

WHAT THIS CRUEL WAR WAS OVER

Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War



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complicated questions of black rights and racial equality. At the same time, new arrivals who had not yet witnessed slavery or the South firsthand frequently brought anti-emancipation sentiments with them when they enlisted, which increased Union dissent on the topic of slavery.

Meanwhile, Confederate discord escalated on virtually every topic except slavery. Soldiers and civilians objected vehemently to impressment, tax-in-kind, and conscription. Troops' commitment to a Richmond government that conflicted with rather than advanced their interests was weak, and many grew contemptuous of a civilian population that failed to live up to early expectations of a purer, morally superior population. Yet as disappointed as troops were with the Confederacy, they accepted the logic that the Union was worse because it meant abolition, and abolition meant disaster because it would destroy the social order, undermine men's very identities, and unleash race war on unprotected families. As soldiers everywhere coped with a changing (and often disillusioning) war, slavery, a source of dissent in the Union Army, proved more powerful than any other single factor in overriding dissent in the Confederate ranks. It continued to define the war.

CHAPTER 3

"Kingdom Coming in the Year of Jubilo":

Revolution and Resistance

ONE JANUARY night in 1863, Arkansas soldier James Harrison dreamed of a big dinner at his Aunt Polly's house. Suddenly, the dream turned sour when Harrison realized, "I had too eat by the side of a negro." Even worse, the black man "had a plate to eat on and I had none." Harrison had his dream just days after President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, as bondmen and bondwomen continued to chip away at slavery and the Union Army enlisted black soldiers. Harrison's nightmare encapsulated much of what Confederate soldiers feared all those changes would mean. Blacks would not only "eat at table with white folks," but they would also enjoy new rights and benefits at the expense of ordinary whites like small farmer James Harrison, who sat helplessly without a plate while a black man used a plate that Harrison regarded as rightfully his.¹ The Emancipation Proclamation and black enlistment in the Union Army pushed Confederate discontent into the shadows and steeled resolve in the Confederate Army by providing soldiers like James Harrison with fresh reminders of precisely why they must keep up the fight.

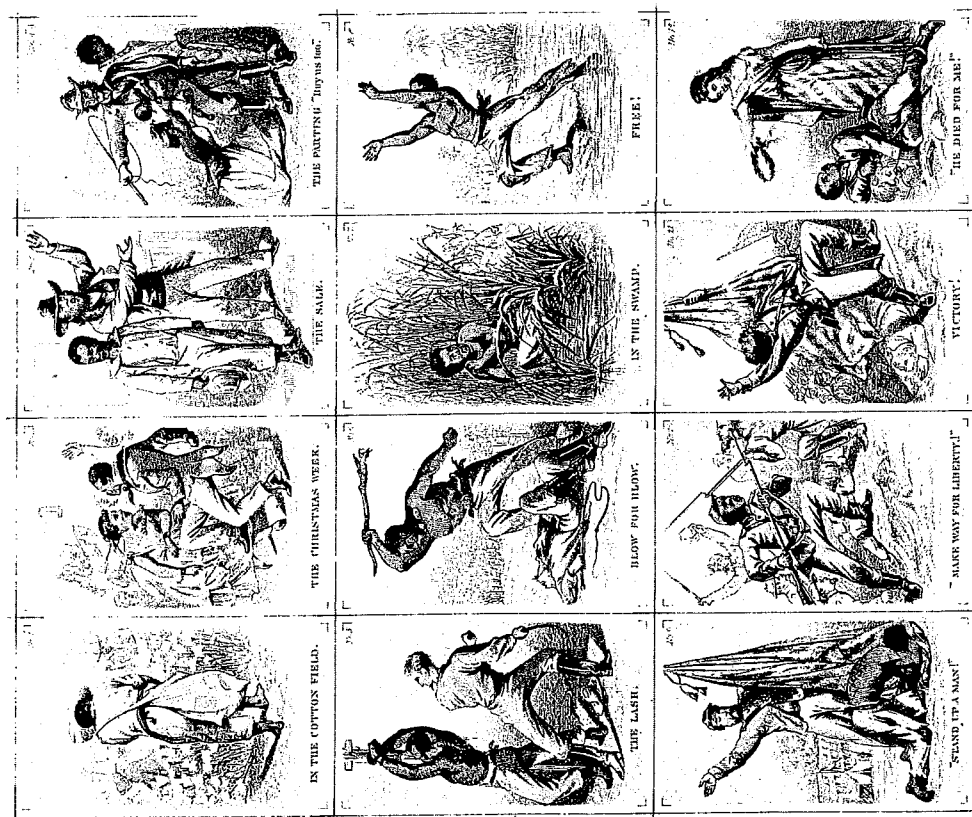
Meanwhile, the impact of the Emancipation Proclamation and black enlistment also reverberated among the Union ranks, changing a war to preserve the Union into a war to reform it. That shift revolutionized the American Republic. While the revolution clarified war aims for Confederates, it complicated things for many Union soldiers, because it required them to admit painful truths about the Union they had revered all their

Chapter title from "Kingdom Coming," a song written by Henry Clay Work in 1862.

lives, confront the uncomfortable reality of slavery as a national rather than sectional issue, and face difficult questions about what the place of former slaves within the Union should be. Yet despite lingering ambivalence and some resistance to the revolution that 1863 constituted, the men of the Union rank and file on the whole continued to serve as advocates of emancipation, partly because they knew that emancipation was necessary to save the Union, but also because they now recognized that it was necessary to make the Union worth saving.

"This peculiar institution . . . has become so deeply rooted that [removing] it will shake the nation"

From the summer of 1862 through the spring of 1863, the men in blue sustained major defeats on the battlefield, just as the Union withstood its most profound revolution since the nation's founding. For the first year and a half of the conflict, Union soldiers had stressed the need to save the republic inherited from the founders in order to demonstrate to the rest of the world that a self-governing republic founded on ideals of liberty and equality could survive and flourish. For over a year, many had identified slavery as the cause of the rebellion and the greatest threat to the success of the American experiment, and therefore demanded the destruction of slavery as the only way to end the war and prevent its recurrence, but before the Peninsula Campaign, most had assumed that eventual Union victory was assured, and emancipation would demand little of northern whites other than their abstract approval. Once the Peninsula Campaign failed to take Richmond, military setbacks forced federal soldiers to re-examine basic assumptions. President Lincoln appointed Henry Halleck general in chief in the hopes that Halleck would be able to coordinate the Army of the Potomac (under Gen. George McClellan) and the Army of Virginia (under Gen. John Pope) into a renewed offensive against Richmond. Instead, rivalry between McClellan, Pope, and their allies led directly to another Union defeat at Manassas at the end of August, which in turn permitted Confederate forces to threaten Washington, D.C. Confederates then seized the momentum to launch an ambitious invasion of Union territory in September. Left with little choice, President Lincoln restored McClellan to command. With Little Mac at the helm, the Army of the Potomac stemmed the invasion at the battle of Antietam on September 17, 1862, but at the cost of the single deadliest day of the war. Grim as it was at the time, Antietam stood out as a relative Union highlight com-



Emancipation and black enlistment in 1863: "Journey of a Slave from the Plantation to the Battlefield," James Fuller Queen, 1863. Courtesy of Library of Congress

pared to what followed. Under a new commander, Gen. Ambrose Burnside, the beleaguered Army of the Potomac endured a devastating loss at Fredericksburg, Virginia, in December, and then suffered humiliation under yet another commander, Gen. Joseph Hooker, at Chancellorsville in May 1863. Even in the West, things looked bleak. Confederate invasions designed to affect the fall 1862 elections rattled Northerners and cost soldiers' lives, though the Confederate advances were checked at places like Perryville, Kentucky. A bogged-down and disease-ridden campaign for the Mississippi River further weakened confidence. Meanwhile, all the changes in high command combined with discontent on the home front to create more upheaval. By the spring of 1863, Massachusetts private Charles Tubbs was not alone when he feared "the Union is a thing that was and we might as well lay down our arms at once."² In short, in 1862 and 1863, some Union soldiers began to suspect that saving the Union might not be possible.

Others decided that merely saving the Union was not enough. In 1863, members of the 102d Illinois still believed that "the best interests of the human race" were at stake, because the failure of the Union would prove "fatal to all human freedom, independent of color or race," but they began to suspect that they could not truly save the Union or vindicate its ideals of liberty and equality until they made sure those ideals meant something.³ In 1863, soldiers started to realize that turning the nation's ideals into realities would require fighting to reform rather than simply preserve the Union. "If all this untold expense of blood and treasure, of toil and suffering, of want and sacrifice, of grief and mourning is . . . to result in no greater good than the restoration of the Union as it was, what will it amount to?" Pvt. Leigh Webber wondered. All the hardship and heartache would "result in no real and lasting good" unless the war transformed principles like "the rights of human nature and universal human freedom" from hollow platitudes (or worse, blatant hypocrisies) into actual achievements.⁴ Fighting for "the Union under the old construction" was just not enough anymore, Pvt. Thomas Covert told his wife. "We now want a new one, that knows nothing about slavery."⁵

From the harvest of 1862 through the 1863 planting season, Northerners struggled to come to grips with a revolution that would ask far more of them than even soldiers who had been demanding emancipation since 1861 had previously supposed. This revolution demanded that white Northerners admit that they had been mistaken about the nature of their beloved Union, which they once assumed was sacred and stainless, but

was instead badly marred. It forced them to see slavery not as a sectional oddity, comfortably removed from them by geography, but rather as a national institution. Even more painful, the revolution also forced white Northerners to see that they were partly to blame for the Union's ugliest defects. "Any country that allows the curse of Slavery and Amalgamation as this has done, should be cursed," an Illinois soldier confided to his sister and brother-in-law, "and I believe in my soul that God allowed this war for the very purpose of clearing out the evil and punishing us as a nation for allowing it."⁶ In short, white Northerners had been wrong about the Union, and by 1863, it had become much more difficult to deny their mistakes or hide from their culpability.

The revolution of 1862-63 also forced a shift in the relationship between ending slavery and the purpose of the war. In 1861, soldiers saw slavery as something akin to a malignant mole on the body politic: it was an unsightly blemish with the ability to poison the entire nation, but since slavery appeared only in a limited area, Union troops assumed it could be excised with little impact on the rest of the body. After nearly two years of observing slavery, interacting with slaves, and fighting a horrible war, the Union rank and file now recognized slavery as a much more insidious cancer, embedded in the very spine and sinew of the nation. Its elimination amounted to traumatic surgery for the entire organism. Northerners as well as Confederates must help "up root [slavery] and cast it out," Pvt. Orra Bailey insisted, even though he knew that the process would be harrowing. "We of the free states have yielded to this peculiar institution . . . untill it has become so deeply rooted that [removing] it will shake the nation and our institutions to the very center."⁷ Like many of his fellow enlisted men, Bailey knew a revolution when he saw one.

Slaves initiated much of the shaking themselves, as Union soldiers continued to observe. Tennessee slaves on an abandoned farm proved to be more than a match for Confederate guerrillas in an episode recounted by a Union Army surgeon. As the guerrilla band's leader rode onto the farm to round up escaped slaves, a black man stepped out from behind a fence and sent a bullet "crashing through his ribs and heart." After watching their comrade fall, the rest of the raiders "thought discrediting the better part of valor and took to a hasty flight, doubtless suppressing a whole brigade" of guerrillas, the surgeon surmised. As he saw it, the incident handily illustrated "the way the Blacks will treat . . . the Robbers of their labor[,] of their children[,] and their freedom."⁸

The actions of slaves were crucial in eroding the institution of slavery,

but they also asked the least of white Northerners, since the impact of slaves' acts of self-liberation fell primarily on slaves themselves and on white Southerners. The Emancipation Proclamation and the enlistment of black Union soldiers, in contrast, involved everyone. When the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation was issued on September 22, 1862 (just days after Union forces claimed victory at Antietam), it announced that all slaves held in areas still in rebellion against the Union on January 1, 1863, would be free. The document mentioned voluntary colonization of former slaves outside the United States as one possible alternative for freedpeople, while saying nothing about black enlistment, even though blacks had begun joining Union regiments raised in Kansas and South Carolina. The final Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863, freed all slaves in areas still in rebellion, just as the preliminary proclamation had promised. The final proclamation also exempted from emancipation slaves in several areas under Union control, but, unlike the first document, it omitted any mention of colonization and explicitly endorsed the enlistment of black soldiers into the Union Army.

By making abolition a matter of national policy, the Emancipation Proclamation and black enlistment directly implicated all Americans, even though the territory specified by the proclamation included only areas under Confederate control. The proclamation and the arming of black Union troops made it much harder to ignore complicated questions about the place of former slaves and other blacks within the American Republic, which most Union soldiers had resolutely avoided since the war began. Even acknowledging the limited jurisdiction of the proclamation, it is impossible to overstate its magnitude, for it took direct aim at an institution even older than the nation itself. It was issued by a man renowned for the statement, "A house divided against itself cannot stand." The nation must become all slave or all free, Lincoln had famously argued.⁹ The proclamation pointed the country in the all-free direction, which was uncharted territory for a nation in which slavery had always existed, and where it had profoundly shaped foreign policy, domestic affairs, and the national character.¹⁰ To destroy the institution was to create a new United States unlike one that had ever existed before.

Given the immensity of the transformation wrought by the proclamation, it comes as no surprise that the measure elicited a wide variety of strong reactions among Union soldiers and civilians, but soldiers' responses were not nearly as negative or simplistic as has long been supposed. The idea that Union troops reacted to the Emancipation Proclama-

tion with fury, throwing down their arms by the regiment and plunging the Army into a morale crisis from which it never fully recovered, has proven both popular and tenacious, but it is based on a set of three assumptions rather than on evidence.¹¹ The assumptions go like this. First, since Union morale declined in the winter of 1862 and 1863, and since the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation arrived in the autumn of 1862, followed by the final proclamation in January 1863, the proclamation must have caused the dip in morale.¹² Second, since many Union soldiers held racist views, they must have objected to the proclamation.¹³ Finally, since anti-war and anti-emancipation Democrats made gains in the 1862 state and Congressional elections, which were held hard on the heels of the preliminary proclamation, the election results amount to soldiers' repudiation of emancipation.¹⁴ None of these assumptions holds up under scrutiny.

Morale in the Union did plummet in the winter and spring of 1862 and 1863, and the preliminary proclamation did arrive in the autumn of 1862, followed by the final proclamation on the first day of 1863. Yet to most Union soldiers, emancipation and declining morale were distinct phenomena, not two halves of a cause-and-effect relationship. Union troops themselves attributed their sagging morale mainly (but not solely) to military factors, although the precise triggers differed between eastern and western armies.

In assessing the mood of the Army of the Potomac, a New Jersey private explained, "patriotism has oozed out through the pores opened by the imbecility of [army] leaders, and the fatigues and disappointments of a fruitless winter campaign."¹⁵ The spirits of the Army of the Potomac began to decline in the summer of 1862, when the Peninsula Campaign failed to take Richmond. Morale perked up in the wake of Antietam, but only temporarily. By November, when Richmond remained as firmly in Confederate hands as ever and the Army of the Potomac seemed stuck in an everlasting rut, a Massachusetts soldier noticed, "I hear nothing but curses both loud and deep even from some of the best men, whom I left at Harrison's Landing full of faith and hope."¹⁶ An equally frustrated President Lincoln identified Gen. George McClellan as the main obstacle to Union progress, and removed him from command of the Army of the Potomac on November 7. However necessary, McClellan's demotion cast a "gloom over [the] army," as one Little Mac supporter put it, because many members remained loyal to the general.¹⁷ It also failed to solve the Union's high command woes, as a string of ill-fated successors and a winter of bad fortune made clear. Tracing low Union morale like a trouble-

some river, many soldiers located its origins in Fredericksburg, Virginia, where the badly mismanaged December attack achieved nothing but appalling Union casualties. To John Babb, the mere fact of being "whipped, and that severely" at Fredericksburg would have been bad enough, but the humiliation and senselessness of sacrificing "ten thousand lives" all for nothing made it worse.¹⁸ The aftereffects of Fredericksburg and the so-called Mud March that followed lingered for months. In February, Cpl. Adam Muezenberger reported that disconsolate soldiers remained unable to recover from the effects of the battle, some of them so downhearted that only "the thought of their families keeps them from suicide."¹⁹ After a winter of dispiriting inactivity, and the Army of the Potomac's loss and retreat at Chancellorsville in May, one Pennsylvania sergeant claimed he had "never seen the Arme[y] so much demoralised as it is at the Present time."²⁰ Battlefield reverses and leadership woes made the Army of the Potomac feel as if it had been put through a wringer.

Despair took longer to set in among western armies, where morale held reasonably steady through 1862, but by February of the new year, the unique set of challenges facing western regiments took their toll. Soldiers most often attributed their dreary spirits to idleness, soaring disease rates, and the futility of a grand design to regain the Mississippi River by moving it. The scheme entailed digging through swamps and diverting the Mississippi from its riverbed into a new channel to get around the Confederate stronghold of Vicksburg. The absurdity of the task was enough to make digging detail miserable, but even worse, days spent in the unhealthy conditions led to disease rates so high that Iowa private Charles Musser described duty along the Mississippi as "wholeSale murder." Musser warned that his dysentery-plagued regiment was so "tired of the war" and of the fruitless channel digging that "if there is not some great movements made between this and spring, I believe one half of the army will throw down their arms and go home."²¹ When spring came, battles at Jackson, Champion's Hill, and Big Black failed to capture Vicksburg, and Union troops settled in for a grim siege.

While Musser, Muezenberger, Babb, and others freely admitted to discouragement, they did not blame the Emancipation Proclamation. Pvt. Dayton Flint, who personally opposed emancipation, listed the proclamation as one of many factors, but even he judged woeful army leadership, battlefield defeats, disease, and the removal of McClellan to be more responsible than the Emancipation Proclamation for poor morale.²² Furthermore, timing does not support a link between emancipation and

demoralization. If soldiers' low spirits resulted from the preliminary or final Emancipation Proclamation, then morale should have dropped at the same time throughout the entire Union Army, right after one or the other of the proclamations. Instead, morale in the Army of the Potomac slid in November and plunged most steeply in December, months after the preliminary proclamation but before the final proclamation. Meanwhile, morale in the West did not drop until February. Demoralization, in short, struck eastern and western armies at different times in response to local circumstances, not as the result of emancipation, which troops everywhere had known was coming since September.

In fact, when the preliminary and final proclamations came, many soldiers regarded them less as unwelcome surprises than as evidence that a tardy federal government was finally catching up to what soldiers had known for more than a year. Three weeks before Lincoln issued the preliminary proclamation, a German immigrant who fought with the Twelfth Missouri argued impatiently that emancipation was "the only proper policy," and without it, "the war will not take a successful turn."²³ Once news of the preliminary proclamation reached the camp of the Third Kansas Cavalry, Joseph Trego announced, "we are rejoiced to learn that Abraham has, at last begun at the bottom of the difficulty to solve it."²⁴ Gratified though Elijah Penny was by news of emancipation, he could not help but grumble, "if the Presidents *proclamation* had been proclaimed one year sooner than it was I think the war would have been just so much nearer the end."²⁵

However much soldiers may have anticipated the destruction of slavery, the final Emancipation Proclamation still amounted to big news. An Iowa regiment gathered for a reading of the document and greeted it with "3 times 3 hearty cheer[s]" from the whole regiment, hurrah for the proclamation and old Abe.²⁶ In Louisiana, the Eleventh Illinois listened to a speech reminding soldiers that "the Negroes was free, as free as the wind that blows, and that they had to be treated as men & women." After the speech, Sgt. William Parkinson admitted that approval of the proclamation was "not a unanimous thing," but he added that overall, "I never in all my days saw such inthusias[m]." A "large majority" of the men greeted the proclamation and the speech with "shouts & Hurrahs."²⁷

When Parkinson remarked that response to the proclamation was "not a unanimous thing," he rightly noted that soldiers remained individuals with their own, sometimes conflicting, opinions. Yet despite a wide range of outlooks, a predominant view clearly emerged, and it is best summed

up by a soldier who explained, "slavery is the primary cause, or the root of the matter"; therefore, the Emancipation Proclamation made good sense, because "to destroy the tree root & branch is the surest way to brake this rebellion."²⁸ Certain that "the ware never will come to a close while the negros is left where they are," Pvt. Jasper Barney set out to persuade his socially elite brother-in-law (an officer and Barney's superior in rank), who worried that emancipation would upset the social order. "Even if we could suppress the rebellion and leave the main root where it was before," Barney argued, "it wouldnt be long before they would try the same game as before. But if we take away the main root of evil and confiscate their property they will have nothing to fight fore hereafter."²⁹ To soldiers who had been claiming that emancipation was the only way to end the war once and for all, the proclamation seemed like plain old common sense.

Without a doubt, some soldiers bitterly resented the radical transformation that they rightly saw in the Emancipation Proclamation. In July 1862, Gen. George McClellan had warned President Lincoln, "a declaration of radical views, especially upon slavery, will rapidly disintegrate our present armies."³⁰ General McClellan personally opposed emancipation, and habitually exaggerated the odds against any proposition he himself did not favor, emancipation included. Nevertheless, some individual soldiers shared McClellan's hostility. Nobody could have been more angry than Ohio private Chauncey Welton, who fumed to his father, "I can tell you we don't think mutch of [the Emancipation Proclamation] hear in the army for we did not enlist to fight for the negro and I can tell you that we neer shall or many of us anyhow no never." Welton even agreed with McClellan's prediction that emancipation would deplete the Union ranks. "Already men are deserting evry day from our regiment," he reported.³¹

Opponents of the Emancipation Proclamation objected for various reasons, including legality and practicality. Some troops cited constitutional scruples. One Pennsylvania corporal personally opposed slavery, but worried that the proclamation violated constitutional guarantees for the institution, which mattered in a war fought in defense of the Constitution. Stretch the Constitution once, he feared, and Washington's "set of Pollitical demagogues" would begin using the document recklessly to advance their own petty quarrels.³² Among Chauncey Welton's complaints was his belief that the proclamation was "both illegal and unconstitutional."³³ Welton and others also reasoned that the proclamation would prolong rather than resolve the war, because it would inspire Confederates to fight harder. The measure, according to Welton, "swelled the southern ranks to

an alarming extent." Confederates also became so much "more ferocious" that they "fight much better since the 1st of Jan."³⁴ Another soldier agreed that the proclamation "unite[d] the South almost as a unit," which minimized the valuable asset of internal southern dissent.³⁵ Meanwhile, some Union troops feared that the proclamation would divide Northerners. Cyrus Boyd had no personal hostility toward emancipation, but fretted that "Rebel sympathizers at home" might use the inevitable disagreement over the issue to stir up antiwar "revolution in the north."³⁶

The Emancipation Proclamation created particular dilemmas for soldiers from the border states (especially Kentucky, Maryland, and Missouri), which retained both slavery and their place in the Union, even as the measure turned the war into a struggle to end slavery elsewhere. When secessionists had warned in 1861 that the slaveholding states must choose between slavery and the Union, many border-state unionists had refused to believe they would have to sacrifice either. Now they could not be so sure. Some border-state soldiers called for an end to slavery just as insistently as troops from any other state, but others, like Marylander John Babb, had their doubts. "It really seems to me that we are not fighting for our *country*, but for the freedom of the negroes," Babb grumbled, and that perception was likely to "do more harm than good" to the Union cause in Maryland.³⁷ David Massey and Phillip Reilly came from the fiercely divided state of Missouri, home to many who had been committed to protecting and expanding slavery since the Kansas border wars of the 1850s. Both soldiers resented the war's transformation into a "negro crusade," as Reilly put it.³⁸ Massey went further, suggesting, "if old Abe does free the negro I say that the Democrats owt to go in with the south and kill all the Abaltians of the north and that will end this war where nothing else will."³⁹ The proclamation did not disillusion Kentuckian Terah Sampson quite as badly, mainly because Sampson blamed the Confederacy for starting the war to protect slavery and therefore bringing the proclamation on itself. Nonetheless, the whole idea of being "in the army for to free negros" did not sit easily with him.⁴⁰

Many soldiers born and raised in free states shared Sampson's racism, and for some of them, dislike of black people was reason enough to oppose the Emancipation Proclamation. Some troops blamed slaves for the existence of the war, and resented the idea of rewarding the culprits with emancipation. Cyrus Boyd saw such scapegoating at work in his Iowa regiment, where he estimated that about one-quarter of soldiers opposed emancipation. Some of them took out their wrath on African

Americans on the grounds that if it were not for slaves, the war never would have happened. "The poor African . . . from no fault of his—save in the fact of his black skin" was subjected to "prejudice," "indignant language," and threats from surly Union troops in the months following the proclamation.⁴¹ No soldier anywhere spoke more angrily or hatefully than Chauncey Welton. In one of his outbursts, he raged:

When we think it is all for the purpose of raising the poor down trodden african to a common with an intelligent race of beings[!] My abolition enmies . . . say . . . free the negroe at all hazzards whether the union is saved or not if it takes the last man, yes this is their language. The nigger, nigger, nigger, free him, free him, free him sacrifice money, wealth, treasure, blood, life and country, but free the nigger, and their mottow is emancipation first and the union, afterwards.⁴²

For Welton, racism provided reason enough to oppose emancipation, which makes it easy to leap to the conclusion that all northern racists resisted emancipation, but despite obvious exceptions like Welton, Union soldiers by and large proved themselves perfectly able to retain prejudice and support the proclamation at the same time. According to Fred Pettit, "nine tenths of the army" supported the proclamation because "a Negro has rights as a dog has rights and [we] think his rights should be respected."⁴³ Reassuring his parents that he was "no nigger worshiper," David Nichol affirmed his own racial prejudice even as he praised the proclamation for striking "at the root of the Evil," and helping to "end this war."⁴⁴ Sergeant Nichol saw no contradiction between calls to end the institution of slavery and personal bigotry toward black people because, like most white Northerners who so much as glanced at a newspaper in the 1850s but whose prewar lives rarely or never brought them into contact with actual African Americans, Nichol had plenty of practice reading or thinking about the abstract institution of slavery without giving a thought to flesh-and-blood black Americans. For other Northerners, racism even made it easier to support emancipation, because their assumptions of the innate inferiority of black people convinced them that nature would keep African Americans in unthreatening, subordinate positions even without the legal institution of slavery. "This talk about 'putting ourselves on an equality with niggers,' is to me, the *boldest nonsense* or rather an *insult* to me as one of the Saxon race," claimed Leigh Webber, an ardent supporter

of abolition long before the proclamation. As he saw it, whites' "natural superiority" made any notion of equality an "absurdity."⁴⁵ In short, most white Union troops felt that they did not need to believe that black Americans were equal to white Americans in order to support the destruction of the institution that brought the war. Illinoisan Amos Hostetter, who devoted no thought to freeing slaves before the war, admitted that he and many of his fellow soldiers "like the Negro no better now than we did then but we hate his master 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."⁴⁶

In fact, many of Hostetter's fellow Midwesterners felt especially pressed to affirm their support for the proclamation in order to salvage the good name of their home states. Exaggerated stories of enraged Indiana, Illinois, and Ohio soldiers stacking weapons rather than fighting for emancipation, along with the denunciation of the Emancipation Proclamation by the state legislatures of Indiana and Illinois, embarrassed and angered many midwestern troops. When James Dodds heard of letters in his hometown newspaper purporting to be from soldiers "on the point of laying down their arms on account of the Proclamation," he angrily dismissed them as "all untrue," and claimed instead that "the army was never more united than now." While Dodds's assessment of unity was exaggerated, his disgust at reports of opposition was sincere.⁴⁷ William Lewis insisted that if any antiproclamation demonstrations took place, they must have been the work of officers. "I no that the soldier had nothing to do with it wether fighting the war to protest a measure that was likely to help win it.⁴⁸ When the men of the 105th Ohio "heard that there is also a story going the rounds in the north that the soldiers of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and other western states that are in the army of the west are willing to throw down their arms and let the cause go as it will," they passed resolutions supporting the proclamation and criticizing its opponents as "traitors to our cause and country."⁴⁹

Some pragmatic troops praised specific benefits of emancipation as a war measure. One soldier wrote to his hometown newspaper to remind readers that emancipation robbed the Confederacy of a valuable war resource. "Any man who comes into, or goes with the army will see that the white men of the South are in the Southern army, and their negroes are at home raising crops to support their families," he pointed out. Free the slaves, and "the white men will be obliged to come home to look after the

welfare of their families and go to work themselves or starve."⁵⁰ A lifelong Democrat from Ohio, Sam Evans, succinctly explained his reasons for supporting the proclamation to his father, who opposed it: "my doctrine has been any thing to weaken the enemy."⁵¹ Whatever else motivated soldiers, most of them wanted to go home, and they welcomed a measure they believed would help speed their returns.

Other soldiers embraced emancipation because it eliminated an embarrassing source of hypocrisy, and moved the American Republic closer to living up to its own ideals. William White saluted the proclamation because it announced that the flag of the United States "shall triumphantly wave over a free land, which it has never done yet."⁵² Until emancipation was achieved, an Indiana private held that "this war has not done its work." He fought to "sustain a principle, to protect a right, and secure the liberties of the oppressed." Emancipation constituted "a check to the tyranny of European monarchs" and a step in "the establishing of free government throughout the earth."⁵³ If the existence of slavery had mocked the propositions of human equality and universal justice in the United States, then eliminating slavery should strengthen those ideals and certify the success of the United States' republican experiment in the eyes of the world.

Once the proclamation turned the ending of slavery into official war policy, it also alerted many complacent troops who had been advocating emancipation while ignoring the future of freed slaves to the reality that, as Sgt. Maj. Stephen Fleharty put it, "*the status of the negro in the future organization of our government*" was a "vexed question" they could no longer ignore.⁵⁴ Few soldiers had clear ideas of how a postslavery, biracial society might function. As Pennsylvanian Jacob Seibert pointed out, "we don't want [former slaves] in the north."⁵⁵ Some troops pinned their hopes on labor schemes that kept former slaves in southern fields and at a safe distance from white Northerners. An April 1863 edition of *The Banner of the Ironsides* advocated a solution adopted in Louisiana, in which black workers labored for wages on sugar plantations. According to the *Banner*, "hundreds of negroes" now proved themselves to be "commendable" workers in a free labor system.⁵⁶ Others hoped emancipation would pave the way for genuine equality such as had never yet existed in the United States. A black man "is our brother and has God's likeness," Stephen Emerson reminded his mother, even predicting that "prejudice against him will soon begin to wear away."⁵⁷ While Emerson's optimism proved to be inflated, he accurately recognized that the Emancipation Proclamation

eliminated the comforting luxury of emancipation as an abstract proposition. Just as it forced many federal soldiers to admit the imperfection of the old Union, the proclamation also insisted that even reluctant Northerners begin to envision new roles for black Americans within the American Republic.

Even more than emancipation, the enlistment of black soldiers into the Union Army forced many white Union soldiers to face questions about the standing of black Americans within the nation. African American soldiers had served in early conflicts such as the Revolution and the War of 1812, but they had been barred from the Mexican War, which was the conflict freshest in American memory when the Civil War broke out. Since military service was a long-standing hallmark of citizenship, black enlistment in the Army forced white Americans to reexamine the place of African American men within the American social structure. Moreover, black soldiers bore witness to how revolutionary the war had become by 1863. For these reasons, black enlistment proved more controversial among Northerners than emancipation. James Brewer wholeheartedly endorsed freeing slaves, but he was "awfull mad about Negroe arming," which he regarded as "a burlesk on the white man's Soldiering."⁵⁸ Yet by late spring 1863, the discouraging progress of the war was fast convincing many troops that a Union victory would require new measures. Stationed near a black regiment from Arkansas, Leigh Webber noted that soldiers who "less than a year ago would threaten to desert if the Government even enlisted negroes are now among the most earnest in the new policy."⁵⁹

Soldiers grew more favorable toward black enlistment for many of the same reasons they espoused emancipation. "The purpose of employing negroe soldiers is to make them be serviceable to the country," one soldier noted. As a "war measure," arming blacks who were anxious to fight their former masters was simply "the most efficient means that can be brought into action," especially as the North faced the prospect of its first nationwide draft in 1863.⁶⁰ Cpl. Charles Musser and his regiment agreed. "The arming of Negroes for Soldiers is now considered by all or a large majority of the boys as a necessity, and they go in Strong for it," Musser maintained.⁶¹ Lt. Anson Patterson, meanwhile, saw potential benefits in black Union enlistment, because the very sight of black soldiers would terrify Confederates and convince them that "the closing scene of the Rebellion" had arrived.⁶²

The performance of black soldiers also converted many white troops to the idea of black enlistment, even though it did not wholly dislodge white

soldiers' racial prejudices. After a Florida expedition, Pvt. Orra Bailey noticed that black soldiers "whipl[ed] the rebels handsomely," fighting "like tigers" and striking horror in the enemy, who regarded no fate as worse than "being taken prisoner by a niger."⁶³ Some members of Samuel Storow's Massachusetts regiment objected to the prospect of black soldiers before "fighting alongside them" in North Carolina. Witnessing black troops' bravery, according to Corporal Storow, changed many soldiers' minds.⁶⁴ Changing minds did not mean that bigotry disappeared. Henry Kircher was "very much for" arming black soldiers, as long as he did not have to fight next to them and risk being "wounded by the same bullet that first trafficks with a Negro and then pays me a visit." If black and white regiments mixed too closely, "gradually the difference between white and black will show less and less until it has disappeared," warned Lieutenant Kircher. "What is a white who forgets that he stands above the African?" he wondered.⁶⁵

Even though black enlistment did not wholly eliminate white racism, black soldiers like Joseph Williams recognized that it still underscored both how revolutionary the war had become by 1863 and how crucial African Americans' actions had been in that process. Just three years previously, Williams reminded readers of the *Christian Recorder* (a northern black newspaper), "slavery, with all its wrath was upon us." In contrast, emancipation brought "hope, happiness, and enjoyment" by turning the "bondman" into a "freeman." Now black soldiers stood to attain even more. "Determined to hold every step which has been offered to us as citizens of the United States," blacks fought "for our elevation which represents justice, the purity, the truth, and aspiration of heaven."⁶⁶ Bitter disappointments like lower pay and a prohibition against black officers would plague black soldiers' aspirations to racial equality, but few of these setbacks were apparent when black regiments first began fighting for what black private William Matthews called the "great and glorious Cause of Union and Liberty."⁶⁷

The determination and performance of black soldiers, the passage of time, and soldiers' experiences in the South and on the battlefield helped to change the minds of some white troops who initially objected to the Emancipation Proclamation. As early as February, Terah Sampson began to reassess his dislike of the measure, and asked for his family's opinions on the matter to help him reformulate his own.⁶⁸ By March, an Ohio soldier reported, "the Pres. Proclamation is gaining favor in the army every day," as troops grew to recognize it as "the right move at the right time."⁶⁹

Even Chauncey Welton had begun to reconsider by June. He still disliked abolitionists and blacks, but he had also come to believe that the once-odious proclamation represented a "means of hastening the speedy Restoration of the union and the termination of this war," and he was willing to stand by it as a pragmatic war measure.⁷⁰

Welton also came around partly because he grew disenchanted with the anti-emancipation and antiwar wing of the Democratic Party, known as the Peace Democrats, or Copperheads. A loyal Democrat, Welton did not change his mind all at once, but as the Copperheads stepped up attacks on emancipation and the war, Welton, like many others, began to associate opposition to emancipation with a lack of support for soldiers or the war effort. Far from mirroring the anti-emancipation rhetoric of Copperheads in 1862 and 1863, soldiers increasingly resented it, and shaped their own opinions in direct opposition to it. That progression took time, but it had largely been accomplished by the summer of 1863.

The autumn of 1862 was an eventful political time for the Union. State and Congressional elections took place just weeks after Lincoln issued the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, which may have guaranteed that slavery and race would dominate the 1862 elections in any event, but a move by Secretary of War Edwin Stanton compounded matters. On September 18, just one day after Antietam and four days before the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, Secretary of War Stanton ordered that black refugees at Cairo, Illinois, be sent by rail to communities throughout the Midwest, which were to feed, clothe, and employ them.⁷¹ In June, Democratic Congressman Samuel Cox of Ohio, in a widely publicized speech, had raised the specters of labor competition and racial mixing as logical outcomes of emancipation.⁷² Racist propaganda capitalized on white voters' prejudice and fear and kept the issue of race at the forefront of political debate during and after the campaign season. An Ohio soldier, for instance, sent his wife a song called "Fight for the Nigger," which he identified as "a specimen of the Trash the damned Copperheads have been sending." Exploiting popular prejudices, the lyrics of the song asked soldiers, "What if with your fighting you all lose your lives? / You help the Abolitionist to get nigger wives."⁷³ The Emancipation Proclamation and Stanton's order persuaded many civilian voters (especially Midwesterners) that Cox and propagandists like the author of the offensive "Fight for the Nigger" were right about racial threats to whites, just as discouraging casualty lists and malaise kept Republican voters at home.⁷⁴ The Republican Party was by no means trounced (in fact, Republicans actually gained

Senate seats), but Democrats picked up key victories, such as the state legislatures of Indiana and Illinois and the governorship of New York.

The success of anti-emancipation candidates at the polls in 1862 has often been assumed to indicate troops' dissatisfaction with the Emancipation Proclamation, but the electoral results reveal less about soldiers' stances on the proclamation than enlisted men's reactions to the campaign and elections do. Because most states had not yet made provision for absentee balloting by the 1862 elections, few soldiers in the field voted, but they paid attention anyway. Pvt. Constant Hanks believed that Republican victories were so important that he wrote home to insist that his ill and elderly father "if he lives and can . . . must go & vote for Gen. [James] Wadsworth for Governor" of New York. Wadsworth "is a firm supporter of Lincoln's policy of cutting Slavery up by the roots in all the Reble States, so that it never can disturb the peace of the country again." The Democratic candidate, Horatio Seymour, supported the idea of the Union as it was before the proclamation, which Hanks felt certain would cause war to "break out again in a few years worse than ever." In fact, the prospect of anti-abolitionists in power so worried Hanks that he wished "women could vote" so that his mother could also cast a ballot for pro-emancipation candidates.⁷⁵ After the elections, a Pennsylvania soldier interpreted Congressional victories of anti-emancipation Democrats as better news for Confederates than for loyal Union supporters. "The rebles that we take prisoner tell us with an air of triumph that we are getting divided among ourselves and point to the Democratic majority for proof and they are very much tickled about it," he informed his brother and sister.⁷⁶ Union troops felt they had less to celebrate, according to soldiers like Pvt. John Garriott, who found things "mighty glumey" in the wake of "the late lections," or Capt. Maschel Manning, who reported that "the news of the elections in the free states has so discouraged the army that they are almost ready to weigh anker."⁷⁷

In 1863, antiwar Democrats could add dissatisfaction with conscription to their platform. The U.S. Congress passed its first conscription law in March 1863, scheduling a draft to take place in the summer. It differed from the Confederate law in several ways. First, while the Confederate draft automatically placed every nonexempt able-bodied white man of military age into the ranks, the Union draft created a lottery system. The names of eligible men aged twenty to forty-five were entered, but a man was conscripted only if his name was drawn.⁷⁸ Also unlike the Confederate draft, Union conscription did not extend the enlistment terms of sol-

diers already serving. Finally, the Union draft offered different escape hatches. Whereas the Confederate draft provided only for substitution and various class and occupational exemptions, the Union conscription law contained a controversial commutation clause, which permitted draftees to purchase exemption from the draft for \$300 per round. One New Yorker who was "down on" conscription objected to the measure "not because it is a Conscription Law, but because it was framed for the benefit of the rich and the disadvantage of the poor."⁷⁹ Pvt. Phillip Reilly complained that commutation transformed the government into a "bold Highwayman [who] says to every man in the loyal states 'three hundred dollars or your life!'"⁸⁰ Opposition notwithstanding, commutation was actually more fair than class-based exemptions or substitution alone, which cost far more than \$300 and therefore was available only to the wealthy. Further, numerous immigrant, workers', and municipal groups banded together to form "draft insurance pools" to pay the commutation fee of any drafted member. In the end, of 207,000 northern men drafted, only 46,000 actually entered the ranks.⁸¹ Nevertheless, commutation looked unfair, and inequity in a war waged to uphold a government dedicated to the ideal of equality angered many enlisted men. The unrelenting continuation of the war and its incessant casualty lists heightened frustration with a war that now required more soldiers than the number willing to volunteer for it.

The most prominent Copperhead, Ohioan Clement Vallandigham, latched onto racism to tie multiple sources of resentment together and fire up the opposition. In 1862, Vallandigham lost his bid for reelection to Congress, but he did not allow defeat to slow down his larger campaign to repudiate the war and emancipation. On January 14, 1863, Vallandigham made his farewell speech to the House, and later circulated the speech in a pamphlet entitled *The Great Civil War in America*, which for the next two years served as the basic articulation of the Peace Democrat platform. In turning a war for Union into one for emancipation, Vallandigham argued, Republicans sacrificed lives needlessly and turned the North into a despotism heedless of civil liberties. Condemning "the folly and madness of this crusade against African slavery," he demanded an immediate end to the war that would be beneficial to "the welfare, peace, and safety of the white race, without reference to the effect that settlement may have upon the condition of the African."⁸²

Among Union soldiers, Vallandigham badly overplayed his hand. On May 1, just as the Army of the Potomac fought desperately at Chancellorsville, Vallandigham recapitulated his platform at Mount Vernon, Ohio,

and soldiers hated him for it. Wilbur Hinman and his friends in the Sixty-fifth Ohio entertained themselves by imagining Vallandigham "pounding his head against the wall of Fort Warren instead of preaching his treason." Upon hearing that the Ohio agitator had in fact been imprisoned by the Union general Ambrose Burnside, Hinman and his peers suggested that as additional penance, the prisoner "be fed only on army crackers," and offered to "donate a few boxes of that loyal food for his use."⁸³ Chauncey Welton did not find anything about Vallandigham amusing, especially when he learned that Vallandigham was out of prison and running for governor of Ohio. According to Welton, that "news fell like a thunderbolt upon this regiment." Despite lifelong Democratic loyalties, Welton now believed that Vallandigham and Copperheads like him betrayed "the true principles of democracy," and wanted his father to "understand that any man who upholds Vallandigham at all never can be called any thing but my enemy. . . . There is no one on the face of this earth that is despised and hated by every soldier as much as the copperhead is."⁸⁴ Aaron Beck summed it up best when he wrote, "I don't know which would cause the most rejoicing in camp, Richmond taken or Val[landigham] hung but I believe the latter would."⁸⁵

Soldiers' anger at Vallandigham and Copperheads did not amount to repudiation of Democrats in general, the two-party system, or political dissent, all of which soldiers continued to regard as aspects of the republic can self-government they fought to uphold. "Politics govern this nation," a Michigan private pointed out to his mother. "Defending the proper politics in majority" was tantamount to "defending our Nation in fact," but the only way to determine the majority was to pit two alternatives against each other at the ballot box and see who won.⁸⁶ Many proud Democrats continued to identify themselves as Democrats, but they also increasingly viewed two topics, Union and emancipation, as above politics. Partisan disagreement over economic policy or civil liberties remained perfectly acceptable, even desirable, but the survival of the intact Union and the end of slavery became nonnegotiable, because they were national, not partisan issues in many soldiers' eyes.⁸⁷

The problem with Copperheads was that they overstepped the bounds of legitimate dissent, and in so doing ran the risk of discrediting the Democratic Party as the respectable alternative necessary to the proper functioning of electoral democracy. As one Illinois Democrat grieved, "the name of Democrats . . . is being sullied and disgraced by demagogues who are appealing to the lo[w]est prejudice and passion of our people."

Copperhead agitation sent a "keen and fatle pang to the heart" of every loyal Democrat. "There is just as good Democrats as any other partie," but "there are a portion . . . that deserve the name of Copperheads," and "the Democrats in our Regiment are even madder at them than the Republicans."⁸⁸ Union troops, in short, saw a real distinction between dissent and disloyal obstruction. They hated Vallandigham and the Copperheads not because they were Democrats, but because they refused to admit the connection between emancipation, winning the war, and saving the Union.

When civilians did not respond as hostilely to Copperheads as soldiers did, a rift deepened between soldiers and the folks at home. After learning of the anti-emancipation leanings of their state legislatures, "the soldiers of Illinois and Indiana are boiling over with rage and indignation," Jacob Behm reported.⁸⁹ David James did not know whether to be disappointed or just plain angry when he heard that the citizens of his hometown, Richland Center, Wisconsin, had convened an anti-emancipation meeting. He told his parents about Illinois regiments encamped nearby that had "passed some encouraging resolutions" in support of the administration, the proclamation, and the war effort. The Wisconsin soldiers, assuming that their families and neighbors would never do anything so disgraceful as to denounce emancipation, had not passed similar resolutions, but now James and his fellow troops regretted their misplaced confidence in the home front.⁹⁰ Even Chauncey Welton accused his Peace Democrat father of being "mistaken considerable" about the war and politics.⁹¹

Soldiers regretted disagreements with family members, but their commitment to the war and emancipation could for the most part withstand family disharmony because success or failure of the Union would be proven by its ability to show the world that republican government based on universal principles worked, not by the government's track record in promoting the interests of particular individuals and families. As a Massachusetts private explained, all of "civilization and common humanity" had a stake in the Union's survival, which meant that soldiers must rise above "family ties" to "sacrifice something for the common good."⁹² When Samuel Storrow's parents objected to his decision to hazard his own life and responsibilities to help save the Union and end slavery, Storrow asked them, "what is the worth of this man's life, or of that man's education, if this great and glorious fabric of our Union . . . is to be shattered to pieces . . . ? If our Country and our nationality is to perish, better that we should all perish with it and not survive to see it a laughingstock for all posterity to be pointed at as the unsuccessful trial of republicanism."⁹³

Differences and quarrels with the families and communities that soldiers believed they represented might sadden soldiers, but they did not necessarily undermine the rank and file's faith in the Union or the war, because both the Union and the war were about something important enough to transcend personal aspirations, and even, by 1863, to warrant revolution.

"Any man who pretends to believe that this is not a war for the emancipation of the blacks . . . is either a fool or a liar"

Cpl. Samuel Storrow's questions would have struck many white Southerners as odd. After all, the function of government was to *protect* citizens' property and interests, not diminish them to nothingness. The logic of secession said that when the government came into conflict with the interests of enfranchised citizens, it contradicted its own purpose and relieved citizens of loyalty to that government. One irony of the Civil War was that Union soldiers' way of envisioning the relationship between individuals, families, and the government lent itself to sacrifice better than the Confederate vision of government did, but the war demanded more sacrifices from Confederates than it did from Northerners. In 1862 and 1863, white Southerners and the interests of their families suffered while the Confederate government continued to function in ways that met with severe disapproval from Confederate soldiers. Incidents like the Richmond bread riots demonstrated that disaffection had become a genuine problem for the Confederacy. Yet as powerful as discontent was, it did not amount to rejection of the Confederacy or the war effort because all internal upheaval faded in the face of united opposition to the very ideas of the Emancipation Proclamation and the enlistment of black soldiers into the Union Army.

In October 1862, the Confederate Congress modified the conscription law by exempting one white owner or overseer for every farm or plantation containing twenty or more slaves. To supporters of the provision, the new measure contributed to community safety by protecting white women and children from violence at the hands of slaves left at home with no white men to control them. In reality, the law intensified the conflict between individual or family interests and community well-being that plagued the Confederacy from start to finish. Specifically, the twenty-slave law (more commonly dubbed the "Twenty-Nigger Law") aggravated class tensions, which in turn strained, but did not negate, ordinary Confederates' willingness to fight in two ways.

First, many nonslaveholders concurred with the rationale that race control and home-front safety required the presence of white men to police slaves, but they did not see why nonslaveholders could not provide that community service just as effectively as the wealthy could. After all, many nonslaveholders had experience on antebellum slave patrols.⁹⁴ A nonslaveholder from Green County, North Carolina, for example, agreed that unless a white man stayed behind, local "negroes" would be "left hear to plunder an steel . . . an destroye our famely," but he also argued that a poor man with a family to support should be allowed to stay home and do the job for his local community rather than exempting a wealthy man whose family could better afford his absence.⁹⁵

Second, and more broadly, ordinary white Southerners did not begrudge fighting for the security of wealthy slave owners' human property—they accepted the necessity of that—but they did object to the way in which the so-called Twenty-Nigger Law seemed to make them bear the disproportionate brunt of the fight. An angry Georgia soldier challenged, "I cannot for my life see how it is, that because the institution of slavery elevates the social position of the poor man, that therefore the poor man should fight the battles of our country, while the rich are allowed to remain at home and to enjoy ease and pleasure." He did not question that he should fight to defend slavery, but he did question why the wealthy should not also have to pitch in, and he resented elite stay-at-homes who took his suffering for granted. "For God's sake don't tell the poor soldier who now shivers in a Northern wind while you snooze in a feather bed, that it is *just* and *right*" for one class to avoid the war while the rest of the white male population "must fight, bleed, and even die, for their ten [*sic*] negroes," he seethed.⁹⁶ Months later, in March, a Texas soldier remained furious at the "trembling lawgivers" who pandered to the wealthy with measures like the twenty-slave exemption. He went so far as to wish the Yankee cavalry would ride into Richmond, if such an invasion would "prevent our Congressmen from continuing their weighty deliberations on the conscript act which was to force every man of the South except themselves and their kind into the army."⁹⁷

In April 1863, the Richmond bread riots heightened the disaffection that many soldiers already felt because of hardships imposed on their families by the war and by oppressive policies like impressment. Thomas Warrick's enthusiasm flagged even before the bread riots. In March, he instructed his struggling wife "to sende me worde if the Government has dun Eney thing for you." Warrick knew that the cow was sick and produc-

ing little milk, and he worried about his ailing children, along with his farm's prospects for the upcoming growing season. His faith that an independent Confederacy could or would do anything to alleviate his family's woes had all but disappeared.⁹⁸ The bread riots further strained that faith. On April 2, 1863, several hundred Richmond women met at a Baptist church and marched to the Virginia governor's mansion to inform the state's chief executive of their families' distress and to demand relief. When the governor rebuffed the women, the crowd began to turn into a mob and headed for Richmond's commercial district. There, the rioters broke into bakeries and shops and helped themselves to food and to thousands of dollars' worth of other merchandise until the governor and the mayor of Richmond organized a militia company and marched it into the fray.

Meanwhile, President Jefferson Davis joined the mayor and governor, climbed on a cart, and tried to get the attention of the rioting women by addressing the crowd calmly, and then throwing a few coins into the mob. The clamor did not die down, and in the midst of the confusion, one of the three officials announced that he would order the militia to fire if the crowd did not disperse in five minutes. After four tense minutes, the mob melted away, and cannons rolled into town to prevent further looting. Smaller riots also began to erupt in other towns throughout the Confederacy, but the riot in the Confederate capital especially intensified ill feeling. Pvt. Daniel Brown was dismayed by a "mob" of famished women swooping in on commissary stores with "bowie knives and swords," but he was even more horrified when "old jef davis ordred our troops to fir on them." He reported that even though his regiment never fired, two men and one woman were killed by the very army supposedly fighting for the rights of *all* (even poor) white Southerners.⁹⁹ The riots certainly illustrated existing dissatisfaction with a Confederacy that was clearly not furthering white Southerners' best interests, but they did more besides. By creating a situation in which white men endangered rather than controlled and protected white women, they shook soldiers' faith in the Confederacy's ability to uphold its own social order.

In response to developments like the twenty-slave law and the bread riots, soldiers' vocal dissatisfaction with both the government and the population of the Confederacy intensified. The Arkansas soldiers who created a camp paper called *The Reveille* criticized the Confederate cabinet as nothing more than a scribbling menagerie of petty and self-serving "chief clerks." They also lambasted President Davis as a power monger who for-

got that the "President of the Confederate States is the creature of the Confederation," not of his own devising.¹⁰⁰ Focusing his own resentment on the Confederate Congress, Sgt. Felix Buchanan sourly concluded that the weak and corrupt legislature did not "reflect much honor upon our government."¹⁰¹ Confederate civilians did not portray the South in a very flattering light either, complained soldiers like Alabamian Edward Brown. As the pressures of war intensified and the home front grew more jaded, Brown nearly despaired to learn that civilians in his home county insisted on growing cotton rather than food. Nobody could eat cotton, which meant that if farmers insisted on growing it, "we are *whipped*." The Army would be "starved out," and defeat would follow. Only greed for the profits earned by running cotton through the blockade (or worse, sold north) could explain farmers' blindness to the needs of the South's own army.¹⁰² Sgt. William Chunn grew despondent over what he viewed as civilians' petty profiteering. Instead of proving "willing to make any sacrifice in the cause of their country & for the accommodation of the suffering soldier," everyone he met in Mississippi "from the children up" was on the take. "There is nothing they are willing to do for the cause unless they get the money," Chunn complained.¹⁰³

In short, the Confederate assumption that government existed primarily to allow white individuals and families to pursue their own interests had led to real trouble by 1863. Rule by "ignoramuses at home & bigots in the army . . . has crushed the spirit of liberty," Sgt. Edward Brown claimed.¹⁰⁴ On one hand, a government that imposed impressment, tax-in-kind, and a draft that was widely perceived to be unfair ran counter to the interests of most soldiers and their families. At the same time, when some civilians took advantage of opportunities for personal gain, soldiers interpreted other people's self-interested behavior less as manifestation of sound political ideology than as selfishness at a time when unity was more necessary than ever. The boastful prewar fire-eaters who had been so sure of a quick Confederate victory that they promised to drink all the blood spilled in the conflict could now sit at home if they wished, spared by the twenty-slave law from making the sacrifices demanded of ordinary men. As Pvt. J. C. Daniel expressed it, "the men that was going to drink the blood, Are not the men that wades the mud." In his company, at least, the "[se]cession boys are very scanty."¹⁰⁵ Louisianan John Ellis was so disgusted with the Confederacy that he advocated "a counter revolution . . . another secession, a recall of all the state troops . . . and freedom from Jeff Davis."¹⁰⁶

Yet as vehemently as they denounced the Confederacy, not even the angriest of Confederate soldiers like John Ellis called for a return to the Union. White Southerners might not share much in the way of affection for the Confederate States of America, but they did share hostility to the North. Even when the war's mounting fury, resentment of seemingly unfair burdens placed on nonslaveholders, and the fierce hardships that culminated in the bread riots provoked John Ellis to call for "counter revolution," the revolution he had in mind bore no resemblance to the one taking place in the Union, nor did it involve abandoning the Confederacy for the Union. Whatever else the Richmond government might do, Confederate soldiers knew it would neither abolish slavery nor introduce measures that hinted at racial equality.

In contrast, when Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation and endorsed the enlistment of black soldiers, he finally revealed what Confederate soldiers assumed had been Northerners' grand design all along. As a Confederate soldiers' newspaper put it, "Now, any man who pretends to believe that this is not a war for the emancipation of the blacks, and that the whole course of the Yankee Government has not only been directed to the abolition of slavery, but even to a stirring up of servile insurrections, is either a fool or a liar."¹⁰⁷ No internal tensions or political quarrels could outweigh the danger of imminent abolition or the terrifying prospect of armed slaves. That revolution, Confederate soldiers felt sure, would be worse than the Confederacy in spite of its disappointments, and it must be resisted at all costs.

The Emancipation Proclamation might look like a weak and insubstantial piece of paper issued by a government that Confederates did not even recognize as legitimate, but it proposed to do nothing less than destroy the foundation of the only society white Southerners had ever known. The logical implications of emancipation horrified Confederate soldiers. Just weeks after the preliminary proclamation was issued, Antoine Prudhomme was convinced that civilization as white Southerners had known it was falling apart in Union-occupied New Orleans. "A perfect reign of terror pervades all hearts—the negroes have the right of citizenship," he claimed. Rumor also had it that "the colored population have turned traitors to our cause they excite the negroes by public demonstrations to insurrection and destruction."¹⁰⁸ An Arkansas soldier also assumed that emancipation could only lead to violence. He readily believed false rumors that the Union general Samuel R. Curtis "had freed all the negroes in Phillips County [Arkansas]," and that freed slaves immediately began

hanging innocent whites, killing livestock, ransacking property, and otherwise destroying every vestige of society.¹⁰⁹ A clever Texas soldier described the logical outcome of the proclamation by writing a song. One verse began:

*They howl the sin of slavery and curse us for the crime,
Of trafficking in human flesh in this enlightened time
They threaten now to signalize the next new calendar
By setting every bondman free beneath the Southern Star.*

Black freedom would be a disaster, the song went on to say, because it would lead "the blacks to mad revolt to murder and to char / With conflagration every home beneath the Southern Star."¹¹⁰ Emancipation amounted to a direct attack on every aspect of white southern society, and not a single white household was safe.

Even something so basic as a white man's individual identity seemed to come under siege in the wake of emancipation. Before John Williams became a soldier, he lived on his father's struggling farm and helped raise just enough corn to keep the family afloat. The family owned no slaves. Yet Corporal Williams wholeheartedly believed in the necessity of a war to separate from the Union and prevent the abolition that the Emancipation Proclamation threatened to impose. A story that he told his sister explains why. Two white Virginians, Williams claimed, were arrested by "an armed band of negroes and carried before one whom they styled the President," who had them "condemned to be shot." The murder accounted for only part of the story's horror. After the shooting, the mortification continued when the victims "were striped of all their clothing and thrown into the river."¹¹¹ Racial role reversal, humiliation, powerlessness before an authority of a different race, summary and autocratic justice, and the loss of individual identity and basic dignity could all be expected under the black- and Yankee-controlled regime that emancipation was sure to introduce. The Confederate camp newspaper *The Vidette* made this same point more concisely when it called emancipation "Slavery for the White Man!"¹¹²

In igniting white Southerners' long-smoldering fears, the Emancipation Proclamation roused many Confederate soldiers to fury. "The proclamation of Lincoln has filled every one with indignation, and we are all now in favor of raising the 'black flag' and asking and showing 'no quarter,'" a member of the First South Carolina announced when his regiment

learned of the preliminary proclamation.¹¹³ A Texan denounced "the proclamation of Lincoln" as "the crowning infamy of all his diabolical schemes for our ruin."¹¹⁴

Confederates might be outraged, but they were not surprised. In fact, Confederate morale actually improved because the Emancipation Proclamation raised troops' hackles, giving them more energy than they had shown in months. By clarifying the war, the proclamation brought the struggle back into focus and reminded soldiers why they had to fight even when scarcity threatened loved ones, or the Confederacy fell short of their expectations.¹¹⁵ According to Pvt. John Street, the proclamation called the bluff of any remaining Union soldiers who claimed (deceptively, in his opinion) that they fought for the Union and not emancipation. "The cry of Union is now no longer made a pretext for carrying on the war," he argued. "By their resent acts the Lincoln government have shown plainly what they have in reality been fighting for all the time vis: the abolition of slavery."¹¹⁶ Scathing as *The Reveille* was toward the Confederate government, it rallied around the cause when abolition appeared on the horizon. Nothing motivated the southern soldier in the weeks before the Emancipation Proclamation was due to take effect, according to *The Reveille*, quite like thoughts of "the chains of slaves, forged in a Northern furnace, with which to mangle his free limbs."¹¹⁷ Because it provided a clear rallying point, the proclamation renewed the resolve of soldiers like Pvt. Jonathan Doyle, who reminded his sister, "we must never despair, for death is preferable to a life spent under the gauling yoke of abolition rule."¹¹⁸

When the final Emancipation Proclamation came in January, it did more than just declare slaves free; it also proposed to arm them against their former masters. As a result of the Haitian revolution of 1791-1804, the Denmark Vesey plot of 1822 in South Carolina, the 1831 Nat Turner revolt in Virginia, and John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry in 1859, nothing terrified white Southerners more than the specter of armed blacks. When David Ballenger learned that "the Yankees are drilling the negroes to fight us," he warned his wife that the Confederacy now faced "the bloody year of the war." Yankee use of black soldiers, he believed, "will almost surpass anything recorded in the annals of history for war and blood shed."¹¹⁹ In addition, African American soldiers would carry firearms, just like white men, and would be dressed in the same uniforms as white men. In the minds of Confederates, making soldiers of black men implied racial equality, and that prospect could not be allowed to pass without a fight. James Branscomb had been downhearted and disillusioned

sioned with the Confederacy for months, but the news of black Union soldiers propelled him out of his gloom. For the first time in a long while, he predicted "success for our army" because "the negro army of the north is only adding fuel to [the] fire of our soldiers."¹²⁰ One Virginian suggested a practical way in which Confederate authorities could use black soldiers to boost the morale of war-weary troops. "If our Congress would only pass a bill giving each soldier all the negroes whom he could capture," new soldiers would flood the ranks and existing soldiers would perk up again. "Opportunities for speculating in 'human flesh,' as the Abolitionists say," would renew the Confederate Army's enthusiasm like nothing else, the private predicted.¹²¹

As the war, emancipation, and black enlistment continued to grind away at slavery, enslaved men and women took advantage of opportunities the war uncovered to gain freedom any way they could. For some enslaved Southerners, liberation meant fleeing to the Union Army. "Many negroes are lost by . . . desertion to the enemy," one Florida sergeant noticed.¹²² A North Carolina soldier learned that friends of his, the Brown family, lost two slaves when their mammy "went to the Yankees carrying with her, one of her grandchildren, one that Mrs. Brown had raised in the house." When Mrs. Brown sent word to have the child returned to the family's possession, the mammy suddenly became an "old hag" who replied that she would "stand a law suit in h-ll first."¹²³ Actions like these added to Confederates' motivation by stoking white southern fears of assertive blacks who refused to recognize white authority.

Other slaves found ways to assert their growing autonomy without leaving home, which disturbed Confederate soldiers at least as much as the runaways did, because it reminded them that disruptions to slavery disturbed the stable and reliable order of things, even in the domestic sanctuary of white southern homes. When Leander Parker saw slaves in Mississippi dressing themselves in their masters' "best apparels" and "valuables," and parading about town presuming to the status usually associated with such finery, it seemed as if he was living in a nightmare.¹²⁴ Texas chaplain Robert Bunting sought to horrify Confederate civilians and soldiers alike with stories of marriages between slave women and white Union soldiers taking place in the homes of the slaves' helpless white mistresses. "It is no unusual thing," Bunting claimed, "for the mistress to be compelled to witness, in her own parlor, the marriage of her likely house-maids to officers and privates of the army." After the ceremony, shameless brides helped themselves to articles from the home, and

then departed from their rightful mistress "with the taunt that now they are as free as she."¹²⁵

No evidence suggests that marriages between white Union soldiers and slaves occurred at all, let alone became commonplace, but Bunting's stories were powerful despite their falsehood. In fact, the stories helped explain why the defense of slavery continued to rally nonslaveholding soldiers whose families needed them at home, especially when measures like the twenty-slave law could have soured the rank and file on a war for slavery. The twenty-slave law made plain exactly how little direct material interest nonslaveholders had in an institution that so clearly privileged the wealthy, but tales like the ones Bunting spun revealed that for nonslaveholders, slavery's importance had little to do with its pecuniary benefits. The intimacy and social parity between black and white implied by Bunting's stories of interracial marriages, along with the brazenness displayed by black house servants laying claim to their mistresses' belongings and social status, tapped deeply into white Southerners' fears. For one thing, protecting white women from insults and depredations by blacks ranked high on the list of duties that entitled a white Southerner to honorable status as a true man. Moreover, the women whose servants were (according to Bunting) insulting their dignity enjoyed no political rights that abolition could usurp, yet the erosion of slavery still compromised them. Nonslaveholders might be just as economically distanced from slavery's financial profits as women were marginalized from its political benefits, but they would still lose safety, personal dignity, and identity if slavery disappeared. White men who enlisted in the Confederate Army believed that they and their families needed the institution of slavery to survive, as Robert Bunting's fabrications both demonstrated and shrewdly exploited.

ONE MAJOR source of consolation remained available to Confederates: the Emancipation Proclamation could destroy slavery only if the Union won the war. After the dreary winter and spring of 1862, Confederate military fortunes had improved. By early 1863, a Virginian noticed the "difference in our army now and this time last year." For much of 1862, Confederate troops had been "demoralized, discouraged by repeated defeats and retreats," but after Fredericksburg, he believed "the yankees are getting very tired of [the war] . . . and they are quite willing to get out of it."¹²⁶ A Texas private grew increasingly sure that the Confederate Army

would "whip [the Union] at vixburge," and that would only be the beginning. "Their own papers . . . said that we had whipped them in evry big fight and . . . that they would loos men and cost them a heap and we would still whip them . . . and now was the time for them to make a proposial to us."¹²⁷ Other troops sought to capitalize on Confederate morale and momentum with invasions of the North. Autumn incursions into Maryland, Ohio, and Kentucky had not worked out as planned in 1862, but by the summer of 1863, the Confederacy's star army, the Army of Northern Virginia, was ready to try again. Looking toward Pennsylvania, North Carolinian John Kinyoun could hardly wait to repay "that Grand old Quaker abolitionist State for all that she has caused our Confederacy to suffer."¹²⁸ In short, prospects looked encouraging at the end of June 1863, when the Army of Northern Virginia took the war to Union territory, intent on breaking northern will and rolling back the wheels of revolution.