

V. Jacque Voegeli, Free But Not Equal: The Midwest and the Negro During the Civil War (1967)

Background for Conflict/ V points out that as the nation girded for war in 1861 the state constitutions and statutes reflected the racism that had always existed in the Middle West. The severity of the discriminatory legislation varied, but every state imposed legal disabilities upon its black residents. All 7 states barred Negroes from suffrage and from the militia. In Illinois and Indiana there were no provisions for the education of colored children; Negroes were not permitted to testify against white persons in court. Iowa and Ohio and Illinois excluded men of color from jury service. Interracial marriages were forbidden in Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. Ohio denied Negroes the benefits of the poor relief and provided for racially segregated public schools. Exclusion laws carrying severe penalties prohibited Negroes from settling in Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa.

The Civil War set in motion a black fear in the Midwest. Voegeli attributes this to several reasons: 1) an economic fear that black immigrants from the South would flood the Midwest; enter into competitive work situations with the whites. With the region already in the throes of a business depression, these apprehensions were powerful forces in 1861. But these were superficial fears. racial antipathy had deeper and more enduring roots than the economic anxieties.

Emancipation, Race, and Politics/ The first stirrings of what to do with the Negro began as a result of the war in the south. Congress' actions in 1861 headed up by the emancipationists could point with pride to the blows they had dealt slavery. During the 7 months Congress was in session, they had done more to destroy the institution than had ever been done since the founding of the Republic. They owed their success mainly to their ability to convince a majority of Republican congressmen that the Union could be saved only by depriving the Confederacy of its chief sustenance--slave labor. But at the same time the emancipationists had to persuade the Midwest that emancipation and white supremacy were compatible.

Toward a Solution/ As Lincoln contemplated the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation he was treated to the racism and fear that was intensifying in the Midwest. News of blacks filtering into the region from the devastation of war in the South triggered racial riots in Toledo, Cincinnati, and Chicago. . . . These riots in the summer of 1862 must have given Lincoln pause. . .

Voegeli sees the EP as a strategic and political half-way measure that Lincoln offered to appease both the anti-slavery elements of his party and the racists in regions like the Midwest.

In the EP he took care to inform that he would employ blacks as laborers but would not promise to make them soldiers. But at the same time Stanton in the War Department went ahead and ordered General Rufus Saxton, operating in So. Carolina, to arm and equip not more than 5,000 blacks. V sees Lincoln sending up a trial balloon with this nominal use of blacks as combatants to test the popular reaction.

Moreover, V defends Lincoln's expressed public interest in colonization schemes. He admits that Lincoln was sincerely interested in this as more than a political ploy. But whether it worked or not, it did serve to take some of the heat off the President and his Emancipation Proclamation especially as it diverted Midwest fears that emancipation was the first step to an influx of unwanted blacks into the Midwest. Lincoln hoped to dispell this fear and gain political support for emancipation with the implied promise that colonization would block immigration.

the election of 1862/ Throughout the book V underscores the failure of the Republicans to really try and deal with the moral issues involved in slavery. In defending their President and his Emancipation policy they stuck to lines of arguments that were at best expedient. They defended the EP on the grounds of military expedience and necessity. A "military strategem."

In campaigning against the Democrats in the 1862 by-year elections in the Midwest the Republicans argued on grounds of national loyalty rather than the moral rights and wrongs of slavery. They tried to avoid the slavery question and concentrate on support for Lincoln administration's war efforts. Those who opposed the EP were tarred as disloyalists, etc. . . Far more attention was devoted to refuting the Democratic claim that emancipation would deluge the Midwest with blacks. Instead of inviting the slaves to seek their liberty in the free states, they again made it clear that they neither wanted nor expected the Negroes to move into the Midwest. To prove their case the Republicans pointed to their plans for colonization of the freedmen abroad.

Republicans emphasized their belief that emancipation would hold the blacks in the land of their labor and attract most of the northern Negroes into the South as it was occupied by northern troops.

In 1862 the Democrats sweep into office in the Midwest. V attributed this Democratic victory significantly, if not entirely, to the regions opposition to the emancipation proclamation. It was clear that moral opposition to slavery may have speeded on the civil war and forced the Congress and Lincoln to take steps to bring about its extirpation, but by 1862 the Midwest was morally impervious to the issue of slavery and hostile to the idea of emancipation as a war aim.

The Crusade Proclaimed/

A Solution/ Republicans were concerned about the reaction to the EP. . . . They had to show the worth that emancipation was a military necessity and assest, that the government could deal effectively and justly with the freed Negroes, and that some satisfactory system of racial accommodation could be worked out.

By early 1863 none of these deards were making any headway in actual operation. The contraband issue was increasing but the GOP solutions were not capable of dealing with the increasing influx of blacks into Union lines. Colonization was a disaster; Union army was not making other than marginal success with the use of blacks as labor forces; and the party and its leader had no real long term plans to show that the black man could make the transition from slavery to freedom with any success. The Republican party was being forced to deal with a massive social readjustment problem while it was forced to fight a war at the same time.

The solution the Lincoln administration came up with was the decision to arm the blacks. This decision did not flow logically from the Emancipation Proclamation. It was a decision arrived at with great reluctance and equal trepidation. The reaction to blacks in uniforms was of course immediate and sharp. . . . Racists believed that the blacks could not fight; that they were drive white soldiers into disertation; that the war was a white man's war; and those who saw the arming of blacks as the next step to their ultimate equality were angered. . . .

Negro soldier policy when enacted was fraught with inequality: They were shunted into segregated units; were discriminated against in lower pay for the same duties as whites; and with few exceptions were barred from receiving officers commissions. This practice was shaped partly to assure and advertise the superiority of ~~whites~~ whites, and to assuage fears that the use of black troopers would become the entering wedge to racial equality.

V does not state flatly that the decision to use blacks in the South was to fix them permanently in that region and prevent them from coming North. But it was a consideration of no mean proportions among Republican politicians. Of course, the South was where the war was being fought. But V points out that there were alternatives to the administration's decision. For example, the administration could have decided to transport the thousands of former slaves not useful in the war effort into parts of the Midwest and West where a critical labor shortage was evident. But they chose not to because of racial attitudes in the Midwest.

Rather the policy that General Lorenzo Thomas was to implement was to employ the freedmen on the abandoned plantations or for caring for them in the South. The administration had shown that emancipation was a source of strength. Liberation was a two-edged sword: while it devastated the Confederacy of many of its slaves it strengthened Union arms by marshalling them into the war effort as soldiers and workers. This arrangement supplied a plausible method of race adjustment. The systematic mobilization of the blacks in the South moderated the racial fears of the Midwest in another way. By bringing them into the war effort the Union had developed a permanent way of containing them in the South.

The Turning Point The final acceptance of freedom as a war aim in the Midwest V attributes to the military victories of mid-1863. Notably, Gettysburg and Vicksburg. Especially the opening up of the Mississippi by Grant turned the Midwest into champions of emancipation as a legitimate war aim.

Blacks helped their own cause by the reports of their actions in the engagements at Port Hudson, Milliken's Bend, and Fort Wagner. . . .

The 1864 election which returned a firm mandate for Lincoln and his conduct of the war was seen as a ratification of emancipation as a accepted war goal.

Victory of a Limited Crusade V notes however how qualified the North's attitude was on the slave issue. It is true that northerners held strong feelings against slavery--but largely because it was identified with the rebellion against the Government and not because it was a stupendous crime against human nature.

In 1864 when things were looking black for Lincoln and the oncoming election ϕ was uncertain. . . .Radicals in the GOP were thinking of running someone stronger and better equipped to deal with the racial question. . . .The Democrats were running a peace candidate to appeal to the war weariness of the Union, etc. . . . and Northern military efforts were bogged down. . . .

Lincoln sponsored an official "peace feelers" to the South. This was the Niagra Falls meeting. . . . headed up by Greeley. In the terms of the North's negotiations for peace Lincoln included in his public state ment the terms of peace, reunion, and the abolishment of ~~the~~ slavery. . . .

The response was shocking to the administration. Opponents and Democrats jumped on these terms to discredit Lincoln and his party.

Democrats pointed out that Lincoln was willing to keep the war going over slavery.

Some members of his party wanted Lincoln to retract abolitionism as necessary for peace. Others wanted him to stick to this as a war aim. The northern backlash troubled Lincoln and he turned on his dilemma. To stick to the original statement of war aims of try and hedge. . . . V notes that Lincoln was miserable as he turned on the horns of his dilemma growing out of the Niagra statement.

He notes that Seward gave an address in Auburn, NY, a month later in which he intimated that if the South would lay down her arms the question of slavery could be arbitrated. V assumed that Lincoln knew of the content of the Seward address and did nothing to discourage his Secretary of State.

South did not accept negotiated surrender in the summer of 1864. . . .

V points to Douglass' shrewd analysis of the situation and his precise gauging of the antislavery resolution of the North. Frederick Douglass said that the destiny of slavery rested upon the southern will to resist reunion, rather than on northern determination to establish freedom. Hopes for abolition hung not upon the disposition of the GOP, not upon the disposition of President Lincoln; but upon the slender thread of Rebel power, pride and persistence."

The Equalitarian Paradox/ In this chapter V takes exception to the claims of historians who find the radicals the avid exponents of black equality. Who find that this ideal was not relegated to a few men within the GOP; but a broad complex of commitment shared by most Republicans.

He takes to task Van Woodward's assertion that for a time equality had become a third war aim of the Union.

V cannot find the exact moment when this was true. It was certainly never true for the Democrats in the north. And for the Midwest as a region he states that attitudes toward the blacks moderated by the war experience to the point where they accepted black freedom; but never equality for the freedman.

As for Lincoln the chief of the GOP remained conservative as far as his attitude towards the former slave was concerned. There is not one shred of evidence that he ever modified his fundamental racial attitudes in spite of his fond feelings for the Negroes and his compassionate nature. Lincoln generally stood aloof from the campaign being waged in the Congress for more rights and advancement for Negroes. Moreover, he never so much as hinted that the ballot should be extended to Negroes living in the North, and he apparently assumed no leadership in the battle to eliminate the Black laws in Illinois and elsewhere in the Midwest.

His chief concern was for finding ways to govern in the South by a loyal following. How to bring about this transformation was the issue that preoccupied Lincoln during his last days. It was certain to be a party based on white strength. He only went as far as to suggest to the wartime Governor of Louisiana that some qualified blacks should have the right to vote. He steadily turned down demands that equal suffrage be imposed on the South and he used his influence in Congress to block such suggestions.

As for the remainder of the Republican party it was divided over what more should be done for the freedman.

There was general admittance among Midwestern Republicans that freedom should include some respect for civil liberties. In some of the Midwestern states the Black Laws were expunged or modified. . . Although this was not true in Indiana. But the Midwest's definition of equality did not include political rights for Negroes. Not a single midwestern state granted the ballot to the Negroe during the Civil War.

Furthermore, few of the states took any significant action to remove the discriminatory laws from the state books (even when the legislatures were controlled by the Republicans) during the war years. There was no effort to dismantle the segregated customs in these states.

V sees the greatest default in the failure of the North--Republicans--to reduce the concentration of Negroes in the South. He feels resettlement in the thinly settled West for those blacks willing to leave would have benefitted the racial picture in the US by removing blacks from the South and the heritage of slavery.

This was impossible given the Midwest and West hostility toward the black man.

V closing point is that equality was never a serious attitude among the Midwest nor was it with the radical Republicans or any Republicans from the region.