

“ONE GOVERNMENT, ONE FLAG, ONE DESTINY:” UNION SOLDIERS’ IDEOLOGICAL
SUPPORT OF LINCOLN’S REELECTION

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the reasons Union soldiers voted overwhelmingly for Abraham Lincoln in the presidential election of 1864. This thesis bridges the gap between the emerging disagreements within the historiography of the soldier vote in 1864. The disagreements thus far deal with the role of emancipation in the Union soldier's decision-making process versus the role of other issues, particularly whether or not the war effort should have been continued on to ultimate victory. By extension, the argument also deals with whether or not Union soldiers adhered to the Republican Party's ideology in making their decision. Through analysis of primary sources including Union soldiers' letters and diaries, the answer that emerges is that Union soldiers adhered to Republican ideology as outlined by Republican campaign materials as well as their party platform in making their decision for president. This thesis ultimately concludes that a focus on any one reason or another that soldiers chose Lincoln misses the larger picture.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my fiancée, Carly, whose unwavering support helped me see this project through to the end. I love you very much. You make life exciting. I can't wait to see what the future has in store.

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Introduction

In the late summer of 1864, President Abraham Lincoln requested that soldiers making their way home from the front stop and meet with him at the Executive Mansion. On August 18th and August 22nd, Lincoln spoke to the 164th and 166th Ohio Regiments, respectively. As the summer wore on without much military success, the presidential election approached and was likely foremost on the president's mind. Lincoln took these opportunities to explain, in his own words, what was at stake in the ongoing contest.

I suppose you are going home to see your families and friends. For the service you have done in this great struggle in which we are engaged I present you sincere thanks for myself and the country. I almost always feel inclined, when I happen to say anything to soldiers, to impress upon them in a few brief remarks the importance of success in this contest. It is not merely for to-day, but for all time to come that we should perpetuate for our children's children this great and free government, which we have enjoyed all our lives. I beg you to remember this, not merely for my sake, but for yours. I happen temporarily to occupy this big White House. I am a living witness that any one of your children may look to come here as my father's child has. It is in order that each of you may have through this free government which we have enjoyed, an open field and a fair chance for your industry, enterprise and intelligence; that you may all have equal privileges in the race of life, with all its desirable human aspirations. It is for this the struggle should be maintained, that we may not lose our birthright – not only for one, but for two or three years. The nation is worth fighting for, to secure such an inestimable jewel.¹

Lincoln argues that the ability for citizens to rise above the stations of their birth was at stake. This freedom to rise by the merits of one's own hard work and enterprise was "an inestimable jewel." Lincoln uses his own life as an example of this feature of the union. The ideology of the North during the Civil War was based much on the concept of union, which included the idea that the United States was a beacon of hope for the rest of the world in terms of republican government and personal liberties guaranteed to the people. Lincoln's vision of the past, present,

¹ Abraham Lincoln, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 7:512.

and future of the United States at the time surely resonated with Union voters, including the men fighting in blue.

The cause of union, among other things, weighed on the minds of Union soldiers as the summer of 1864 dragged on and the fall elections loomed. In the end, Union soldiers who were able to vote did so overwhelmingly in favor of Abraham Lincoln's reelection to the presidency. Many historians agree that nearly eighty percent of Union soldiers who cast a ballot in the 1864 presidential election did so for Lincoln.² As of late, a historiographical argument has begun to take shape over the reasons why these soldiers were so favorable to the Republican candidate. Some historians have pointed to the issue of emancipation, arguing that Union soldiers' overwhelming support of the party that included a proposed amendment abolishing slavery forever in their platform indicated support of that cause. Others have argued that Union soldiers were not swayed by emancipationist ideals, but rather decided to vote for Lincoln due to considerations having mostly to do with the continuation of the war on to ultimate victory and restoration of the union. Another historian argues that Union soldiers' electoral choice did not reflect any sort of ideological conversion or support for the Republican Party, but was rather a pragmatic choice based on dislike for Peace Democrats and essentially reflected a choice based on the "lesser of two evils."³ The purpose of this thesis is to provide a new answer to the perplexing issue of the soldier vote and the reasons why soldiers pledged their allegiance to Lincoln. I bridge the gap between these two competing historiographical assertions, arguing that Union soldiers who voted for Abraham Lincoln in 1864 largely conformed to the ideological

² For example, see James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 129.

³ Jonathan W. White, *Emancipation, The Union Army, and the Reelection of Abraham Lincoln* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014), 109, 128.

tenets of the Republican Party of 1864, as expressed by campaign publications as well as their platform. In other words, Union soldiers did conform to the objectives of Lincoln and his party, including both emancipation and continuance of the war. Any focus on one issue at the expense of another loses this bigger picture.

By the summer of 1864, the renewed optimism that came with Ulysses S. Grant's assumption of the command of the Army of the Potomac had faded. This happened as Grant fought for every inch of enemy territory, suffering devastating numbers of casualties in the spring of 1864 that then made their way into newspapers throughout the North. By July of 1864, Grant's Overland Campaign had stalled. With this, along with the high numbers of casualties, war weariness set in upon the Northern populace. This weariness fueled the political aspirations of the Peace Democrats, often referred to as "Copperheads" by Republicans and their supporters. These Peace Democrats advocated an immediate armistice with or without military victory. They were also dead set against most if not all of the actions Abraham Lincoln had taken as president, including emancipation.

Due to the dismal military situation, Lincoln felt his chances for reelection vanishing. Spurred on by news delivered to him by advisors, including the politically astute Thurlow Weed, Lincoln requested that the members of his cabinet sign the back of a piece of paper without ever having seen the contents of the letter within.⁴ In this letter, dated August 23, 1864, Lincoln writes, "This morning, as for some days past, it seems exceedingly probable that this Administration will not be re-elected. Then it will be my duty to so co-operate with the President-elect, as to save the Union between the election and the inauguration; as he will have

⁴ Philip Shaw Paludan, *The Presidency of Abraham Lincoln* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994), 282-283, Abraham Lincoln, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 7:514-515.

secured his election on such ground that he can not possibly save it afterwards.”⁵ The information that prompted Lincoln to draft this memorandum was grim indeed: Thurlow Weed had told Lincoln that his reelection was out of the realm of possibility after hearing from political operatives from various states remaining in the Union as well as the chairman of the Republican National Committee and editor of the *New York Times*, Henry Raymond. Raymond told Weed “unless some prompt and bold step now be taken, all is lost.”⁶ Raymond reacted strongly to the Peace Democrats’ campaign tactics up this point. The Peace wing of the Democratic Party argued vociferously that a cessation of hostilities could be obtained if only Lincoln dropped emancipation as a condition of peace. Raymond went so far as to recommend that Lincoln extend a peace offer to Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederate States of America, on the basis of Union without mention of emancipation. Lincoln thought of doing so, but ultimately rejected the notion.

Lincoln, however, only rejected this advice after drafting a letter to Charles D. Robinson, a Democratic newspaper editor in Wisconsin. In the letter, Lincoln wrote, “If Jefferson Davis wishes, for himself, or for the benefit of his friends in the North, to know what I would do if he were to offer peace and re-union, saying nothing about slavery, let him try me.”⁷ While he ultimately did not send the letter, it is clear that Lincoln did not believe he would be reelected. In late August, the Republicans’ chances seemed to be slipping away as the army remained stalled and the war looked very much like a failed venture.

⁵ Abraham Lincoln, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 7:514-515.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 501.

Lincoln's memorandum concerning the potential for an electoral defeat in November was written six days prior to the Democratic National Convention, which was to be held in Chicago on August 29th, 1864. The results of this convention served to solidify leading Republicans' support of Lincoln in the coming election. The Democrats, split between those having supported the war effort in general and those calling for an immediate armistice, nominated War Democrat George B. McClellan with a Peace Democrat running mate, George H. Pendleton, on a platform written by Peace Democrats. This ideologically split ticket, as well as the pivotal second plank, or "war failure plank," gave Republicans an issue to rally around. This issue was whether or not the Democrats were disloyal. The Republicans decided affirmatively, and continued to hammer this issue home throughout the rest of the electoral campaign. For the general population in the North, this issue certainly played out to the Republicans' advantage, but it is also important to note that the fall of Atlanta and the battles of Mobile Bay and Cedar Creek also played a pivotal role in swinging the vote further toward Lincoln's reelection. While those military victories served to ameliorate the negative voices on the home front, the victories simply served to assure soldiers they had made the correct decision already, for their support of Lincoln could hardly be said to have wavered much at all over the turbulent months from April to August 1864.

The platform consisted of just six resolutions, or planks. The first expressed the Democrats' "unswerving fidelity to the Union under the Constitution."⁸ While this first plank speaks to the Democrats' continued allegiance to the country in general, the second plank became a lightning rod for Republican charges of disloyalty and even treason. The second plank stated that, "after four years of failure to restore the Union by the experiment of war, during

⁸ *Official Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention, Held in 1864 at Chicago* (Chicago: The Times Steam Book and Job Printing House, 1864), 27.

which, under the pretence of a military necessity, or war power higher than the Constitution, the Constitution itself has been disregarded in every part.” The plank concluded that, “immediate efforts be made for a cessation of hostilities, with a view to an ultimate convention of the States” so that the Union could be restored and peace thus made.⁹ The third, fourth, and fifth planks spoke to the administration’s failures to observe constitutional law in relation to elections, disregard of states’ rights, and prisoners of war. The sixth, and final, plank assured that “the sympathy of the Democratic party is heartily and earnestly extended to the soldiery of our army and the sailors of our navy.”¹⁰ The platform that the Democrats adopted in Chicago was certainly antagonistic to the Lincoln administration, but hardly indicated disloyalty to the United States. Rather, it simply indicated an alternate political ideological choice.

Alternately, the Republican platform, adopted in June of 1864, supported the continued military effort to restore the Union. The resolutions passed at the Republican National Convention expressed the party’s continued support to ending the rebellion by force of arms without compromise with those then in rebellion, unless it “may be based upon an unconditional surrender of their hostility and a return to their just allegiance to the Constitution and laws of the United States.”¹¹ The Republican platform also promised continued support for the Lincoln administration as well as emancipation, while expressing gratitude for the sacrifices made by the

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Abraham Lincoln, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 7:381.

Union soldiers.¹² Concerning the future of the war, the two platforms were diametrically opposed to one another in terms of ideology, or the political goals and preferred methods to achieve those goals.

Given the political situation, the continuation of the war, and thus the survival of the Union, was clearly at stake in the coming election. Within this context, the election of 1864 takes on an air of utmost importance historically. Prominent Civil War historian James M. McPherson labels the election as the “third turning point” of the war, with the first turning point being the battle of Antietam and the subsequent issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation and the second being the 1863 military victories at Gettysburg, Vicksburg, and Chattanooga.¹³ The election was certainly a turning point in American history. Abraham Lincoln’s reelection was uncertain both within his own party and without. Through the summer, his chances became slimmer and slimmer as each day passed. This was an instance where American history could have gone forward on a variety of very different routes. Because of this, study into the deeper workings of the election is of a good deal of interest.

Soldiers’ participation in both the conflict and the electoral referendum on that conflict make for an interesting study into this integral turning point in the history of the United States. Given the choice between war and peace, soldiers appeared to choose war overwhelmingly. The generally agreed upon figure has about four out of every five Union soldiers casting a vote for Abraham Lincoln. Historians have proposed several reasons for these soldiers’ electoral choice. The historiography of the “soldier vote,” as it has been termed by historians of the Civil War, can

¹² Ibid.

¹³ James M. McPherson and James K. Hogue, *Ordeal By Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction*, 4th ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2010). See chapters seventeen, nineteen, and twenty-four.

be quite cumbersome as there are not many works devoted exclusively to this topic. Rather, the topic is generally discussed within the pages of historical works looking at Civil War soldiers as a whole. The first book devoted exclusively to the soldier vote was published in 1915 and written by Josiah Henry Benton. Titled *Voting in the Field: A Forgotten Chapter of the Civil War*, the book covers both Union and Confederate states and their individual efforts to secure voting rights for their respective soldiers in the field. The book is useful in that Benton records the legislative histories for each state in regard to this topic, but there is little in terms of analysis of the reasons soldiers voted the way they did. The only other book devoted solely to an aspect of soldier voting in the Civil War was not published until 2014. Historian Jonathan W. White's *Emancipation, The Union Army, and the Reelection of Abraham Lincoln* argues that the soldier vote did not indicate any wholesale change in ideology among Union soldiers. In fact, White concludes, Union soldiers were not ideologically committed to the Republican Party's support of emancipation and instead voted for Lincoln due to simple pragmatic considerations such as ending the war with the union intact. White's work is in response to the long-held belief that the soldier vote indicated full support of the wartime Republican policy of emancipation.

The handful of historians who grappled with the soldier vote often did so through the lens of emancipation. Among the historians that White argues against are James M. McPherson, Jennifer L. Weber, and Chandra Manning. McPherson contended in his study of Civil War soldiers, *For Cause and Comrades*, published in 1997, that the overwhelming numbers of Union soldiers who voted for Lincoln was a "pretty fair indication of army sentiment on slavery" since the Republican platform supported a constitutional amendment outlawing slavery in the United

States.¹⁴ Likewise, Jennifer L. Weber argues in *Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln's Opponents in the North* that opposition to antiwar Democrats in the North encouraged soldiers to support Lincoln's policies, including emancipation. This support followed with electoral support in 1864 and "turned many soldiers into lifelong Republicans."¹⁵ Weber continues, arguing that soldiers' "unqualified support" of Lincoln helped him to hold together the country.¹⁶ These arguments are precisely what Jonathan W. White takes offense to in his aforementioned 2014 publication. For Weber, Union soldiers supported Lincoln wholeheartedly, endorsing emancipation while also voting against Democratic candidates due to what soldiers perceived as opposition to the war effort. Historian Chandra Manning also makes the case for emancipation's role in influencing the soldier vote in *What This Cruel War Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War*. Published in 2007, Manning's book argues that soldiers understood slavery's role in causing the war and so were willing to support Lincoln because he would "end it right by eliminating slavery once and for all."¹⁷ In addition to the emancipation issue, historians have shed light on other issues soldiers may have taken into consideration when casting a vote for Lincoln.

¹⁴ James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 129.

¹⁵ Jennifer L. Weber, *Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln's Opponents in the North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Chandra Manning, *What This Cruel War Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 184.

In addition to emancipation and opposition to Copperheads, historian William C. Davis points to Abraham Lincoln the man in explaining the reasons soldiers voted for the Republican candidate in 1864. Davis's *Lincoln's Men: How President Lincoln Became Father to an Army and a Nation* argues that President Lincoln endeared himself to the Union soldier through personal availability, his physical presence at army reviews, and executive clemency. This played a part in making Lincoln so popular among the soldiers, who remained loyal to the cause, as evidenced by the election results in 1864. Davis also argues that because of Lincoln's actions, Union soldiers were much more willing to support controversial policies such as emancipation and conscription than the general populace. Thus, the election results were a direct result of Lincoln's policies that served to endear him on a personal level to soldiers.

Additionally, within the emerging historiography of the soldier vote, there is an argument that soldiers were ideologically motivated as citizen-soldiers. Historian Joseph Frank Allen makes this argument in *With Ballot and Bayonet: The Political Socialization of American Civil War Soldiers*. Frank's meta-argument seeks to explain why soldiers were willing to continue fighting a war that was becoming increasingly brutal without any end in sight. However, the election of 1864 and the soldier vote clearly fall into the subject matter. Frank's explanation of the soldier vote and the reasons for support of Lincoln includes soldiers' political awareness. These citizen-soldiers were able to differentiate the man McClellan from his platform, which advocated an immediate cessation of hostilities. Union soldiers "rightly suspected that a Democratic victory was synonymous with dissolution of the Union if the South could survive as a political entity."¹⁸ Historian Reid Mitchell comes to the same conclusion in *Civil War Soldiers*,

¹⁸ Joseph Allen Frank, *With Ballot and Bayonet: The Political Socialization of American Civil War Soldiers* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 117-118.

first published in 1988. Mitchell concludes that Union soldiers “viewed McClellan’s candidacy as a threat to the Union.”¹⁹ Frank and Mitchell both find Union soldiers to be ideologically aware of the consequences of the election.

There are several other books on the election of 1864 within the historiography, but they hardly deviate from these basic historiographical distinctions. These include works of popular history by John C. Waugh and Charles Bracelen Flood titled *Reelecting Lincoln: The Battle for the 1864 Presidency* and *1864: Lincoln at the Gates of History*, reflectively, as well as others like historian David E. Long’s *The Jewel of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln’s Re-election and the End of Slavery*. These three, for example, all make the case that the election of 1864 was a pivotal turn in the course of the war. They add little to the historiographical debate of the soldier vote.

After careful reading of the historiography as well as research into soldiers’ letters and diaries, it becomes evident that any one answer as to why soldiers chose Abraham Lincoln in 1864 is insufficient. Rather, new synthesis is required wherein all of the political issues at hand in the summer and fall of 1864 are taken into account. Union soldiers, who are generally acknowledged to have been fairly knowledgeable of political issues at home, cast their ballots for Abraham Lincoln because they felt he best represented their wishes for the nation. It appeared that Union soldiers had already accepted the policy of emancipation by the summer of 1864, as the topic did not grab their attention nearly as much as that of disloyalty and antipathy towards the peace wing of the Democratic Party often labeled “Copperheads.” Union soldiers’ acceptance of emancipation as well as their stance on continuing the war to total victory and restoration of the Union fit squarely into the Republican Party’s ideology in 1864. In voting for Lincoln, they made a purely ideological choice. In addition, a remarkable phenomenon is seen in soldiers’

¹⁹ Reid Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 188.

writings concerning the presidential election of 1864: they viewed it as another battle that had to be won for the North to prevail over the rebellion. This blend of the political and military objectives of the war is Clausewitzian in nature and adds another piece to this fascinating piece of Civil War history.

This thesis focuses largely on why soldiers voted the way they did. As such, there is little analysis into the “how” of soldier voting. It is pertinent to merely state that soldier voting, if it was done in the field, was done in one of two ways. Soldiers from states providing for these absentee ballots either allowed soldier votes to be sent in directly and tabulated separately from the general vote or they allowed soldiers to vote by proxy. Soldiers voting by proxy sent their ballot in a closed envelope to an authorized citizen to act as a representative in their behalf. One state that allowed this proxy method was New York. Due to the nature of this proxy method concerning soldier voting, it is nearly impossible to determine any statistics on the soldier vote in that state, as they were not counted separately. The states that allowed soldier voting in time for the presidential election in 1864 were Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, Missouri, Kentucky, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, Maine, California, Massachusetts, New York, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and New Hampshire. Those states that either never passed legislation allowing soldiers to vote from the field or did not do so in time for the election were Illinois, Delaware, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Indiana, Nevada, and Oregon.

In the states of Illinois and Indiana, specifically, there is large evidence of the Lincoln administration’s efforts to overcome the challenge presented by the lack of legislation supporting soldier voting. The evidence most often pointed to is Lincoln’s request that General William T. Sherman furlough some of his troops so that they may participate in the state elections in Indiana

in October of 1864.²⁰ Republicans believed that the electoral results from the three states that held elections in October for representatives to Congress would indicate which party they would support in November. And so the state elections in Indiana, Ohio, and Pennsylvania were given a great amount of attention. Efforts were also made in November by the administration, state officials, and the soldiers themselves, to secure furloughs for soldiers to return home to vote in the presidential election.

This thesis is divided into three parts. In the first chapter, I will discuss the issue of emancipation and its effect on the electoral choice made by Union soldiers. I come to the conclusion, like many historians, that Union soldiers came to accept the policy of emancipation after initial hesitation but that many soldiers fail to mention emancipation during the run-up to the election. Rather, they wrote on the topic that occupied their minds solely in the summer and fall of 1864: disloyalty and the Democratic Party. If soldiers were particularly against the policy of emancipation in 1864, they undoubtedly would have mentioned the proposed amendment to the Constitution advocated in the Republican Party platform but they do not. Instead, the few who do reveal insight into the Union army's thoughts on emancipation align perfectly with the Republican campaign message on emancipation: that it was a worthwhile military tactic that would help to end the war with victory. In this light, it is reasonable to conclude that Union soldiers, at the least, gave tacit approval to Lincoln's emancipation policies by voting for him on a platform that included continued support for the measure of emancipation.

²⁰ Abraham Lincoln, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 8:11. On September 19th, 1864, Lincoln requested that Sherman furlough Indiana soldiers in time to vote in the state election taking place on October 11th. He writes, "The State election of Indiana occurs on the 11th of October, and the loss of it to the friends of the Government would go far towards losing the whole Union cause." He assured Sherman that this was not an order, and only to send the troops if he could spare them. He also stated that they need not stay for the presidential election in November.

The second chapter deals exclusively with the issue of disloyalty. Republicans made disloyalty a major issue in the campaign for the presidency and their arguments against the Democratic Party are mirrored in the writings of Union soldiers. The soldiers' writings argue against the Democratic Party's adopted platform, which they felt referred to the war as a failure. They also express their wish to continue the war until victory could be achieved, whereupon the union would be restored. This way, their comrades', as well as their own, sacrifices would not have been made in vain. Soldiers' emotive language, as well as their parallels to Republican campaign literature, point to the disloyalty issue's being the main reason why soldiers voted for Abraham Lincoln in 1864.

The third chapter discusses one of the ways Union soldiers conceptualized the election of 1864 and its importance. They came to view the presidential election as yet another battle that must be won in order to end the war victoriously. This phenomenon provides another layer to our understanding of the decisions made by Union soldiers in relation to the election of 1864 and so is worth discussion. It also perhaps shows an effect of the disloyalty issue, as the Republican Party becomes representative for the Union while the Democratic Party becomes representative of the Confederacy.

It is worth noting that the soldier letters and diaries I consulted in this study are drawn from every state that stayed within the Union in the American Civil War. I did not leave out the voices of Union soldiers from those states that barred voting in the field. For example, many soldiers from the state of Illinois were unable to vote unless they were able to secure furloughs home to do so. Some were able to do this; many were not. According to the research, a soldier's geographical place of origin did not have much of an impact as to their outlook on the election.

In fact, many of the soldiers from southern Illinois were much more supportive of Lincoln than those they left at home.

Chapter 1 – Union Soldiers, Emancipation, and the Election of 1864

Upon receiving news of the results of an election in Louisiana, William Roberts Jr. proclaimed it “a glorious Union Emancipation triumph.” Roberts viewed the results as a clear indication of “the Union as it will be: free from the accursed shackles of a despotism, born of Slavery.”²¹ He continues his March 6th, 1864 letter by widening its scope past the results of a state election in to-be-reconstructed Louisiana to the upcoming presidential election in November. Roberts states that Abraham Lincoln is his choice for president. He argues that Lincoln has

kept the ship of state bearing bravely onward firm and unflinching at his Post, like a true patriot should ever be. Then came his crushing Proclamation of Emancipation. Ever since the day that was issued, our Arms have been crowned with success. before disaster and defeat loomed darkly over us.²²

Roberts, a Philadelphia native and company clerk in the 28th Regiment of the Pennsylvania Volunteer Force, writes much clearer of his opinion on the subject of emancipation and its relation to the elections of 1864 than his fellow Union comrades. Roberts notes what he perceives as the military benefits received from the Emancipation Proclamation, which Lincoln perhaps issued in order to keep the “ship of state” afloat. Research shows that many Union soldiers who mentioned emancipation in their letters did not do so in direct relation to the election of 1864 and showed very little ideological attachment to emancipation as an issue within the election. However, this is deceiving. The few soldiers who did mention emancipation often

²¹ Roberts to Father, letter, March 6, 1864, William Roberts Jr. Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

²² Ibid.

conformed with Republican ideology on the subject while those who failed to mention the issue argued other reasons why Lincoln should win another term.

In studies of the American Civil War, the topic of emancipation commands a large amount of attention. This is especially true for those studies involving the soldier vote, the election of 1864, and the reelection of Abraham Lincoln as president of the United States. Historians grapple over the reasons why Lincoln received so much support from the soldiers during the election of 1864, and one of the chief concerns revolves around the question of the role emancipation played in their decision-making. Jonathan W. White is the latest historian to enter the argument in his study entitled *Emancipation, The Union Army, and the Reelection of Abraham Lincoln*. White argues, “the Union armies – while becoming de facto armies of liberation – did not necessarily have an ideological conversion to the Republican war measure of emancipation. For many northern soldiers, restoring the Union was the only true goal of the war from beginning to end.”²³ White’s conclusions are in direct disagreement with historians such as James M. McPherson and Jennifer L. Weber, who argue that Union soldiers’ support of Lincoln in the election of 1864 proved their commitment to the Republican Party’s support of emancipation.

As discussed in the introduction, the historiography of the soldier vote’s role in the reelection of Abraham Lincoln seemed to have come to a consensus until very recently that such landslide proportions of soldiers voting for or supporting Abraham Lincoln gave clear indication of their sentiments regarding all tenets of the Republican Party’s platform in 1864, including emancipation. It is not my purpose here to dispute the 78% figure, as Jonathan W. White has

²³ Jonathan W. White, *Emancipation, The Union Army, and the Reelection of Abraham Lincoln* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014), 9.

done, but to reassess the emancipation issue's role in the soldiers' estimations of the Lincoln-Johnson ticket in November of 1864.²⁴ Through the use of soldiers' letters and diaries, this chapter aims to show that when Union soldiers wrote on emancipation and slavery, they did so in ways that did not usually indicate that it was their primary reason for voting a certain way in the presidential election. Rather, soldiers referred to slavery as the cause of the national struggle, while finding the act of emancipation as a necessary act in prosecuting and winning the war. However, their relative silence on the issue during the election season may also speak volumes: if soldiers did not take the time to denounce Lincoln because of emancipation and slavery, then it may logically signify apathy, acceptance, or tacit approval. Given the campaign literature spread through camps before the election as well as the interest of soldiers in talking politics, this silence most likely represents the latter.

The notion of emancipation as a war aim entered the national consciousness upon issuance of Abraham Lincoln's Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation on September 22nd, 1862. Lincoln, after much deliberation on the subject, decided that it was of military necessity to seize all of the property and war-making materials of the Confederacy, including slaves, in order to potentially shorten the duration of the war. When the Confederate states failed to surrender to the Union before January 1st, 1863, Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, cementing emancipation as an official war aim. The proclamation freed the slaves residing in states or areas

²⁴ White, *Emancipation*, 112-117. In his efforts to shake up understanding of the soldier vote in 1864, White estimates that only 80 percent of the soldiers eligible to vote in the presidential election cast a vote. Thus, while 78 percent of those soldiers casting a vote did so for Lincoln, overall the soldiers voting for Lincoln represented just 50-60 percent of eligible voters. White accounts for 20 percent not participating by positing that these soldiers were not able to do so because of troop movements, skirmishes, not registering to vote (eligibility for the Pennsylvania election required a ten cent tax); little interest in, or even downright aversion to, politics among Democratic-leaning soldiers; as well as intimidation and coercion at the polls by Republican-minded officers and comrades.

of states then in rebellion and effectively turned the Union army into an army of liberation. This was met with mixed reactions among Union soldiers. According to Jonathan W. White, a good number of them either resigned or deserted in response to this new war aim.²⁵ James M. McPherson accounts for this divide in opinion amongst the soldiers, noting “two-fifths of them [Union soldiers] came from Democratic backgrounds and another tenth from the border states.”²⁶ Thus, it seems reasonable to have expected to see a backlash within the Union army. The issue of emancipation inspired many campfire discussions and arguments between Union soldiers, and as McPherson put it: “the cause of Union united Northern soldiers; the cause of emancipation divided them.”²⁷

However, as the prevailing historiography suggests sans Jonathan White, sentiments concerning emancipation as a war aim softened to acceptance and even support as time went on. McPherson states, “But these were distinctly minority views among Union soldiers by 1864. When Lincoln ran for reelection on a platform pledging a constitutional amendment to abolish slavery, he received almost 80 percent of the soldier vote – a pretty fair indication of army sentiment on slavery by that time.”²⁸ McPherson’s assertion, although he does not come right out and say it, is that Union soldiers were conscious their vote would go toward abolishing slavery,

²⁵ Ibid, 69-97.

²⁶ James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 121. The “border states” were the states of Maryland, Kentucky, Missouri, and Delaware. They were slave states that never seceded from the United States and as such often held a tenuous relationship with the Lincoln Administration.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid, 129.

and were either in favor of it or at least did not think it the most vital issue of the election. Jennifer L. Weber, in her study of Copperheads, those Peace Democrats opposing the Lincoln administration and its conduct of the war, goes one step further. She argues that the soldiers' animosity toward this "antiwar faction helped bring most of the army behind the Emancipation Proclamation within a year of Lincoln's first announcing it, and turned many soldiers into lifelong Republicans."²⁹ Historian William C. Davis agrees in the pages of *Lincoln's Men: How President Lincoln Became Father to an Army and a Nation*, arguing that soldiers' personal feelings toward Lincoln as well as their pragmatism allowed them to support emancipation as a war aim and ultimately as a piece of the 1864 Republican platform.

The soldiers represented in this study rarely mentioned the issue of slavery, but when they did, it was largely in relation to the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation or in relation to the presidential election. Within the historiography of late, the issue largely concerns the question of whether or not the soldiers bought into the Republican Party's ideology concerning abolition, or whether the soldiers were simply being pragmatic in their choice of Abraham Lincoln as president. This chapter argues that soldiers often took a pragmatic view towards the emancipation issue, and often did not make explicitly moral arguments against the institution of slavery. This is very much in line with the way the Republican Party campaigned for the presidential election. Indeed, Republican pamphlets and newspapers rarely used emancipation as a positive force, and when it was mentioned, it was largely in order to characterize it as a war aim. Union soldiers supporting the emancipation efforts of the Lincoln administration often pointed to slavery's nature as the cause of the war and emancipation thus being an effective way

²⁹ Jennifer L. Weber, *Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln's Opponents in the North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 2.

of ensuring a lasting peace once the war was over. They also vocalized this support in arguing that it was an act of war and was a necessity in ending the war more quickly. This was very much in line with the Republicans' message during the campaign. This alignment with the Republicans indicates ideological support for the party of Lincoln in the election of 1864.

Given the Union army's mixed feelings concerning emancipation in the beginning, it is important to look at those soldiers who were for the emancipation measure and the reasons why they supported it. The research shows that the opinions expressed in favor of emancipation from the beginning of its official military relevance were also largely the prevailing opinions of Union soldiers during the summer and fall of 1864. These arguments in favor of emancipation likely helped Union soldiers decide whether or not to support Lincoln in his bid for reelection. There were a couple distinct reasons soldiers supported emancipation, according to the research. Soldiers who supported emancipation often did so by pointing out that slavery was the root cause of the war and thus must be terminated and by agreeing with the Lincoln administration that emancipation was an act of war and thus a military necessity. There were also a minority of soldiers who supported the measure for moral reasons, as well as those who were swayed by personal interactions with blacks they met during the war: black troops, freedmen, and slaves.

Those soldiers who favored emancipation because of slavery's perceived role in starting the war often felt that removing the institution from American life may help to make a lasting peace between the two sections of the United States. Many soldiers desired peace, and some of these clarified that only a lasting peace was acceptable lest the country find itself again embroiled in civil war a few years hence.

Union soldier Martin Parkhurst, of Illinois, looked back on the very start of the war, arguing that the South actually fired upon Fort Sumter in order to save the institution of slavery:

“You will recollect about 4 years ago the naybobs of the south inaugurated this awful rebellion by firing on Sumpture all for the purpose of preserving slavery and by so doing they distroyed it and then themselves a great mistake in their own judgment.”³⁰ Parkhurst puts the blame squarely on the South for both the start of the war and for their own destruction. In fact, he writes, the Confederates had by doing so destroyed not only slavery, but also themselves. While Parkhurst reflects on this fact late in the war after the surrender of Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia, Pennsylvania soldier Richard Margerum points to slavery as the cause of war in January of 1864.

Do you think Old Abe Will be Nominated Again for President. I hope So William my motto is Now – go In – And turn loose every Negro – As Slavery have Caused so many lives to be lost. Now let us finish the Ungodly Institution All together.³¹

Unlike the Parkhurst quote above, Margerum discusses emancipation and slavery within the context of the Lincoln’s chances in the impending presidential election, which was a rare occurrence within the trove of soldier letters and diaries consulted here. Margerum implies that Lincoln’s election would have the effect of ending both slavery and the war, while also blaming the heavy loss of life on the institution. While the loss of life was a significant aspect of the war, the emphasis on slavery having caused the war itself was also significant. James M. McPherson’s *For Cause and Comrades* demonstrates this point explicitly, “while restoration of the Union was the main goal for which they fought, they became convinced that this goal was

³⁰ Parkhurst to sirs, letter, April 22, 1865, Martin Parkhurst Papers, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, Springfield, IL.

³¹ Margerum, letter, January 6, 1864, Richard Margerum Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

unattainable without striking against slavery.”³² McPherson then elaborates by producing several examples of Union soldiers who grasped the idea that the institution of slavery had begun this fratricidal conflict as early as 1862. One of the soldiers quoted by McPherson, a private in the 5th Iowa, wrote, “untill this cause is removed and slavery abolished, the rebellion will continue to exist.”³³ Awfully prescient, these views continued to manifest themselves, and are backed up by the research. Thomas F. Miller, of the 29th Illinois, wrote in January 21, 1863, that while he did not believe Lincoln ever intended to free the slaves, Lincoln had come to the conclusion that in order to win the fight, emancipation must be carried out: “So I think the President has after So long a time arrived at th conclusion that th thing that Caused this Great trouble will have to be removed before this thing Can or will be Settled.”³⁴

These soldiers believed, and others came to believe, that slavery must be eradicated in order to return the nation to a state of peace. Illinois soldier John C. Dinsmore believed this to be true, writing, “Even if we could supress the rebellion and leave the main root [slavery] where it was before, it wouldent be long before they would try the same game as before, but if we take a way the main root of Evil and confiscate all ther property they will have nothing to fight fore hereafter.”³⁵ Dinsmore concludes his letter, writing that he feels he has given an

³² McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 118.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Thomas F. Miller, letter, January 21, 1863, Thomas F. Miller Papers, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, Springfield, IL.

³⁵ John C. Dinsmore to brother, letter, October 24, 1862, John C. Dinsmore Papers, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, Springfield IL.

accurate representation of his comrades' views concerning the Emancipation Proclamation and hopes to see it carried into effect.

Family members may have had an effect on the disposition of soldiers towards emancipation. An uncle Carlyle wrote to nephew William L. Dillon, of Marion County, Illinois, about the episode at Fort Pillow, a Union garrison on the Mississippi River. Confederate Major General Nathan Bedford Forrest attacked the fort and his men murdered black Union soldiers as well as their commander after the Union force had already surrendered. This action caused an outcry through much of the North, including Dillon's uncle, it seems. Carlyle wrote,

If I was a soldier and in the service and had the power I would feel like taking vengeance on them having for a watch word "Remember Fort Pillow" I know it is hard to have saw a Brother show down as criminals for the crime of being loyal and of trying to sustain the government. As I am like you I want to see this wicked rebellion cease. I want an honorable peace one that is lasting. I want the cause of war removed and then I think we will have a permanent peace.³⁶

Carlyle here decries the slaughter of Union soldiers white and black at Fort Pillow while also raising the issue of loyalty to the United States government. The implication of this letter is that Carlyle believes in order for the government to be saved, the very cause of the war must be removed. Due to subsequent letters written by his nephew, William L. Dillon, it is likely the cause of the war cited here is slavery. Dillon feared, much like his uncle, that the Union government would collapse and in its place the Confederacy and Copperheads would establish a despotism that would be "death alike to both white & black!"³⁷

³⁶ Carlyle to Dillon, letter, June 5, 1864, William L. Dillon Papers, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, Springfield, IL.

³⁷ Dillon, letter, July 8, 1864, William L. Dillon Papers, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, Springfield, IL.

Union soldier William Roberts Jr., who is quoted at the beginning of this chapter, realized the role slavery had played in bringing about the war and expanded upon this belief by arguing that Abraham Lincoln was the sole candidate able to navigate the stormy seas that the Union now weathered:

Old Abe is my choice. The man who has been through the fiery furnace of affliction as he has; who, (when all looked dark & cheerless and the black spirit of despotism and anarchy shrieked with joy at the apparent downfall of freedom) still kept on in the path God had marked out for him & encouraging others by his cheerful manner & conduct, still kept the ship of State bearing bravely onward firm and unflinching at his Post, like a true patriot should ever be. Then came his crushing Proclamation of Emancipation. Ever since the day that was issued, our Arms have been crowned with success. before disaster and defeat loomed darkly over us.³⁸

Remember that Roberts imagined the Union as it would be, “free from the accursed shackles of a despotism, born of Slavery.”³⁹ After declaring the cause of the present struggle, Roberts declares his support for Lincoln, and describes the qualities he feels that Lincoln engenders: steadfastness and bravery. Finally, Roberts gives an example of Lincoln’s tact: the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation, which contributed to military success and hope where before neither could be found. This marks the second view that both Lincoln and the soldiers supporting the emancipation measure held: that emancipation was a necessary war measure.

The soldiers who wrote favorably on the topic of emancipation in relation to Lincoln’s bid for reelection often did so by pointing out emancipation’s role as a war measure. They reasoned that emancipation took away Southerners’ means of production. Some also pointed out that the Union could benefit from arming the slaves. Thus the institution of slavery was able to become the South’s weakness as well as a Union strength. Along with the argument that slavery

³⁸ William Roberts Jr. to father, letter, March 6, 1864, William Roberts Jr. Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

³⁹ Ibid.

as an institution should cease in the United States, the Republican political press in the presidential campaign perpetuated the argument that emancipation was beneficial and even crucial to the war effort.

Some of the soldiers favoring emancipation fit into the arguments made by historians that soldiers became more and more amenable to Republican ideology as the war progressed. These historians, including James M. McPherson and Reid Mitchell, argued that as the war wound on, Union soldiers saw the pragmatic benefits of emancipation as a war policy.⁴⁰ McPherson cites a Pennsylvanian private who stated, “I have always until lately been opposed to abraham linkins proclamation but i have lately been convinced that it was just the thing that was neded to weaken the strength of rebles.”⁴¹ Another soldier cited by McPherson agrees, arguing that if the Union could make use of rebel property, then they ought to take their slaves away as well.⁴² An Illinoisan from the 37th Illinois agreed, stating, “we are to inflict so much the greater injury on rebels by the terms of the President’s glorious Emancipation Proclamation.”⁴³

Some Union soldiers rationalized emancipation by viewing it as necessary punishment for the slave owners who had turned their backs on the Union by seceding. Amos W. Hostetter,

⁴⁰ McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Reid Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997)

⁴¹ McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 125.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ William P. Black, *Duty, Honor, and Country: The Civil War Experiences of Captain William P. Black, Thirty-Seventh Illinois Infantry* (Iowa City, IA: Camp Pope Bookshop, 2006), 177-178.

of the 34th Illinois, wrote to a Mr. and Mrs. O.P. Miles from a camp near Murfreesboro, Tennessee, in January of 1863, relating to them his changed view on emancipation:

When I came into the service myself and many others did not believe in interfering with slavery but we have changed our opinions. We like the Negro no better now than we did then but we hate his masters worse and I tell you when Old Abe carries out his Proclamation he kills this Rebellion and not before. I am henceforth an Abolitionist and I intend to practice what I preach.⁴⁴

Hostetter implies that the Confederacy will collapse without the help of their slave labor, and that he sees the Emancipation Proclamation as a tool to do exactly that. It speaks volumes that he sees the same resolve in his comrades, as he relates earlier in the same letter “men that came here Strong Democrats are Democrats no longer, men who came here with no intention of interfering with Slavery are now abolitionists.”⁴⁵ Another soldier, Robert B. Latham, of the 106th Illinois, wrote around this very same time that he felt the Emancipation Proclamation was “The way to put down the rebellion, and end the war.”⁴⁶ Captain William P. Black, of the 37th Illinois, reacted to the Proclamation on January 3rd, 1863, stating, “we are now able to inflict so much the greater injury on rebels by the terms of the President’s glorious Emancipation Proclamation.”⁴⁷ However, it is worth noting that of these three soldiers, only Hostetter relates his view of emancipation to his view of Lincoln and his chances of reelection.

⁴⁴ Amos W. Hostetter to Mr. & Mrs. O.P. Miles, letter, January 29, 1863, Amos W. Hostetter Papers, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, Springfield, IL.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ R.B. Latham to wife, letter, January 22, 1863, R.B. Latham Papers, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, Springfield, IL.

⁴⁷ William P. Black, *Duty, Honor, and Country: The Civil War Experiences of Captain William P. Black, Thirty-Seventh Illinois Infantry*, ed. Michael E. Banasik (Iowa City, IA: Camp Pope Bookshop, 2006), 177-178.

Hostetter's letter gives some evidence of the switch in philosophy concerning emancipation that Union soldiers experienced. While Jonathan W. White argues that many Union soldiers did not experience a conversion to abolitionism, there is some evidence that some Union soldiers did. John C. Dinsmore, of the 99th Illinois, wrote to his brother on October 24th, 1862, of the opinions in the army on Lincoln's preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. He related the news that "there is very few soldiers that is against it," and says that he would not be surprised if his brother's regiment and most of the soldiers in it did not approve of the measure within six months in the service.⁴⁸ Dinsmore argues that he does not believe "the ware will come to a Close while the negroes is left wheare they are to rais suplies for the rebel army."⁴⁹

Hostetter also tells his family members that if they have the right to vote for president in 1864, that they would undoubtedly go all in for Lincoln. However, he states that this would only happen "if Old Abe carries out what he has commenced."⁵⁰ Among the many soldiers' letters and diaries consulted here, Hostetter's account is only one among a few who explicitly connect the policy of emancipation with support for Lincoln's reelection. This is significant, as the ideological connection between emancipation and reelection is often tenuous at best when it concerns soldiers and their writings. For this reason it is a tough sell to argue that Union soldiers voted for Lincoln because of his stance on slavery and emancipation. In this regard, the work of

⁴⁸ John C. Dinsmore to brother, letter, October 24, 1862, John C. Dinsmore Papers, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, Springfield, IL.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Amos W. Hostetter to Mr. & Mrs. O.P. Miles, letter, January 29, 1863, Amos W. Hostetter Papers, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, Springfield, IL. Due to Hostetter's language in the rest of the letter, it is very likely that what he refers to as the "what" that Lincoln has commenced is in fact the policy of emancipation.

Jonathan W. White holds up against the likes of James M. McPherson, Chandra Manning, and Jennifer L. Weber, who emphasize that soldiers made their choice based on Lincoln's handling of emancipation in the Civil War.

Some soldiers who may have held a negative view of the emancipation issue or of the changes in race relations that the war seemed to cause even found themselves in favor of Lincoln's reelection. Take George F. Miller of the 2nd Illinois Cavalry, for instance. In a diary entry dated November 8th, 1864, election day, he writes, "Well this is Election day but we Ills. Soldiers are not allowed a vote: we are on equality with the Negro now; I would like to be at home long enough to vote! This is the 4th president I have voted for; but; I did not vote this time!! ... I do sincerely hope it is Abe Lincoln!!"⁵¹ While Miller makes more of a statement against the treatment of soldiers in respects to voting in the election, he does not fault Lincoln with his being on par "with the Negro now."⁵² Another soldier, Colonel Theodore Lyman, of General George Meade's staff, related the news of Lincoln's reelection positively while at the same time hoping that the significant political opposition would temper Lincoln's actions in his second term. Lyman writes, "This will caution him, or better, his party, to proceed cautiously and to make no fanatical experiments, such as we too often have seen, but to proceed firmly, and

⁵¹ George F. Miller, diary, November 8, 1864, George F. Miller Papers, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, Springfield, IL. See also James A. Connolly, *Three Years in the Army of the Cumberland: The Letters and Diary of Major James A. Connolly*, ed. Paul M. Angle (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 216-218. Connolly expresses the same sentiments of him and fellow Illinois soldiers being "no more than so many negroes, in the election, for we are disfranchised." However, he explicitly endorses Lincoln's reelection and expresses admiration for the state of Georgia, stating that it would become even better with slavery gone forever. He seems to wish for slavery's eradication as a way to promote a class system on par with the North, as he comments, "Its farm homes are very much like our Northern farmers homes, and the people are more like our home people. There appears to be a 'middle class' here, something I have not found in any other Southern state."

⁵² Ibid. Remember that Illinois was one of the states that did not allow for soldier voting from the field.

according to rule and law.”⁵³ While Lyman finds Lincoln to be the correct choice for president, he seems to express indignation at past actions taken by his administration. The quote implies actions that were taken in spite of “rule and law,” which by the Democratic opposition would mean either action taken against civil liberties or of emancipation.

Soldiers undoubtedly thought about emancipation during the course of the election. This was an issue that obviously incited much passion since its introduction into the national political consciousness, and soldiers’ relative silence on the issue in favor of other topics during the election may speak to its relative unimportance in their decision-making. However, what the soldiers did say on the topic of slavery rarely deviated from the mainstream Republican Party message: that slavery was the cause of the war and must be gotten rid of in order to repair the Union, and so emancipation was a necessary war measure taken to ultimately win the war.

Any attempts to pigeon hole the message of a nineteenth century political party in the midst of an electoral campaign is a monumental task. It must be remembered that Abraham Lincoln’s nomination in June 1864 was not inevitable in the midst of an increasingly unpopular war and the disappointment of a military stalemate in Virginia in the spring of 1864. Historian William Frank Zornow, as well as many historians since, described the political climate within the Republican Party at length. Factions of the party, most notably the Radicals, were decidedly uninspired by the prospect of four more years of Lincoln and consequently the presidential stocks of fellow Republicans such as John C. Frémont and Salmon P. Chase rose during this process. Due to this factionalism, it is difficult to nail down a single party line on any one issue, especially emancipation.

⁵³ Theodore Lyman, *With Grant and Meade from the Wilderness to Appomattox*, ed. George R. Agassiz (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 259.

However, for the purposes of this study, it is only necessary to attempt to give a cursory glance at the materials that likely passed before soldiers' eyes during the course of the 1864 campaign. Among these were political pamphlets and newspapers. Perhaps the most crucial campaign literature to reach the front were those published by the Union League and the Loyal Publication Society. James M. McPherson notes that these political societies were created in opposition to political societies formed at the time by the Democratic Party, and thus became "an auxiliary of the Republican party."⁵⁴ Thus, the pamphlets published by these societies should be seen as near to official campaign literature as possible given the time period. It should also be noted that the Loyal Publication Society's resolution, as adopted at its first meeting in February of 1863, stated:

Resolved, that the object of this organization is, and shall be confined to the distribution of Journals and Documents of unquestionable and unconditional loyalty throughout the United States, and particularly in the Armies now engaged in the suppression of the Rebellion, and to counteract, as far as practicable, the efforts now being made by the enemies of the Government and the advocates of a disgraceful peace to circulate journals and documents of a disloyal character.⁵⁵

First and foremost, the language of this resolution, as well as the society's name, directly attacks the opposition societies as disloyal and traitorous. This was an integral aspect of the

⁵⁴ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 599. See also Joseph Allen Frank, *With Ballot and Bayonet: The Political Socialization of American Civil War Soldiers* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 184-185. Frank also uses the term "auxiliary" to describe the Union Leagues' relationship to the Republican Party, except that he describes them as "repressive," noting activities they engaged in, including "breaking opposition demonstrations, attacking Copperhead newspapers, and demanding that suspect officeholders be ferreted out. They took to the streets to track down deserters, draft evaders, and other political troublemakers."

⁵⁵ "Opinions of the Early Presidents, and of the Fathers of the Republic, Upon Slavery," *Loyal Publication Society*, no. 18 (New York: Wm. C. Bryant & Co., Printers, 1863). This resolution is printed in the front matter of this particular pamphlet.

Republican Party's strategy as it relates to the opinions expressed by Union soldiers, and will be discussed in the next chapter. For the purposes of this chapter, the above passage's importance lies in the Loyal Publication Society's intent to distribute campaign literature to the soldiers on the front. This information makes it necessary for one to analyze the opinions expressed concerning emancipation within their pages and compare it to what is seen in soldiers' letters and diaries.

Upon analysis, the opinions expressed and promoted by these political societies through their pamphlets is not far from the pragmatic outlook on emancipation seen in the soldiers' own words. These "auxiliary" components of the Republican Party encouraged emancipation to be seen as a necessary move toward finishing up the Civil War. It is not unlikely that the soldiers read the words of pamphlets such as these, since historians like Joseph Allen Frank and James M. McPherson contend that soldiers were politically knowledgeable and often anxious for news from other fronts as well as from home.⁵⁶

Pamphlets produced by these political societies addressed the emancipation issue with a decidedly pragmatic and conservative approach. They were published by more moderate elements of the party and as such, these publications stayed away from moral arguments against slavery then favored by the more radical wing of the Republican Party. Rather, the pamphlets

⁵⁶ Joseph Allen Frank, *With Ballot and Bayonet: The Political Socialization of American Civil War Soldiers* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998). Frank argues that soldiers continued to enlist and fight primarily because they were motivated by the dominant political issues of the day. Within Frank's thesis, the results of the soldier vote in 1864 indicated the affirmation of Lincoln and the Republicans' national policies, including emancipation. James M. McPherson, "'Spend Much Time in Reading the Daily Papers': The Press and Army Morale in the Civil War," in *This Mighty Scourge: Perspective on the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 155-166. McPherson argues in this chapter that soldiers were often anxious to receive news of the war from both other fronts and from home, and were thus very politically knowledgeable as well as invested.

promoted the contention that emancipation was a necessary measure toward ensuring victory. A decent example of this message is contained in a speech published and distributed by the Loyal Publication Society entitled “Rebellion, Slavery, and Peace.” The speech, given by an N.G. Upham, upholds the actions taken by the U.S. government regarding slavery and emancipation. Among the actions Upham recognizes are the seizure of Confederate contraband of war, including slaves. Concerning the Emancipation Proclamation, Upham reinforces the contention that it was first and foremost a war measure, and forcefully states that Lincoln, in issuing the Proclamation, was merely reacting against a hostile South bent upon sundering the Union in order to save slavery. Upham concludes this portion of his speech by arguing that while the value of slavery could be calculated, the value of the Union could not.⁵⁷

Importantly, Upham also evaluates the constitutionality of the Emancipation Proclamation. He mentions a vague “charge of unconstitutionality” before weighing in on the issue, ultimately finding that the president’s war powers as commander-in-chief allow him discretion in this sphere.⁵⁸ The issue of constitutionality is also addressed in another Loyal Publication Society publication entitled, “The Constitution Vindicated. Nationality, Secession, Slavery.” The pamphlet, a published form of a speech by a James A. Hamilton, concludes that the Emancipation Proclamation and any actions taken by Congress to deprive the enemy of their war-making property are fully condoned by the Constitution.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ N.G. Upham, “Rebellion, Slavery, and Peace,” *Loyal Publication Society*, no. 52 (New York: Wm. C. Bryant & Co., Printers).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵⁹ James A. Hamilton, “The Constitution Vindicated. Rebellion, Secession, Slavery.,” *Loyal Publication Society*, no. 50 (New York: Wm. C. Bryant & Co., Printers,).

The Union League also approached the issue of emancipation in a pragmatic way, arguing that slavery caused the war and that its eradication was a military necessity. An essay written anonymously and published by the Union League of Philadelphia in March 1864 detailed the reasons Lincoln should be reelected to the presidential chair. The essay points out Lincoln's single-minded determination to "the one thought which engrosses every true American heart – the re-establishment of the Union on a permanent basis."⁶⁰ Going further, the essay argues that reunion is the sole purpose of Lincoln's conduct of the war with all other considerations being secondary, including slavery. However, slavery became an "obstacle" to reunion and in this light Lincoln's Proclamation was issued. The author continues,

We found that slavery was not only the cause of the rebellion, but that, in place of being, as we had supposed, an inherent weakness, it was really a source of strength. Its destruction became, therefore, necessary to the overthrow of the rebel chiefs, and also to the permanency of the triumph of the national cause. This last consideration, however, was slowly reached, and the Emancipation Proclamation was issued solely as a military measure.⁶¹

This passage mirrors the arguments seen in soldiers' correspondence concerning the issue of emancipation. The author argues that not only was slavery the cause of the war, but it was also the hindrance to a lasting peace.⁶²

⁶⁰ "Abraham Lincoln. (Union League No. 69)," in *Union Pamphlets of the Civil War, 1861-1865*, vol. II, ed. Frank Freidel (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), 909.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 911.

⁶² *Ibid.* See also James Russell Lowell, "The President's Policy. (Union League No. 71)," in *Union Pamphlets of the Civil War, 1861-1865*, vol. II, ed. Frank Freidel (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), 914-939. Lowell's essay, originally published in the *North American Review* in January 1864, also concludes that the destruction of slavery will allow for a lasting peace between the sections.

Finally, some Union campaign pamphlets sought to place the emancipation into a historical context. In two pamphlets published by the Loyal Publication Society, the precedents are shown for the policy of emancipation. These publications, especially an anonymously written essay on the opinions of the Founding Fathers in regards to slavery, make an explicit effort to ground the eradication of slavery into the founding of the United States. The implication is quite clear: that Abraham Lincoln is merely following in the footsteps of his forebears, including George Washington, John Adams, Patrick Henry, and Benjamin Franklin.⁶³ The Loyal Publication Society also published an April 8th, 1864 speech given in the U.S Senate by Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts in which Sumner argues that the abolition of slavery is sanctioned by the Constitution as well as in the words of the Founders.⁶⁴ While these arguments do not show up in the words of the soldiers themselves, they may very well have served to sway some who were indecisive on Lincoln due to emancipation's position in his party's platform.

The approved platform consisted of eleven resolutions, two of which dealt with slavery in some fashion. The third resolution called for a constitutional amendment abolishing slavery throughout the United States, as it was the cause of the war, aided the Confederate war efforts, and "hostile to the principles of Republican Government." The resolution continued by renewing support for Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, and calling for the aforementioned amendment to "forever prohibit the existence of slavery within the limits or the jurisdiction of

⁶³ "Opinions of the Early Presidents, and of the Fathers of the Republic, Upon Slavery, and Upon Negroes As Men and Soldiers," *Loyal Publication Society*, no. 18 (New York: Wm. C. Bryant & Co., Publishers, 1863).

⁶⁴ Charles Sumner, "No Property in Man. Speech of Hon. Charles Sumner, on the Proposed Amendment of the Constitution Abolishing Slavery Through the United States. In the Senate of the United States, April 8th, 1864.," *Loyal Publication Society*, no. 51 (New York: Loyal Publication Society, 1864).

the United States.”⁶⁵ In the fifth resolution, the approved platform gives its support to Lincoln specifically and endorses his actions, including the Emancipation Proclamation and the enlistment of freedmen as soldiers.⁶⁶ Lincoln accepted the nomination of his party and explicitly reaffirmed his commitment to abolishing slavery by constitutional amendment. The platform, as well as Lincoln’s acceptance letter, appeared in the New York *Tribune* and were likely printed in other newspapers throughout the North. Soldiers, who thirsted for news from the home front, very likely saw the platform of the Republican Party, yet there is very little discussion of the platform one way or another among the soldiers researched here.

Lincoln made one other statement on emancipation and slavery that was widely printed throughout the North: the “Conkling Letter,” written by Lincoln in response to an invitation to visit Springfield, Illinois in the late summer of 1863. Lincoln’s friend, James C. Conkling, became increasingly worried about Republican electoral prospects in Illinois due to the issues of emancipation and the arming of black soldiers. Lincoln’s response reinforced his argument that the Emancipation Proclamation was issued as a tool to save the Union:

You say you will not fight to free negroes. Some of them seem willing to fight for you; but, no matter. Fight you, then, exclusively to save the Union. I issued the proclamation on purpose to aid you in saving the Union. Whenever you shall have conquered all resistance to the Union, if I shall urge you to continue fighting, it will be an apt time, then, for you to declare you will not fight to free negroes.

I thought that in your struggle for the Union, to whatever extent the negroes should cease helping the enemy, to that extent it weakened the enemy in his resistance to you. Do you think differently? I thought that whatever negroes can be got to do as soldiers, leaves just so much less for white soldiers to do, in saving the Union. Does it

⁶⁵ Abraham Lincoln, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 7:381-382. The platform is presented in the first footnote to Lincoln’s “Reply to Committee Notifying Lincoln of His Renomination” as it was originally published in the New York *Tribune* on June 10, 1864.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

appear otherwise to you? But negroes, like other people, act upon motives. Why should they do anything for us, if we will do nothing for them? If they stake their lives for us, they must be prompted by the strongest motive – even the promise of freedom. And the promise being made, must be kept.⁶⁷

Lincoln addresses those who believed that the war's focus had changed by refuting that notion. Instead of a war being fought to free the slaves, it was still a war to save the Union. Lincoln speaks in unconditional terms that the Emancipation Proclamation was issued in order to help save the Union. He then proceeds into pragmatic waters, arguing that any labor the Confederacy loses by emancipation, the Union will undoubtedly benefit from. From this point, Lincoln gives a cursory update on the progress of the war, concluding, "Peace does not appear so distant as it did."⁶⁸ While speaking of peace, he strays into a philosophical analysis of the war's purpose upon its hypothetical conclusion, hoping "it will then be proved that, among free men, there can be no successful appeal from the ballot to the bullet."⁶⁹ Lincoln is of course relating his view of the coming of the war: an electoral dispute wherein one section of the country refused to acknowledge their constitutionally elected President, then resorting to violence. Lincoln ultimately concludes the "Conkling Letter" with some of the most forceful language contained within the document:

And then, there will be some black men who can remember that, with silent tongue, and clenched teeth, and steady eye, and well-poised bayonet, they have helped mankind on to this great consummation; while, I fear, there will be some white ones, unable to forget that, with malignant heart, and deceitful speech, they have strove to hinder it.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Ibid., 409. Lincoln's "Conkling Letter" is located on pages 406-410.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 410.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

Here, at the end of the document, Lincoln takes the moral high ground. He predicts the efforts and successes of the black troops in defeating the Confederacy while warning the opponents of his emancipation policy of the possible lasting personal effects of their disruptiveness.

The effects of Lincoln's "Conkling Letter" are difficult to gauge as it relates to Union soldiers and their eventual electoral support of Lincoln's reelection. However, historian Michael Burlingame notes that this particular letter was discussed throughout the country by the major national and regional newspapers, including the *Chicago Tribune*, the *New York Times*, and the *New York Evening Post*.⁷¹ Given that Union soldiers hungered for news from home and thirsted for political news, it is likely that they read reprints of the letter or, at the very least, political commentary on its contents. The contents of Lincoln's letter definitely align with the mainline thought of the Republican Party concerning emancipation, which matches the reasons the soldiers supported it. As has been said before, the soldiers' virtual silence on the issue during the election likely amounted to tacit support.

Very few of the soldiers in this study gave an opinion on slavery or emancipation at all specifically during the 1864 presidential election campaign. It is more likely that Union soldiers tacitly approved of Lincoln's handling of the emancipation issue, while saving their energy for a more demanding issue featured in the election of 1864: that of treason and disloyalty to the Union. This issue of disloyalty inspired much more emotionally charged language in Union soldiers and is much more likely to have inspired them to cast their votes for Abraham Lincoln.

Even though these Union soldiers believed that emancipation was a necessary tool in eventually winning the war, there is little indication that the emancipation issue loomed largely

⁷¹ Michael Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln: A Life*, vol. 2 (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 561-563.

in the minds of soldiers when deciding whom to vote for in 1864. However, it is important to note that those who did mention it rarely strayed far from the Republican Party line. The issue that dominated the hearts and minds of Union soldiers throughout the summer and fall of 1864 was what I refer to as the “disloyalty issue.”

Chapter 2 – “Soldiers don’t generally believe in fighting to put down treason, and voting to let it live:” The Disloyalty Issue and the Soldier Vote

On November 9th, 1864, the day after the presidential election, a private from Vermont by the name of Wilbur Fisk wrote, “Soldiers don’t generally believe in fighting to put down treason, and voting to let it live.”⁷² Although simply stated, this sentiment likely rang true for a great many soldiers in the fall of 1864 and was perhaps the primary factor in determining whom one would cast a ballot for in the presidential election. Unlike the already discussed issue of emancipation, the issue of disloyalty inspired far more deliberation throughout the pages of soldiers’ letters and diaries in the months leading up to the pivotal election. Broadly speaking, the disloyalty issue encompassed the soldiers’ conception of the Democratic Party in the North, particularly the peace faction within its ranks. The Peace Democrats were commonly referred to as Copperheads.

For the purposes of this study, the Copperheads need only be defined by their opposition to the Lincoln administration’s war policies, which included emancipation, the draft, demands for an unconditional surrender, full restoration of the Union upon cessation of hostilities, and suspension of the writ of habeas corpus. Rather, as historian Jennifer L. Weber points out, the Copperheads demanded “an immediate peace settlement... they were willing to trade victory for peace.”⁷³ This characteristic of the antiwar wing of the Democratic Party encouraged Union

⁷² Wilbur Fisk, *Hard Marching Every Day: The Civil War Letters of Private Wilbur Fisk, 1861-1865*, ed. Emil and Ruth Rosenblatt (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 276.

⁷³ Jennifer L. Weber, *Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln’s Opponents in the North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3-4.

soldiers to vote for Lincoln. The soldiers' reasoning included opposition to the idea of peace at any cost, as such a peace could only be temporary. Soldiers also wanted their fallen comrades' sacrifices to not have been made in vain, and so actively supported Lincoln's intention to follow through with the war until total victory could be achieved. Total victory here would include the restoration of the Union, the primary goal of the Union's efforts since the firing upon Fort Sumter in April of 1861. Lastly, a large majority of Union troops found the Copperheads to be downright treasonous in their opposition to the war.

Historians have accounted for the emotions that Copperheads inspired in the ranks of Union soldiers, and several have extended their findings to the soldiers' decision to vote for Abraham Lincoln in 1864. William Frank Zornow, in *Lincoln and the Party Divided*, published in 1954, traces the development of what he terms the "domestic treason issue."⁷⁴ Zornow argues that Republican leadership deliberately pushed the issue in order to stigmatize the Democratic Party, which became a particularly effective electioneering tactic. By the end of the political canvass, after "Republican syllogisms constructed around the words Copperhead, Democrat, traitor, and rebel were presented *ad nauseum*," the Republicans were electorally successful.⁷⁵ Zornow concludes that while the treason issue was decisive in the presidential election, it was an unfair charge against the Democrats, as very few of them harbored any ill will towards the government and alleged Copperhead conspiracies, such as one plan to liberate Confederate

⁷⁴ William Frank Zornow, *Lincoln and the Party Divided* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), 149.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 160.

prisoners of war in Indiana, were overstated.⁷⁶ Jennifer L. Weber, in *Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln's Opponents in the North*, argues that these conspiracies have been erroneously focused upon. She disagrees with historian Frank L. Klement, who argued in *The Copperheads in the Middle West* that the Copperheads as a significant political threat were largely a fictional “product of fevered Republican imaginations.”⁷⁷ Instead, Weber finds that the Copperheads were not merely a group on the fringe of Democratic Party politics, but were in fact a broadly based group whose ideas threatened to take over the reins of the party's national message. While Weber's assertion has merit, especially since the peace wing of the Democratic Party was able to secure their own platform as well as notable Copperhead George H. Pendleton as the vice presidential candidate, it is important to note that it was indeed Republican strategy to paint the Copperheads as disloyal and treasonous. This was a perception that Union soldiers readily accepted.

As far as the Copperheads' effect on the opinions of Union soldiers as it related to the presidential election, historians have not been silent. Zornow does not specifically mention the effects the attacks on Copperheads by the Republican campaign had on the Union army, but Weber certainly does. She argues that Union soldiers became more politicized between the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation and the presidential election in 1864 in part because

⁷⁶ Ibid., 155-156. Zornow refers to the plot, allegedly constructed by Sons of Liberty leader Harrison Dodd, to “liberate Confederate prisoners at Camp Morton, seize the arsenal, and raise a general insurrection throughout the state. Presumably they intended to create some kind of a Northwest Confederacy.”

⁷⁷ Jennifer L. Weber, *Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln's Opponents in the North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 10; Frank L. Klement, *The Copperheads in the Middle West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

of the Copperhead presence, which resulted in “unqualified support of Lincoln.”⁷⁸ This statement, along with her other assertion that the soldiers became “lifelong Republicans” due to Copperhead activity, are most troublesome. The trouble with these two assertions is that they are largely unqualified. The latter is particularly so, given the monumental task it would take to prove the thesis correct. Weber’s assertion, along with James M. McPherson’s previously discussed assertion that the army’s overwhelming support for Lincoln gives a “pretty fair indication of army sentiment on slavery,” provides the impetus for Jonathan W. White’s argument in *Emancipation, The Union Army, and the Reelection of Abraham Lincoln*.⁷⁹ White’s is the most recently published work on the election of 1864 and the only book length project to deal with the soldier’s role within the election. White’s main bone of contention is emancipation as it relates to the soldier’s decision to cast a vote for Lincoln as well as whether the soldier vote indicated an authentic identification with the Republican Party. White gives a number of other reasons soldiers, of both Republican and Democratic persuasions, voted for Lincoln. These reasons, including opposition to Copperheads, are given to show that soldiers thought about much more than emancipation during the course of the election. These alternate motives are given by White to show that the results of the soldier vote had little to do with loyalty to the

⁷⁸ Ibid., 2.

⁷⁹ James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 129. McPherson deems the results of the soldier vote to be a referendum on slavery, with the roughly eighty percent of soldiers who cast a vote for Lincoln to be in favor of the Republican policy of emancipation. This is discussed in the previous chapter in more detail.

Republican Party. White concludes, arguing that the results of the soldier vote “was not an overarching change in ideology or political sentiment.”⁸⁰ However, this argument is flawed.

Many soldiers may not have mentioned their stance on emancipation during the run-up to the presidential election, but a great number of them had a lot to say about their reasons for not supporting the Democratic Party. This anti-Copperhead stance should not be viewed as apolitical, but instead as a clear endorsement of Lincoln and his party. After all, the Republican platform mirrors the very message that most soldiers who wrote about Copperheads adhered to:

*Resolved, That we approve the determination of the Government of the United States not to compromise with Rebels, or to offer them any terms of peace, except such as may be based upon an unconditional surrender of their hostility and a return to their just allegiance to the Constitution and laws of the United States, and that we call upon the Government to maintain this position, and to prosecute the war with the utmost possible vigor to complete the suppression of the Rebellion, in full reliance upon the self-sacrificing patriotism, the heroic valor, and the undying devotion of the American people to their country and its free institutions.*⁸¹

Indeed, a great many Union soldiers expressed their wish that the war continue on until total victory could be achieved. This sentiment is perhaps the most common among soldiers who seemingly voted for Lincoln because they could not bring themselves to support a party that seemed to argue for peace at any cost. Thus, the anti-Copperhead stance of Union soldiers and the subsequent soldier vote was decidedly political in nature and represents support for the party’s platform and ideology as expressed in the fall of 1864.

⁸⁰ Jonathan W. White, *Emancipation, The Union Army, and the Reelection of Abraham Lincoln* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014), 128.

⁸¹ Abraham Lincoln, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 7: 381.

Not only did the Republican platform call for an unconditional surrender and restoration of the Union, but the leaders of the Republican Party also actively campaigned against the Copperheads' own message as expressed within their platform. Within the pages of newspapers and campaign pamphlets across the country, Republicans lambasted the Democrats' message. For instance, a pamphlet published by the National Union Executive Committee (remember that the Republican Party campaigned as the National Union Party in 1864) breaks down the differences, as they saw them, between the Democrats' platform and their own. The subtitle of the pamphlet sums up the message of the whole document: "How shall we end the Rebellion – Shall we Coax it, or Crush it?"⁸² The document answers this question with a call for victory through the force of arms: "If we surrender to the rebellion, the Union is gone forever. If we fight the Rebels a little longer, it is safe forever. If we give them to understand, in November next, that the only Road to Peace lies through the Victory of the National arms, the contest is over!"⁸³ Other pamphlets echo the same message.

In another pamphlet published by the very same National Union Executive Committee, the authors show further reasoning as to why sticking with Abraham Lincoln would be the correct choice in November 1864. This pamphlet, entitled "What Jeff. Davis Thinks Of The War," gives excerpts from two speeches made by Confederate President Jefferson Davis in which he discusses the need for reinforcements and for any deserters to return to the front. The author of the pamphlet points out that this entreaty is at odds with the message that the Democrats present in their platform: "Does that look as if the war had been a failure on our

⁸² "The Two Roads to Peace! How Shall we end the Rebellion – Shall we Coax it, or Crush it?" (New York: National Union Executive Committee, 1864).

⁸³ Ibid.

part?”⁸⁴ The pamphlet closes much the same as the first, entreating voters who agree that the war must be fought on to ultimate victory to vote for Lincoln.

In a pamphlet published by the Union Congressional Committee, the author specifically addresses the soldiers in the Union armies regarding the Democratic platform:

Men of the North! Soldiers of the Republic! Do you want such a peace? Are you willing that all your heroic devotion to liberty, and the Union, should result only in this temporary peace? If you want a peace worth having, one that will be *permanent*, a peace that comes to you unstained with national dishonor, then you will trample under your feet this proposition for a “*temporary peace*,” which comes to you with the nomination of McClellan.⁸⁵

This quote cements the political message of the Republican Party during the electoral campaign of 1864: to vote for Abraham Lincoln if one wishes for an honorable peace gained via military victory in the field. As the soldiers’ letters attest, this issue fired up the members who would contribute to the soldier vote much more than any other single issue. It is due to these political pamphlets that the soldiers’ vocal support of Republican war aims becomes an essential component of the soldiers’ political ideology in 1864. The soldier vote very much signified political support and loyalty to the Republicans’ message.

While the Democratic platform passed at Chicago called for a convention of sorts to be held in order to return the states to their practical places within the Union, the manner in which it did so irked Republicans and soldiers alike. The platform, as the soldiers attest in their letters, seemed to describe the war as an abject failure. The Democratic platform stated,

Resolved, That this convention does explicitly declare, as the sense of the American people, that after four years of failure to restore the Union by the experiment of war,

⁸⁴ “What Jeff. Davis Thinks Of The War” (New York: National Union Executive Committee, 1864).

⁸⁵ Union Congressional Committee, “Shall we have an armistice?” (Washington, DC: Union Congressional Committee, 1864), 3.

during which, under the pretense of military necessity of war-power higher than the Constitution, the Constitution itself has been disregarded in every part, and public liberty and private right alike trodden down. . . demand that immediate efforts be made for a cessation of hostilities, with a view of an ultimate convention of the States, or other peaceable means, to the end that, at the earliest practicable moment, peace may be restored on the basis of the Federal Union of the States.⁸⁶

This passage from the Democratic platform argues three points, all of which are connected. First, the resolution describes the war efforts as a failure. This argument was passed on by both publishers friendly to the Lincoln Administration as well as Republican leadership in order to sow seeds of discontent among potential voters, many of whom, especially the soldiers, already viewed the Democrats as a traitorous crowd.⁸⁷ Second, the resolution alludes to the use of war powers by the Lincoln Administration, undoubtedly including the suspension of the writ of *habeas corpus*, emancipation, and the draft. Due to the research of historian William C. Davis, it is generally acknowledged that soldiers' support of Lincoln as a person and figure extended to each of his then controversial policies.⁸⁸ Thus, it is likely that this attack on the administration did not convert many soldiers to the Democratic cause. Third, the resolution calls for suspension

⁸⁶ *Official Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention, Held in 1864 at Chicago* (Chicago: The Times Steam Book and Job Printing House, 1864), 27. This pamphlet's inner page indicates that a James H. Goodsell served as the official reporter.

⁸⁷ Jonathan W. White, *Emancipation, The Union Army, and the Reelection of Abraham Lincoln* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014), 4. White discusses the soldiers' reasons for voting for Lincoln instead of the Democrats, pointing out that soldiers were unlikely to vote for a party "that routinely appeared unpatriotic and anti-soldier." White considers their votes for Lincoln to be logical in this light, it seems, but contends that their votes did not signify an ideological conversion to the Republican Party.

⁸⁸ William C. Davis, *Lincoln's Men: How President Lincoln Became Father to an Army and a Nation* (New York: The Free Press, 1999). Davis argues in this work that soldiers became personally attached to Lincoln as both a man and an image over the course of the war, which allowed a majority of them to support controversial actions such as the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation, the military draft, and the suspension of *habeas corpus*.

of hostilities as soon as possible. The soldiers translated this call for an immediate peace as surrender to the Confederacy and a peace without victory. Many soldiers felt that this peace would not last, and would not be worth the effort.

As we shall see, many soldiers discussed these very ideas in their letters and diaries and this was a major issue in the election cycle. Soldiers thought that concluding the war without victory would make their fallen comrades' sacrifices, as well as their own, to have been in vain. Soldiers saw this aspect of the Democratic platform as treasonous. **It did not likely help the Democratic cause that its nominee, following the fall of Atlanta, accepted his nomination for president while at the same time distancing himself from the "war failure" plank present on the platform. Indeed, George B. McClellan wrote that when "our present adversaries are ready for peace, on the basis of the Union," then a conversation on peace would be acceptable.⁸⁹ McClellan thus shied away from his party's platform and in so doing, forced the Democrats into an awkward position, torn between the conflicting principles of war and peace. This likely did not inspire trust on the part of soldiers voting for president.**

Union soldiers expressed their dislike for Copperheads on numerous occasions throughout the course of the war. Of all the aspects of the Northern political landscape, the issue of what they deemed disloyal attracted their attention most. This became especially true in the summer and fall of 1864, during the lead-up to the presidential election. The soldiers expressed their displeasure with the Copperhead platform of the Democratic Party in ways that showed their commitment to the message of the Republican Party platform. This indicates a level of commitment to Republican political ideology, at least during the latter months of the Civil War.

⁸⁹ *The Democratic Platform. General McClellan's Letter of Acceptance*, accessed April 15, 2015, <https://archive.org/details/democraticplatform00mcclrich>. There is no publication information present in document. This publication is clearly campaign literature in favor of the Democratic Party.

The soldiers based their support of Abraham Lincoln on what they believed he stood for in 1864: a continuation of the war until total military victory could be achieved, which would then lead to a permanent peace and the restoration of their beloved Union. At times, their language did not necessarily express support for Lincoln, but rather opposition to his electoral opponents. Due to this nature of the Republican Party's campaign, this is not simply a vote *against* the Democrats rather than support *for* the Republicans as Jonathan W. White suggests.⁹⁰ The Republican campaign made disloyalty an issue, and the soldiers' voices should be seen in this light and thus as an expression of ideological commitment. Those few who disagreed with Lincoln's politics but could not bring themselves to vote for the Copperheads made their opinions absolutely clear through their letters and diaries.

Many Union soldiers felt as Private Wilbur Fisk did in the fall of 1864; Lincoln was the candidate the country needed to see the war through to its successful conclusion. Fisk stated,

They know Mr. Lincoln's straightforward iron determination to punish treason everywhere and do it thoroughly, and they know that he will not spare their pride, nor buy them off, nor surrender one iota of the principles that he has avowed.⁹¹

Fisk suggests that his own support for Lincoln's reelection is based on Lincoln's principles, namely not to "surrender" and "to punish treason everywhere." The latter is the first trend that can be seen in soldiers' letters and diaries in discussion of Lincoln and the election in the summer and fall of 1864. This trend, broadly speaking, is to identify opposition to Lincoln as treason and disloyalty. Soldiers oftentimes disparaged anybody they deemed disloyal.

⁹⁰ Jonathan W. White, *Emancipation, The Union Army, and the Reelection of Abraham Lincoln* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014).

⁹¹ Wilbur Fisk, *Hard Marching Every Day: The Civil War Letters of Private Wilbur Fisk, 1861-1865*, ed. Emil and Ruth Rosenblatt (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 262.

Soldiers often identified the two players in the electoral campaign in simple and unmistakable terms. They often believed that loyalty meant support for Lincoln while support for McClellan and the Democrats was both disloyal and treasonous. For example, John Anderson of the Independent Pennsylvania Battery E, very simply identified the army as “loyal,” which translated to “very few votes here for McClellan.”⁹² Furthermore, Anderson states his impression that the army was loyal “almost to a man and a Copperhead in the army is a very scard reptile.”⁹³ Other soldiers were even less sophisticated in their criticisms of the Democratic Party. John C. Baum of the 42nd Ohio recorded election results from his regiment on November 9, 1864. Of 198 votes cast in the regiment, “seven for the traitor two in our company.”⁹⁴

The issue of loyalty versus disloyalty inspired a great deal of emotional reaction from Union soldiers. This becomes evident in their letters and diaries. A Richard H. Watson of the 36th Illinois expressed a wish concerning the election results in the coming presidential election: “Oh that we had every Traitor North by the neck. I would shoot Vallandigham with as little compunctions of conscience as I would a serpent.”⁹⁵ Another soldier, Hosea Smith of the 8th New Hampshire, expressed similar wishes in an October 11, 1864 letter: “This war is destined to close up, if not in every respect as some of us would have it but with the Union restored and

⁹² John Anderson to brother, letter, October 25, 1864, Civil War Document Collection, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ John C. Baum, diary entry, November 9, 1864, Civil War Document Collection, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA.

⁹⁵ Richard H. Watson, letter, August 17, 1864, Civil War Document Collection, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA.

rebels and traitors both North and South made to bite the dust.”⁹⁶ The issue of how the war would terminate dominated soldiers’ discussions of the election, especially as it became more and more apparent that the election was shaping up to be a referendum on the war itself.

Union soldiers voted for Lincoln in 1864 because for two primary reasons related to the disloyalty issue. The first reason revolved around the fact that Lincoln stood for total military victory. Soldiers felt that such a victory would ensure that their sacrifices had not been made in vain, and would also result in a lasting peace. The second reason is closely related to the first in that they could not stomach voting for the Democrats due to their platform, which they felt called for an armistice.

The succinct quote that opened this chapter is a good way to begin discussion of the disloyalty issue within the letters and diaries of the soldiers. As Wilbur Fisk stated in a letter written on November 9, 1864, “Soldiers don’t generally believe in fighting to put down treason, and voting to let it live.”⁹⁷ This frank observation serves to characterize the way soldiers viewed the two sides of the electoral conflict. Soldiers believed that Republicans stood for continuing the war until total victory and chose to support them because of this belief. George M. Gilchrist, of Indiana, wrote on September 20, 1864 that he supported Lincoln’s reelection because he stood staunchly against “treason” and “because I think his election will do more to crush out this rebellion than anything outside shot and shell... I am opposed to bringing about peace until we have whipped the rebels and brought them back into our union.”⁹⁸ Lieutenant Joseph Ferguson of

⁹⁶ Hosea Smith, letter, October 11, 1864, Civil War Document Collection, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA.

⁹⁷ Wilbur Fisk, *Hard Marching Every Day: The Civil War Letters of Private Wilbur Fisk, 1861-1865*, ed. Emil and Ruth Rosenblatt (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992).

⁹⁸ George M. Gilchrist to wife, letter, September 20, 1864, Papers of George M. Gilchrist, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

the 7th U.S. Colored Infantry believed that the election results meant “a firm prosecution of the war until the Union is restored.”⁹⁹

The disloyalty issue within the soldier vote, as well as the components of it, is inextricably linked to the ideology of the Republican Party in 1864, as expressed in the party’s adopted platform. Each component of the issue is explicitly laid out in the campaign literature of the time, and so the parallels in the writing of Union soldiers on the subject are an indication of their political commitment to Lincoln and the Republicans, at least in 1864. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Republicans did not focus their campaign on emancipation, but on the winning of the war. They campaigned on fighting until military victory could be achieved, at which point the Union could be restored. They campaigned against the Copperhead peace platform of the Democratic Party, arguing that peace without victory was not worthy of the country’s sacrifice thus far. Each of these issues is related in Union soldiers’ writings.

Union soldiers often identified those they found disloyal and the issue of treason occupied their interest immensely in the months leading up to the presidential election. William Dillon of Illinois is fairly representative of the research: he expressed fears of “an outburst of an unfavorable character among the belligerents at home to the Administration, the war-policy, and to the support and encouragement of the army.”¹⁰⁰ Dillon here makes a connection that is seen in many soldiers’ writings: the connection between the Lincoln administration and the war policy.

⁹⁹ Joseph Ferguson, transcribed memoir, “Civil War Journal of Lieutenant Joseph Ferguson,” Civil War Document Collection, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA.

¹⁰⁰ William L. Dillon, letter, August 14, 1864, William L. Dillon Papers, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, Springfield, IL.

He also implies that any opposition to either would indicate a lack of support for the Union army. For some soldiers, the specter of disloyalty at home inspired their deepest resentments. These soldiers expressed wishes to shoot these Northern traitors either after, or instead of, defeating their Southern Confederate foes. Richard H. Watson, of the 36th Illinois, wrote, “Oh that we had every Traitor North by the neck. I would shoot Vallandigham with as little compunctions of conscience as I would a Serpent.”¹⁰¹ Austin J. Kendall of the 117th New York Infantry expressed his wish to fight Copperheads as well. Kendall wrote on November 10, 1864 concerning his wish to be sent north for the remainder of the war to fight the “cowardly copperheads.”¹⁰² Union soldiers were clearly incensed at the very thought of dissension in the North, and wished very much to quell these voices.

Union soldiers may have wished to quiet the voices of dissent at home because they felt that the North needed to convey an image of unison in order to dissuade the South from fighting on much longer after the potential reelection of Lincoln. William M. Martindell of the 119th Pennsylvania expressed this very sentiment: “I think his reelection will do more to end the war than anything else, for the rebels will see that the north are determined to carry the war on and restore the union.”¹⁰³ Another soldier, Warren S. Heald, believed that Lincoln’s reelection would force the Confederacy to recognize that it had been defeated. He wrote, “When Lincoln is

¹⁰¹ Richard H. Watson, letter, August 17, 1864, Civil War Document Collection, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA.

¹⁰² Austin J. Kendall, letter, November 10, 1864, Civil War Document Collection, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA.

¹⁰³ William M. Martindell, letter, October 12, 1864, Civil War Document Collection, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA.

Relected the Ware will be over they are Whiped and only hold out for a compromise that they never can have... when the South see that the North will stick to one another they will give up.”¹⁰⁴ This view was perhaps naïve but it indicates what soldiers thought the election of Lincoln could accomplish.

As discussed above, the soldiers’ malignity for Copperheads stemmed from their calls for peace at seemingly any cost. This general malign translated into staunch support for the Lincoln – Johnson ticket. There are several ideological strands distinguishable within this anti-Copperhead position. For one, without a military victory, the Union soldiers worried that the Union would be lost. Second, soldiers did not want their efforts and sacrifices to save the union to have been in vain. Third, soldiers thought that peace gained by military victory would be long lasting, rather than of a short duration borne from an armistice. It is for these reasons that Union soldiers could not support the Democratic Party in 1864. The presence of the aforementioned Chicago Platform and the “peace plank” within it all but ensured that the soldiers would align themselves ideologically with Lincoln and the Republicans.

Peace granted by complete military success was most desirable to soldiers in part because of the beliefs they held on the nature of union. Americans in the 1860s held certain beliefs about America that today might seem foreign and “vaguely embarrassing if not mock-heroic.”¹⁰⁵

Historian James M. McPherson explains that the concept of union held “transcendent values”

¹⁰⁴ Warren S. Heald, letter, August 8, 1864, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA.

¹⁰⁵ James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 100.

that made it amount to an almost religion.¹⁰⁶ So what was union? The concept of union dealt with a vision of America's place in the history of the world: as the first state in history to survive as a government based on majority rule. The Confederate states' action in dissolving the union in reaction to national electoral results threatened the very survival of the American experiment. Lincoln, of course, gave voice to these concepts in his seminal Gettysburg Address. The union was also thought to be endowed with the American Revolution's core values of liberty and so its granting of freedom and liberty could not be torn apart so easily.

The research supports the contention that many soldiers who favored the reelection of Abraham Lincoln felt that he best represented the cause of union. Soldiers wanted peace, but only a peace that would come with the union restored. Soldier Hosea Smith firmly believed that the war was "destined to close up, if not in every respect as some of us would have it but with the Union restored."¹⁰⁷ Another, George Gilchrist, refused to give up the fight until Southern states then in rebellion were "back into our Union."¹⁰⁸ William B. Gates of the 3rd Ohio Cavalry wrote his own retort to hypothetical Copperheads who asked, "When will this war be over?"

Not until every white livered traitor in shape of human flesh and blood, both north and south should be wiped out of existence and from the face of our once happy, prosperous and united country, second to none beneath heaven.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ James M. McPherson and James K. Hogue, *Ordeal By Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction*, 4th ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2010), 286.

¹⁰⁷ Hosea Smith, letter, October 11, 1864, Civil War Document Collection, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA.

¹⁰⁸ George M. Gilchrist, letter, September 20, 1864, George M. Gilchrist Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹⁰⁹ William B. Gates, letter, September 14, 1864, Civil War Document Collection, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA.

This quote answers to a few characteristics Union soldiers had when discussing the coming election. One is the already-mentioned idea that the war would cease when all traitors were silenced and another is the contention that the United States was worth saving. The concept of union undoubtedly fueled Gates' assertion that the country was "second to none beneath heaven." Soldiers' acceptance and support of the ideology of American exceptionalism was a contributing factor to their willingness to continue fighting the war and, consequently, their electoral support of Abraham Lincoln.

Part and parcel within the concept and ideology of union was the belief that in the United States, one could elevate their social status through hard work and determination. This was a concept that many Americans held dear, including soldiers. Union soldiers thought about what kind of country they wanted to leave to their children when making electoral decisions. Charles H. Smith is one example of this. He wrote to his wife, telling her, "If I fall it will be fighting for a government worth leaving for my children to live under."¹¹⁰ Abraham Lincoln himself spoke along these lines directly to soldiers in the fall of 1864, possibly carrying influence in the election. After thanking the soldiers of the 166th Ohio, who were passing through the city of Washington on their way home, Lincoln impressed upon them his idea of what the war would decide:

It is not merely for to-day, but for all time to come that we should perpetuate for our children's children this great and free government, which we have enjoyed all our lives. I beg you to remember this, not merely for my sake, but for yours. I happen to temporarily occupy this big White House. I am a living witness that any one of your children may look to come here as my father's child has. It is in order that each of you may have through this free government which we have enjoyed, an open field and a fair chance for your industry, enterprise and intelligence; that you may all have equal privileges in the

¹¹⁰ Charles H. Smith, letter, October 20, 1864, Civil War Document Collection, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA.

race of life, with all its desirable human aspirations. It is for this the struggle should be maintained, that we may not lose our birthright – not only for one, but for two or three years. The nation is worth fighting for, to secure such an inestimable jewel.¹¹¹

Lincoln urged that the war should continue simply because the country was worth saving. It was worth saving because of the concept of union. Within the union, a Midwestern farmer's son could rise to become the political leader of the government. The freedom to rise above one's inherited social status was only possible within the American experiment, if one was willing to work hard enough. Lincoln gave the same message to the 148th Ohio, who passed through Washington one day earlier, on August 21, 1864. Both speeches were reprinted in major newspapers across the North, spreading Lincoln's conception of union and military victory far and wide.

It is no small thing then that Union soldiers who supported Lincoln's bid for reelection mentioned their wish to fight on to victory in order to restore the union. This sentiment was not unconnected with their view of what the presidential election stood for. Instead, this sentiment indicated a major ideological commitment that signaled who the soldiers believed would protect the legacy of the American Revolution itself.

In addition to restoring the union, soldiers supporting Lincoln also wrote on their wish to fight on to ensure that their sacrifices would not have been made in vain. Campaign pamphlets supporting the Republicans brought out this issue in conjunction with the aforementioned issue of union. One such pamphlet addressed Union soldiers directly. In it, the Union Executive

¹¹¹ Abraham Lincoln, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 7:512. This speech was delivered to the 166th Ohio Regiment on August 22, 1864. It was reprinted in multiple newspapers, including the *New York Herald*, *New York Tribune*, and the *Baltimore Sun*.

Congressional Committee explained what they believed was at stake in the coming presidential election:

If ever there was a time when Union bayonets were called on to *think*, it is now. The crisis of the war, when our armies have the rebellion in their grasp and are preparing to deal its death-blow, finds the country precipitated into the turmoil of a Presidential election. This election touches you, because in becoming *soldiers* you did not cease to be *citizens*; but it touches you even more closely than it does those of us who are merely citizens and *not* soldiers: for the issue is presented whether this war for the Union in which you are battling is a delusion and a mockery – whether the priceless blood shed shall go for no more than water spilt on the ground – whether you shall lay down your arms and sue rebels to make on *their* terms the peace you thought your valor had nearly won.¹¹²

The message of this pamphlet was likely well received by Union soldiers, as some of their letters express this very sentiment. Warren S. Heald wrote on this matter, stating that “there has been to many men killed and to many Soldiers still fighting to give up without accomplishing something.”¹¹³ This sentiment is closely connected with the soldiers’ stance against ending the war prematurely without complete military victory.

This connection is shown explicitly in a letter written by a soldier who served in the 20th and 97th Pennsylvania Cavalry, Annesley N. Morton. He wrote on November 23, 1864 concerning an acquaintance that sent him a Democratic newspaper. After reading the paper, Morton became offended at its use of the term “d__d Lincoln Hirelings” to describe Union soldiers. Morton warned that he and the acquaintance in question would surely fight it out when Morton returned home if talk turned to politics. He continued, writing:

¹¹² “A Few Plain Words with the Rank and File of the Union Armies. (Union Executive Congressional Committee No. 6),” in *Union Pamphlets of the Civil War, 1861-1865*, vol. II, ed. Frank Freidel (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), 1029-1030.

¹¹³ Warren S. Heald, letter, August 8, 1864, Warren S. Heald Papers, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA.

I will not hear anybody run down that country that my dear Bro. Sketchie's life was lost in assisting to save and what I have been over 3 years enduring the many hardships and dangers of a soldier's life and d__n the man or woman who says what we all have done is a failure and I won't listen to such talk.¹¹⁴

Morton here refers to the aforementioned "war failure" plank of the Democratic Party and its relation to the sacrifices he and others had made in relation to the war. Morton's outburst is overtly political in nature, as he cannot stomach the consequences of declaring the war a failure. These consequences include admission that his brother's sacrifice had been made in vain.

This was not to be. Upon hearing the news of Lincoln's reelection, soldier John Anderson reflected upon the meaning of the results for Union soldiers:

It assures us that the sacrifices that the soldier has made, have not been in vain and that the war will continue until the parties who brought our present National Trouble upon us, will be compelled to submit to the law – and the cause of our troubles removed forever.¹¹⁵

Thus, even after the election had been won, Anderson felt it important to mention that the soldiers' sacrifices would not be made in vain. This idea is important to understanding why Union soldiers voted for Lincoln in 1864, and it is inextricably connected to the disloyalty issue and disgust of the Democratic Party. Anderson's estimation of what the election results signified to the men around him is significant. It signaled firm prosecution of the war until victory, and a lasting peace, could be achieved. The latter idea is also integral to understanding the effect of the disloyalty issue on Union soldier voting patterns in 1864.

Union soldiers who supported Lincoln also desired that the war be concluded with a lasting peace. This issue is also tied to the concept of union. Soldiers wanted to save the union so

¹¹⁴ Annesley N. Morton, letter, November 23, 1864, Civil War Document Collection, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA.

¹¹⁵ John Anderson, letter, December 29, 1864, Civil War Document Collection, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA.

that their children would benefit from the government built by the Founding Fathers. Soldiers felt they must preserve the “last best hope for mankind” for their posterity. As was shown above, this objective was pushed by the Republican Party and played a significant part in the campaign against the Democratic Party and their demands for an immediate end to hostilities. As such, Union soldiers supporting Lincoln in 1864 often mentioned their desire that peace be secured, as long as it could be a lasting one.

Many soldiers were like Frank McGregor of the 83rd Ohio, who remarked that soldiers who supported McClellan must be sick of war as to hope for a “temporary peace.”¹¹⁶ While many soldiers’ comments regarding their desire for a lasting peace were often this simplistic, others spoke to this issue more eloquently. William B. Gates of the 3rd Ohio Cavalry was one of these others. He wrote,

Give us a few more men such as Grant, Sherman, and others I could name, and Abraham at the head, which we must and will have for the next four years to come – and we will give them an everlasting peace such as history never dreamed of.¹¹⁷

Gates’ mention of Lincoln along with Grant and Sherman is noteworthy for its implication. The implication being that Lincoln may help secure victory through military means every bit as much as the other two.

If Union soldiers were unsure about Lincoln before September 1864, it is likely that their opinion was made easier by the results of the Democratic National Convention held in Chicago. As has already been discussed, soldiers were decidedly against the aforementioned “war failure plank” included in the Democratic platform for reasons outlined above. The research supports

¹¹⁶ Frank McGregor, letter, September 19, 1864, Frank McGregor Papers, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA.

¹¹⁷ William B. Gates, letter, September 14, 1864, Civil War Document Collection, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA.

the contention that some soldiers may have decided to vote for Lincoln based on their view of the ideological slant presented in Chicago. The research indicates that the group of soldiers that expressed such sentiments was not merely choosing the lesser of two evils, as historian Jonathan W. White has suggested.¹¹⁸ Rather, it was usually a simple extension of their ideological commitment to the Republicans' stated goal of finishing the war via victory. This included a number of War Democrat soldiers, who could not follow the Peace Democrats' lead. George F. Morse, of the 91st New York, related that a majority of his comrades were Democrats, "but nearly all are for War until the Rebellion has been put down."¹¹⁹

A majority of those who mentioned the platform passed in Chicago did so in regard to Lincoln's electoral chances. Union soldier Thomas Campbell, in his diary, wrote:

The Peace Party have carried everything before them. adopting platform entire. tis a wishy washy meaningless string of glittering generalities but breaths the spirit of peace at any price. McClellan was nominated unanemously with such a platform and such a candidate. I have no fears of the election of Lincoln.¹²⁰

Campbell's writing implies disgust with the platform, which he believed called for "peace at any price." Following his writing on the convention and the platform, Campbell states that he has no "fears of the election of Lincoln." In other words, Campbell has no fears about Lincoln's chances

¹¹⁸ Jonathan W. White, *Emancipation, The Union Army, and the Reelection of Abraham Lincoln* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014), 109. White presents the testimony of a few soldiers, clearly making the argument that a vote for Lincoln may have been, for soldiers, the lesser of two evils. I have not found sufficient evidence to claim that this was indeed the case. White may be misconstruing antipathy toward the Copperheads with a lackluster support for Lincoln. They are not intrinsically the same.

¹¹⁹ George F. Morse, letter, November 6, 1864, Civil War Document Collection, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA.

¹²⁰ Thomas Campbell, diary entry, September 1, 1864, Civil War Document Collection, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA.

for reelection after what was done at Chicago. While he does not explicitly state why he has no fear, it is possible that he had spoken with others about the platform and found them to have the same opinion, including fellow Union soldiers. Another soldier with a similar view, Frank Dickerson of the 5th U.S. Cavalry, mentioned the leaders of the Peace Democrats by name.

The army has no desire to see the destinies of the country in the hands of a Pendleton, a Vallandigham...under whom the independence of the South would soon be recognized, but they wish to see the rebellion crushed out and accordingly will vote for Lincoln.¹²¹

Dickerson also related the information that few soldiers he was acquainted with would vote for McClellan. Importantly, Dickerson mentions Pendleton's name. Many soldiers were decidedly set against supporting the Democratic ticket because of the well-known Copperhead's inclusion as the vice presidential candidate. Any soldier who may have felt comfortable voting for McClellan likely was swayed against doing so by the indicators that he would be a simple puppet to the Peace Democrats: the platform, as well as Pendleton's inclusion on the ticket. Soldiers who expressed absolute support for McClellan are few and far between.

Union soldiers discussing the presidential election of 1864 followed several trends as it related to the distinct issue of disloyalty. According to historian William Frank Zornow, the Republican Party was responsible for introducing this charge against the Democrats in the summer of 1864, as the political campaign heated up. This is certainly seen in select campaign pamphlets published by organizations favorable to Lincoln's reelection. It is clear from their writings that soldiers found the ideological message of the Republicans more favorable than that pushed by the Democrats. Their arguments in support of Lincoln make this clear. They found in Lincoln a candidate who would continue fighting the war until absolute military victory could be

¹²¹ Frank Wilberforce Dickerson, letter, October 31, 1864, Civil War Document Collection, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA.

achieved, devotion to the restoration of the “mystic chords of memory” that was the union, and a refusal to allow their sacrifice to have been made in vain. To be sure, this campaign strategy played to the “disgust for the party [Democratic] that had deemed their work in the field a ‘failure,’” but the soldiers were forced to make a legitimate ideological choice in 1864.¹²² After all, the election of 1864 can be seen as a referendum on the war itself. Whether or not one voted to continue the war effort became an ideological issue in the framework of the election.

In 1864, the political landscape had changed quite a bit. The two sides of the presidential campaign’s boundaries were drawn on the issue of whether or not to continue to fight on until ultimate victory. The soldiers were conscious of this decision, and decidedly chose to fight on until the unconditional surrender of the Confederacy. They felt that anything less than total victory would bring about a temporary peace unflattering to the memory and sacrifices of their fallen comrades. Because of this shared feeling, soldiers saw the Democratic Party as an organization of traitors and decried their existence in emotive language not seen in their discussion of other issues such as emancipation. It is likely that the disloyalty issue and the anti-Copperhead vote was much more decisive than emancipation in soldiers’ choice to vote for Abraham Lincoln in 1864.

¹²² Jonathan W. White, *Emancipation, The Union Army, and the Reelection of Abraham Lincoln* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014), 115. White contends again that Union soldiers’ choice for Abraham Lincoln demonstrated less of an attachment to him and the policies of his administration than opposition to a party that they felt opposed the soldiers. These are not mutually exclusive. There is little evidence to suggest that soldiers who primarily mentioned disgust for the Democrats in their writing on the election bore no affinity to Lincoln and his policies.

Chapter 3 – The Presidential Election as a Military Contest

Reflecting on the news of the Republicans' victory in the crucial state elections in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Indiana, Major James A. Connolly of the 123rd Illinois remarked that he and his comrades gave:

Our old flag victories with the ballot as well as with the bullet. Oh, how the election news cheers this army! How proudly our soldiers step as they think of the defeat of Northern traitors! It is second alone to the fall of Richmond.¹²³

This excerpt, from a letter dated October 22, 1864, is a fine example of a third issue Union soldiers had in mind during the presidential campaign in the summer and fall of 1864. This third issue can be better classified as a “concept” that Union soldiers had in mind when discussing the election. Union soldiers, according to the research, conceptualized the presidential election of 1864 as simply another in a line of battles which must be won in order to finish the war up with a victory. Lincoln's triumph in the election became akin to a military victory.

This phenomenon is somewhat unsurprising given that the election essentially shaped up to be a referendum on the war itself. Perhaps this was unavoidable, given the diametrically opposed platforms of each party: one calling for continuation of the war and the other for an immediate armistice. For soldiers, as has been discussed at length thus far, the Democratic Party could not be trusted to deliver the victory that they wished for: an absolute, military, victory followed by an everlasting peace. Ending the war honorably became paramount to the men in blue, and since the Democrats seemed to find the war a failure on all counts, soldiers felt that they were traitorous. For the men in blue, this was tantamount to fighting for the Confederacy. It is no stretch, then, that soldiers may have come to view Democrats themselves as a legitimate

¹²³ James A. Connolly, *Three Years in the Army of the Cumberland: The Letters and Diary of Major James A. Connolly*, ed. Paul M. Angle (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 282.

enemy that must be defeated at the polls. The election of 1864 became another battle that Union soldiers felt must be won in order to win the war and restore the union. In this chapter, I will examine the colorful language soldiers used to describe the elections as an extension of the war.

In the North, this phenomenon was not exclusive to the soldiers. Some campaign publications favorable to the Republican cause may have encouraged this wedding of the military struggle with the Lincoln administration's (and Republicans') struggle at the polls. A fine example of this is seen in the pages of the October 18, 1864 issue of the Reading, Pennsylvania-based *Father Abraham*, a campaign paper that was sent to soldiers at the front. On the third page, an image appears of an elephant carrying a banner reading "The Elephant Is Coming!" The ad declares victory, listing recent electoral victories in Pennsylvania, Indiana, Ohio, and Maryland, "and victory along the line!"¹²⁴ Under this last declaration is a depiction of a Union cavalry charge. The implication is clear: the electoral victories are an extension of the war and vice versa. Images like this may have encouraged soldiers to think of the coming presidential election in these terms, but they likely came to see this connection regardless.

Many historians who have treated the soldier vote in some fashion acknowledge the feelings soldiers expressed toward Copperheads, but have largely missed the fact that at least a sizeable minority of these soldiers appeared to view the election as another military campaign to be won on the road to ending the rebellion. Historian Joseph Allen Frank comes closest to arguing this point when he writes,

The 1864 U.S. presidential election crystallized issues for the Northern troops. It sharpened the Union troops' political awareness by tying decisions at home to the

¹²⁴ *Father Abraham*, October 18, 1864, 3.

outcome of the war at the front, which enhanced the citizen-soldiers' political perspicacity.¹²⁵

This enhanced political perspicacity, along with distaste for those they found disloyal, allowed for language regarding the election at home to draw a parallel between the war at the front and “a war at home.”¹²⁶ Frank acknowledges that soldiers' language when discussing the election and dissidents at home turned from political to military: “it was a ‘war’ against ‘traitors’ who were ‘allies’ of the ‘enemy.’”¹²⁷ However, Frank's analysis stops short of declaring that soldiers viewed the election as an extension of the war rather than simply a parallel to the conflict they were fighting themselves. Moreover, Frank contends that the act of voting in the field “symbolized the citizen-soldier's critical role in the war as part of an army of thinking bayonets.”¹²⁸ The research certainly supports Frank's assertions, however Frank does not take the step of showing how the connection between politics and war manifested itself in the soldiers' writings.

The concept of politics as warfare and warfare as politics was not new in the world of 1864. While Union soldiers may not have been aware of the writings of Carl von Clausewitz, a longtime Prussian soldier, any discussion on the parallels between war and politics is bare without mention of Clausewitz's *On War*. In the pages of Clausewitz's defining work, he writes, “War is a mere continuation of policy by other means.” Elaborating, he continues, “War is not

¹²⁵ Joseph Allen Frank, *With Ballot and Bayonet: The Political Socialization of Civil War Soldiers* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 117.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 172.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 117.

merely a political act, but also a real political instrument, a continuation of political commerce, a carrying out of the same by other means.”¹²⁹ Clausewitz observed that policy was often blended within the war effort, since there were always policy goals and desired outcomes. Of course, the most pivotal political issue interwoven within the American Civil War was that of union and the states’ relation to each other and to the federal government – initially. Eventually, other policies such as emancipation were brought to bear on the battlefield. While Union soldiers may not have read Clausewitz, his commentary on war proves useful in understanding the nature of war and the American Civil War is certainly a good example of what Clausewitz observed in warfare himself. Union soldiers realized that war and politics were intertwined, as we saw in their continued castigation of Democrats over issues directly related to war and peace. Their proximity to the conflict allowed them to grasp the political and military realities of a Lincoln electoral victory. They were able to then conceptualize the election as simply another battle they would have to fight themselves.

When discussing the coming election, some soldiers reflected upon what Lincoln’s election would really accomplish. They also explicitly let it be known that voting was a military act, where the Copperheads in the North were essentially a military enemy. And finally, that Lincoln’s reelection was an opportunity for a distinct victory for the Union armies. Some soldiers saw the effect that military victories had on the political situation, and thus believed the election would result in military victory, as they were intertwined.

A good many soldiers thought that, at base, Lincoln’s reelection would signal the beginning of the end for the war. A letter from a B. Bruce of Sangamon County, Illinois wrote home to his mother, stating that “the war... will soon end it all depends on the... campaign and

¹²⁹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Colonel J.J. Graham (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2004), 18.

the Election of the president.”¹³⁰ Bruce implies that the election of the president and the military campaign are both precursors to the end of the war. This sentiment was widespread. Also widespread was the belief that the reelection of Lincoln would signal to the South that the end was nigh, as the election would signify the continued union of all Northern states. Soldiers believed that the North must provide the image of a united front in prosecuting the war to its successful conclusion. They felt that a Lincoln reelection, based on what principles he stood for, would send this message of determination.

Their own participation in the election allowed Union soldiers to grasp the reality of their dual roles in the conflict: as agents of both political and military power. Soldiers were determined to exercise these powers for the Union cause at the polls in 1864. The connection between political and military spheres is apparent here, as the Republicans ran in 1864 as the Union Party. Soldiers thus fought for their sacred union and cast votes for the Union as well. Consequently, soldiers felt it their duty to vote for the Lincoln-Johnson ticket. In letters to Illinois governor Richard Yates, Union soldiers from the state of Illinois requested furloughs in order to be home to be able to cast a vote; they felt it their duty to fight for the union at the polls. Illinois soldiers were not allowed to vote from the field, despite efforts by state Republicans to pass a bill allowing them to. One Union doctor wrote from Burnside Barracks, Indiana to request this very thing:

There are a great many Ill. soldiers at this place both in the 5th and 17th... who are very anxious to assist the Union cause in our own state at the coming election & deeming it

¹³⁰ B. Bruce, letter to mother, June 20, 1864, Bruce Family Papers, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, Springfield, IL.

very important that all the Union strength of the state should be manifested at the polls would ask, whether some influence cannot be brought to bear upon the Powers that be.¹³¹

This Union doctor's language illuminates the connection between the political and military spheres evident in the election of 1864 as conceptualized by members of the military. He not only discusses soldiers "anxious to assist the Union cause," but also mentions the "Union strength of the state." Both the country as well as the new Republican moniker were identifiable as "Union."

A soldier named I.H. Howe expressed more forceful sentiments, writing,

We want to come home to vote. Unless you think you can beat the Enemy badly without us. 'Little Mac' says he can't 'look the soldiers in the face' & give up the Union – but we are afraid he will do it behind our backs if he is Elected.¹³²

Howe presents the case that McClellan, and his supporters by extension, are the enemy and expresses soldiers' fears for a McClellan presidency. This serves to support the argument that Union soldiers chose Lincoln in large part due to his stated objective of continuing the war until absolute victory could be brought about. Howe then signs his letter to Governor Yates of Illinois, "Yours for the Union – one Government, one flag, one destiny."¹³³ Howe's send off is an indication of his belief that Lincoln's reelection would carry with it an affirmation of the political goal of the war: reunion under the "one Government."

Soldiers' language in their writing on the election is indicative of their conception of the election's place in the war. This could be minute, as in referring to bullets as "Lincoln Pills,"

¹³¹ J.G. Shempson, letter, October 24, 1864, Richard Yates Papers, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, Springfield, IL.

¹³² I.H. Howe, letter, October 11, 1864, Richard Yates Papers, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, Springfield, IL.

¹³³ Ibid.

which should be dealt out in “heavy doses,” or larger, as in the election results being akin to the results of a military success.¹³⁴ R.H. Watson of the 36th Illinois believed that “it will take a good deal of hard fighting before the rebels will consider themselves conquered, and a great deal depends on the coming Election.”¹³⁵ Watson makes a comparison between hard fighting and the coming election, pointing out that he believes each will go far to putting the war to bed.

Some soldiers viewed their duty in late 1864 to be twofold – to provide the Lincoln administration with military success as well as elevate Lincoln to the presidency once again. Sometimes, these two objectives blurred into one. For example, Reuben T. Prentice wrote, “Look for a decisive stroke from our army to assist in changing the popular sentiments a little among the peace party & Copperheads in order that we may elect Abraham Lincoln.” Prentice grasped that the army could play a role in shaping popular sentiment at home. He lamented the absence of legislation providing Illinois soldiers the right to vote in the field. Of course, some soldiers were able to vote in Illinois due to the granting of furloughs for that purpose. Because soldiers could not vote from the field, Prentice hoped for a “decisive blow” to help bring about Lincoln’s reelection. Another soldier, Tilmon D. Kyger, believed that even if soldiers could not help by being present physically at the polls, they could affect Union victory there by winning military battles.

Soldier Robert Molford Addison expressed sentiments that were similar. He wrote, “Cheering news from the north in the relation to the election in Ohio and Indiana. If our friends will only be faithful and do their duty at the polls and put down the firing in the rear we will

¹³⁴ William Benton, letter, December 17, 1864, Benton Family Papers, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA.

¹³⁵ R.H. Watson, letter, August 17, 1864, Civil War Document Collection, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA.

attend to matters in the front.”¹³⁶ Addison speaks on duty. A soldier, even if unable to vote, could still carry out their duty in relation to the election by continuing to fight the rebellion while their “friends” in the North must do the same electorally. He actively compares the “firing in the rear” to the Confederate army, thus conceptualizing Copperheads as an actual force that must be quelled. Major James A. Connolly does the same in a letter dated October 16, 1864: “We are close after the copperheads commanded by Hood, and if the stay at home patriots will follow the copperheads commanded by McClellan in the same manner I shall be content.”¹³⁷ This characterization of Copperheads as both Democrats and Confederates seems to have been fairly widespread among the Union soldiers. It also seems to be an extension of the general anti-Copperhead sentiment expressed through the disloyalty issue outlined in the previous chapter.

With the electoral news from the states of Ohio, Indiana, and Pennsylvania, electoral victories came to mean as much as military victories. Elections for seats in the House of Representatives from these critical states took place in October 1864. These two types of victories both were seen as victories for Lincoln’s chances in the later presidential election. Soldier John Anderson of Pennsylvania reported that his comrades were “as much rejoiced at the result as they were at Sheridans Victory in the Valley of the Shenandoah” as the news from Ohio, Indiana, and Pennsylvania arrived in camp.¹³⁸ Another soldier, Charles Maxim, wrote on

¹³⁶ Robert Molford Addison, letter, October 18, 1864, Civil War Document Collection, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA.

¹³⁷ James A. Connolly, *Three Years in the Army of the Cumberland: The Letters and Diary of Major James A. Connolly*, ed. Paul M. Angle (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 279.

¹³⁸ John Anderson, letter, October 25, 1864, Civil War Document Collection, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA.

September 11, 1864 that Atlanta “was a big blow for Old Abe.”¹³⁹ In fact, Maxim believed that a few more such victories would silence Lincoln’s political opposition in the North. Frank McGregor of the 82nd Ohio agreed, writing, “If the Atlanta capture proves true it will make splendid capital for the admin. party to electioneer on.”¹⁴⁰ McGregor explicitly ties the capture of Atlanta to Lincoln’s increased chances of victory in the election. Union soldiers were clearly aware of the effect that military victories would have on the voting population in the North.

In the same vein, soldiers believed Lincoln’s reelection would signal the end of the war. Warren S. Heald voiced this belief, stating, “when Lincoln is Relected the Ware will be over they are Whiped and only hold out for a compromise that they never can have...” George M. Gilchrist believed the same, though coated his words in martial language:

I want him for our next President, and if I cannot vote – I am going to use all the influence I have in his favor. I do it because I think his election will do more to crush out this rebellion than any thing outside shot and shell...¹⁴¹

Both Heald and Gilchrist expressed sentiments that many soldiers shared – that Lincoln’s election would have the effect of a major military victory and move the country toward ultimate victory if not right then, then soon enough.

Union soldiers conceptualized the presidential election of 1864 as another part of their continuing campaign to quell the rebellion and end the American Civil War. They took it upon themselves to wage a dual campaign: one military, one political. Oftentimes, as in this case,

¹³⁹ Charles Maxim, letter, September 11, 1864, Civil War Document Collection, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA.

¹⁴⁰ Frank McGregor, letter, September 5, 1864, Frank McGregor Papers, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA.

¹⁴¹ George M. Gilchrist, letter, September 20, 1864, George M. Gilchrist Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

these roles were inexplicably intertwined. While the issues that stemmed from the political war between the Republicans and the Democrats most decisively pushed Union soldiers into Lincoln's camp in 1864, this specific characteristic of the election is worth noting. The conceptualization of the election of 1864 by Union soldiers as another Civil War victory that must be secured in order to save the union adds another shade to both the soldier vote as well as to the history of the war itself. It certainly adds another element to the characterization of the citizen-soldier.

Conclusion

The election of 1864 was a pivotal event in the course of the American Civil War. President Abraham Lincoln recognized the gravity of the event, and reflected upon its importance in the history of the world in response to a serenade on November 10, 1864. He stated, “we can not have free government without elections; and if the rebellion could force us to forego, or postpone a national election, it might fairly claim to have already conquered and ruined us.”¹⁴² Lincoln continued, stating that the peaceful and successful passing of the late election proved to the world that a republican government could endure through intense intranational military strife.

The electoral participation of those engaged in this military strife in 1864 is a fascinating feature of this pivotal event. It is even more fascinating that these men chose the candidate who represented continuation of the war. This alone says something about these men’s convictions that the nation was worth fighting for and, in 1864, was a fair indicator of their political ideology. The presidential election of 1864 was indeed a referendum on the war as well as the Lincoln administration’s handling of it. And the soldiers chose to support Lincoln for reelection in droves.

Pinning down one definitive reason that Union soldiers supported Lincoln so overwhelmingly is not a task characterized by ease. To make a generalization and point to any one reason does these men a disservice. Historians who have grappled with this issue have often tried to point to one issue, the most prominent being the issue of emancipation, and attempt to frame the soldier vote as a direct response to it. This issue has become a bone of contention

¹⁴² Abraham Lincoln, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 8: 101.

within the historiography of late, with the recent publication of historian Jonathan W. White's *Emancipation, The Union Army, and the Reelection of Abraham Lincoln*. White makes it his primary objective to dispel the idea that soldiers ideologically supported emancipation and the rest of the Republican Party's policies for that matter.

However, upon reflection of the soldiers' letters and diaries researched here, it becomes apparent that the argument over whether emancipation figured largely in the soldier's mind during the electoral campaign misses the larger picture. Union soldiers, in general, opposed any efforts they thought to be deleterious to the progress of the war. While this might not seem to be an ideological stance, the Republican Party's platform and campaign were seemingly built around the continuation of the war until the Union could be restored. Union soldiers expressed the tenets of the Republican campaign within their letters and diaries. They expressed the wish that the Union could be restored and decried any efforts to stall the progress of the war. They wished to push on so that their sacrifices would not have been made in vain. They came to support emancipation as a policy of ending the war. They adamantly opposed the Democratic Party platform in doing so. These were entirely ideological positions within the context of this particular presidential election.

And so Charles Francis Adams, Jr.'s observation on Union soldiers' opinions on the campaign proved prescient as it relates to the issues that soldiers explicitly speak to within their letters and diaries immediately preceding the election. Adams observed,

Soldiers don't vote for individuals; they don't vote for the war; they have but one desire and that is to vote against those who delay the progress of the war at home; they want to vote down the copperheads.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ Charles Francis Adams, Jr., *A Cycle of Adams Letters, 1861-1865*, ed. Worthington Chauncey Ford (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920), 2: 204.

Adams himself served in the Union army during the Civil War, and recorded these observations on how he believed the soldiers would vote and why. Obviously, he places most stock in the soldier vote as a force to take down the Democratic Party, who seemingly stymied the war effort from the home front. Undoubtedly, the Copperheads figured into the soldiers' writings and influenced highly emotive language from the soldiers' pens. However, it is apparent that their ideological stance, including their stance on emancipation, indeed stemmed from their feelings on this ideological battle. In fact, some Union soldiers even came to view the election as a battle in and of itself.

In sum, Union soldiers voted for Abraham Lincoln for a myriad of reasons that can be summed up as an ideological commitment to the Republican Party in 1864. In this context, soldiers were committed to the continuation of the war effort until ultimate victory could be achieved via success on the battlefield. Soldiers supported fighting until the Union could be restored, and if the policy of emancipation was necessary to do so, then they supported that as well. To be absolutely clear, their support for Lincoln was a positive endorsement of the Republican Party, and not simply a pragmatic choice or a choice of the lesser of two evils, as historian Jonathan W. White has attempted to paint it.

While this new synthesis of evidence provides a new way of looking at the soldier vote, there are natural limitations given the nature of the source material. There is a poignant quote that perfectly illustrates my meaning concerning the use of primary sources like Civil War soldier letters and diaries written by historian James I. Robertson in his study of Civil War soldiers. Robertson states, "This is a work that could be written a dozen different times without repetition."¹⁴⁴ A consistent effort was made to represent these men's words and thoughts

¹⁴⁴ James I. Robertson, *Soldiers Blue and Gray* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), vii.

accurately without cherry-picking information to fit a certain framework. Union soldiers generally voiced their opinions openly but they do not answer the specific questions historians have asked of them. However, their words can provide new meaning if one is patient enough to listen.

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