majority. Still, on average Egyptian counties provided 16% more Republican votes in 1860 than in 1856. While a notable increase, in the end, the election of Abraham Lincoln occurred far more in spite of Egypt than because of it. Remarkably, nearly two decades of rhetoric aimed at the political dimension of “Egyptian Darkness” came to a screeching halt following the announcement of the election results. Overwhelmed with what seemed to be the most tremendously important event of their lifetimes up to that point, Republicans were so busy celebrating the revolution then at hand – the ascension of a Republican candidate to the Presidency and thus the inevitable pending death of the Slave Power – that the party all but lost sight of Egypt entirely. There was no sense in sulking over Egypt's failure to produce the predicted Republican majorities. There was no need to contemplate how the remaining “darkness” could somehow be purged away. As on the national stage, Republicans had realized that the Free-Soil revolution they envisioned only required a unified northern tier in order to overbalance the South and thrust Republicanism into power in Washington. In the wake of the erosion of demographic dominance in Egypt, and the shift of the population center of Illinois further North, even southern Illinois could fall by the

wayside in Republican strategy. The national political battle was won.⁴⁶

But almost before the debris from the post-election festivities could be cleared from the streets of Republican towns and cities across the North, dark clouds began to gather. As one-by-one the states of the slave South began to leave the Union in fear of what Lincoln's election meant for the future of Southern slavery, many Republicans feared what might become of those portions of the Free States still touched intimately by "Slave State influences." Indeed, even William Howard Russell mentioned how, during his aforementioned trip northward across southern Illinois, he noticed "no physical signs to mark the transition from the land of the Secessionist to Union-loving soil," and that "Cairo was for Secession, and Southern Illinois is supposed to be deeply tainted with disaffection to Mr. Lincoln." In the aftermath of the attack on Fort Sumter and President Lincoln's call for volunteers, suspicious rumors filtered northward of Egyptian plans to seize or destroy the Illinois Central as well as vital bridges and ferries across Egypt in an attempt to subvert Union war efforts in the West. Southern newspapers anticipated an influx of Egyptian volunteers into the Confederate ranks while many talked openly about the possibilities of Egyptian secession from Illinois or even the creation of a separate Northwestern Confederacy. Southern editors attributed such Egyptian sentiment to the fact that Republican editors had "been in the habit of taunting Egyptians with ignorance, and pharisaically arrogating to themselves all the intelligence and virtue." This mentality had served to "rankle" the minds of Egyptians and generated "no little hostility." Governor Richard Yates rushed state troops into Egypt to secure major bridges and railroad depots while loyal Egyptians kept a close eye on their "pro-slavery" neighbors for signs of disaffection and disloyalty. Yates's security forces managed

46 Michael J. Dubin, *United States Presidential Elections, 1788-1860: The Official Results by County and State* (Jefferson, 2002), 138-140; 163-164; Discussion of the abandonment by the Republican Party of any antebellum "Southern strategy" is outlined in Richard H. Abbott's *The Republican Party and the South, 1855-1877: The First Southern Strategy* (Chapel Hill, 1986) and briefly in Foner, *Free Soil* and Grant, *North Over South* as cited above.

to head off a number of supposed secessionist plots, thus preserving Egypt for the Union – but the region, though producing a remarkable number of Union Army volunteers during the war, would continue to be a thorn in the side of the Lincoln Administration for the remainder of the conflict. Notably, a substantial number of Union troops would remain in Egypt throughout the war, due mostly to the convenience of Cairo as a strategic “jumping-off” point and supply depot for Western operations, but also to keep an eye on Egypt's supposed “pro-Southern” and even “secessionist” population. The region became notorious for Copperheadism, draft resistance, and even anti-war activities by the shadowy Knights of the Golden Circle (K. G. C.) and retained its moniker of “Dark Egypt” through the war years.⁴⁷

In the end, Republicans had vastly underestimated the tremendous challenges inherent in transforming the culture and indeed society of southern Illinois. Though many had been prepared to claim total victory after a mere half-decade of “regeneration” efforts, the 1860 election results made it starkly clear that “reconstructing” post-slavery white society was much harder than it looked. Although the changes wrought by “the press, the school, and the locomotive” had indeed begun to transform Democratic Egypt by 1860, “the great enlighteners of the people” did not work their magic overnight. Nor did their transformative effects necessarily translate into the kind of Republican millennium anticipated or predicted by Northern editors. Democratic resistance to the efforts of Republicans bent on reconstructing southern Illinois in the image of the Republican upper Midwest foundered on the reality that Egyptian political, social, cultural, and economic life emerged from a complex web of causes irreducible to mere popular ignorance or servility to the Southern slaveholding elite. Egypt would continue on as a “solid” Democratic

⁴⁷ Russell, *My Diary North and South*, 132; Thorough discussion of events in southern Illinois at the outset of secession and during the Civil War is available within James Pickett Jones's *Black Jack: John A. Logan and Southern Illinois in the Civil War Era* (Carbondale, 1967), Gary Ecelbarger's *Black Jack Logan: An Extraordinary Life in Peace and War*, (Guilford, 2005), and Klement, Frank L. *The Copperheads in the Middle West*, (Chicago, 1960). “Secession in Illinois,” *The Anderson Intelligencer*, January 31, 1861.

stronghold well into the twentieth-century. Although endemic levels of poverty and illiteracy would decrease, the southern counties of the state continued to lag behind northern and central Illinois for decades to come. As the gaze of Republicans turned further southward during the war and beyond, the problems of “Egyptian Darkness” fell out of the public mind. The region, now known popularly as “Little Egypt” has lost much of its negative connotation.

Although historians of the Republican Party and of the Civil War era and sectional crisis more generally have focused heavily on Republican strategies aimed at the gradual destruction of Southern slavery, the overthrow of the “Slave Power,” and even the development of free-labor “colonies” in the Slave States designed to illustrate the benefits of free-labor society and convert the upland South to free-soil philosophy and Republican politics, few have addressed what Republicans planned to do after slavery was destroyed. Those who have generally focus on early Republican strategies regarding what to do with the millions of freed people following the eventual destruction of the South's “peculiar institution” – and rightfully so. The challenges faced by all Americans, white and black, in the aftermath of the most terrible institution ever to exist on United States soil, were perplexing in the extreme. Recent work, however, has brought to the historiographical discussion an analysis of Republican efforts to reconstruct Southern society reaching beyond the perplexing problems of race relations in the aftermath of the war as well. This scholarship has uniformly been situated in the wartime and postwar era, addressing the efforts of Republicans to “regenerate” and “reconstruct” Southern society in the image of the antebellum North only after the close of hostilities. Few historians have wrestled with understanding the antebellum roots of Republican strategies regarding the future transformation of a post-slavery Southern society. While many have identified assumptions that the South would require Northern intervention in order to place it on a footing akin to that of antebellum Free

State society, little has been said as to how Republicans envisioned this process unfolding.⁴⁸

An examination of the public discourse regarding the “Egyptian Darkness” problem, engaged in throughout the Republican press during the late antebellum period, offers an opportunity to begin reconstructing Republican assumptions and strategies in light of a future “reconstruction” of the white South after slavery had successfully been dismantled. These future challenges, as the efforts to “redeem” the upland Southerners of southern Illinois during the 1850s illustrates, were not new to Republican ideologues and strategists in the postbellum period. Party members had already constructed, at least a decade prior, ideas and tactics aimed at the transformation of just such a post-slavery society. Their thoughts and efforts to dispel the “Egyptian Darkness” in the southern Illinois of their collective imagination represent intellectual seeds that would later be sown in Southern soil.

48 Discussion of efforts to establish “Free-Soil” colonies in the upper South is most thoroughly addressed within William W. Freehling's *The Road to Disunion: Volume II, Secessionists Triumphant, 1854-1861* (Oxford, 2007); A comprehensive treatment of the voluminous historiography of Reconstruction is impossible and inappropriate to present in its entirety here. Eric Foner's *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (1988) remains, in many ways, the preeminent work in the field. Appropriately, Foner's work stresses the challenges of race relations in the postwar South, emphasizing the failures of the Republican government to secure lasting change. More recent work, like that of Mark Summers in *The Ordeal of the Reunion: A New History of Reconstruction* (2014) takes a more expansive view, focusing on a wider array of issues, most centrally the need to secure a lasting Union in the free-labor mold.

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