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Emancipation in Indiana*By STEPHEN E. TOWNE*

Indiana was a free Union state, but one with strong pro-slavery sentiments. The editorial reactions of Indiana Democratic newspapers to President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation were predictably hostile. The Huntington Democrat, a northern Indiana weekly paper, lashed out in indignation at the president's capitulation to abolitionist pressure. The proclamation would prompt the South's "servile population" of "savage negroes" to rise up in "insurrection, rapine, murder, arson, and what not," the paper predicted.

The racism of the majority whites in Indiana of that era was profound. Both Republicans and Democrats shared a hatred and morbid fear of African-Americans. Many in the state had migrated from the South seeking a landscape and economy free from the reach of the slave-centric economy. But only a small number of them supported the abolition of Southern slavery, and even fewer believed that black was equal to white. Many were willing to let Southern whites maintain slavery in the South and keep African-American slave laborers away from their Indiana farms, workshops and homes. Democratic reactions to Lincoln's proclamation fit the pattern of what the historian Emma Lou Thornbrough called Hoosier "negrophobia."

Indiana was, to be sure, under strong Republican control. Since the formation of the party, Republicans had grown in strength and seized majorities of the Indiana General Assembly and Congressional seats. In 1860, they won the governor's office. The coming of war to preserve the national Union had created a powerful coalition of Indiana Republicans and War Democrats intent on crushing rebellion. But dissension roiled. The Indianapolis Daily State Sentinel, the chief antiwar voice and official organ of the state Democratic Party, crowed that the abolitionist intentions of the administration were now clear; Joseph J. Bingham, the editor and chairman of the party's central committee, challenged apostate War Democrats who had coalesced with Republicans in the Union effort: were they now willing to "sit down to the abolition feast?" Many were not. Reacting in anger and disgust, War Democratic newspapers like The New Albany Daily Ledger denounced the proclamation as a betrayal of their trust.

Back in Washington, Lincoln's secretary of the interior, the Indiana politician Caleb Blood Smith, understood his state's people and telegraphed their interests in the cabinet. In July, when the president shared with the cabinet his plan to emancipate slaves in the

rebel states, Smith had warned (though whether he addressed his warning to Lincoln is not clear) that “if the President carried out that policy, he might count on losing *Indiana*, sure!” Smith knew that a year and a half of bloody, expensive and, to date, inconclusive war had strained that Union coalition and threatened Republican control.

Indeed, since the beginning of the conflict, Indiana Democrats had slowly regained strength. The federal defeat at the First Battle of Bull Run, in July 1861, made clear to all that the rebels would not be defeated easily. In the following months, as the war dragged on, many voters recovered from “war fever” and gravitated to the Democratic position that opposed coercing the rebel states back into the Union.

The war took a severe toll on everyone. Families mourned the large toll of dead, maimed and grievously ill soldiers. The agricultural economy suffered as warfare blocked the shipment of Indiana’s farm products to Southern markets and drained the fields of able workers. Citizens complained of a new protective tariff and higher taxes. As the federal government expanded to meet its military challenges, Democrats who adhered to a Jeffersonian state sovereignty ideology of limited national powers were aghast at what they saw as Lincoln’s overreach. Democratic editors wrote that the president aimed to establish a military dictatorship. Violations of civil liberties mounted. The president suspended the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus, and Union Army forces arrested Democratic politicians and speakers; troops and civilian crowds sacked Indiana Democratic newspapers and assaulted editors for voicing opposition to the coercive war.

Indiana’s people also felt the shock of a resurgent Confederacy when the rebels invaded neighboring Kentucky in August and September 1862. Armies under generals Edmund Kirby-Smith and Braxton Bragg marched north and overran Indiana troops hurriedly sent south. Rebel forces were poised both to strike at Louisville and cross the Ohio River to attack Cincinnati. Could southern Indiana be the next scene of war? The rebels retreated after the battle of Perryville, fought on Oct. 8, but not before sending a cold shiver up the spines and casting gloom on the faces of the people residing north of the river. Federal victory was even less imminent than once believed.

Demands for more federal troops to conquer a resilient Confederacy required a draft. Lincoln called on the states to resume recruiting efforts on a large scale. Congress added conscription to the mix. Indiana’s draft was set for early October, just days after the news of the president’s Emancipation Proclamation. Indiana Democrats viewed the draft as another example of the Republican assault on the liberties of free (white) men.

Moreover, emancipation changed the war from one to restore the Union to one to free Southern slaves. Men who would not volunteer to fight in such a cause certainly did not want to be drafted into it. A draft-day riot in the northern Indiana town of Hartford City, in strongly Democratic Blackford County, revealed profound opposition to the war and prompted authorities to send 500 troops from Indianapolis to quell disorder. Troops remained in the area for several days until after Election Day. Commanders posted

soldiers at polling places to arrest rioters who attempted to vote, adding to Democratic fears of tyranny.

Lincoln's proclamation did no favors for Indiana's Republican candidates in the upcoming elections. The tepid endorsements offered by Republican newspaper editors exemplified rank-and-file reactions to the abolitionist turn. Editors of the state Republican flagship organ, *The Indianapolis Daily Journal*, resigned themselves to making the most of the bad hand dealt them. While faulting the proclamation for freeing the slaves of loyal Southerners along with those of the rebels, the editorial writer fell back on the argument that a blow to the slave economy must weaken the rebellion. In a speech in Washington, Governor Oliver P. Morton characterized it as merely a "stratagem of war." While opposed to slavery, he and other Indiana Republicans believed abolition was bad politics at this time and capable of harming the Union coalition they hoped to preserve.

On Oct. 14, Election Day, Indiana voters went to the polls in presidential-election-year numbers. Republican fortunes suffered from the fact that Indiana law prohibited soldiers in the field from voting. Many War Democrats broke from their union with Republicans and returned to the old standard. The adverse reaction to the proclamation aided the energized Democrats to win all the state offices on the ballot, as well as large majorities in both chambers of the Indiana General Assembly. They also won 7 of 11 congressional races, reversing Republican victories two years earlier. Ohio saw similar Democratic election victories, and Illinois voters followed suit in November. Democratic election victories in the Old Northwest presaged a tumultuous year to come.

Only Indiana's small minority of abolitionists rejoiced at Lincoln's bold move. Centreville's *Indiana True Republican*, owned by the radical-Republican Congressman George W. Julian and edited by his brother Isaac, stood at the forefront of abolitionist opinion in the state. The proclamation, wrote Isaac, "will change the entire policy of the war, and gives new hope for our country." Offering rare praise for Lincoln, he added: "At last, the President is arousing himself to a solemn duty."

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Sources: Huntington Democrat, Sept. 25, 1862; Indianapolis Daily State Sentinel, Sept. 24, 1862; Indianapolis Daily Journal, Sept. 27, 1862; Centreville Indiana True Republican, Sept. 25, 1862; Frank B. Carpenter, "The Inner Life of Abraham Lincoln: Six Months at the White House"; Kenneth M. Stampp, "Indiana Politics during the Civil War"; Emma Lou Thornbrough, "Indiana in the Civil War Era, 1850-1880"; Gary W. Gallagher, "The Union War"; Richard F. Nation and Stephen E. Towne, eds., "Indiana's War: The Civil War in Documents."

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