

ABSTRACT

The Black Brigade of Cincinnati: Martial Volunteerism and the Quest for African-American Citizenship

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The Black Brigade of Cincinnati was immortalized by black activist Peter H. Clark in 1864 as the “first organization of the colored people of the North actually employed for military purposes.” In the city, free African Americans wanted to volunteer for Union military service. Cincinnati officials, however, met that desire with vicious impressment and forced labor of African Americans in response to an impending Confederate invasion. Reacting quickly, the city’s abolitionists petitioned the Union Army to supersede the order with one allowing the African Americans to organize for the city’s defense. But from this most unlikely of beginnings developed an organization whose positive remembrance had lasting import for black recruitment and claims on American citizenship. Several forces worked in the eventual success of the Black Brigade: alliances with white abolitionists, vibrant African-American political engagement, and a tradition of black martial volunteerism—even prior to the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation.

The Black Brigade of Cincinnati: Martial Volunteerism and
the Quest for African-American Citizenship

by

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION	
The Quest for Citizenship	1
Literary Review and Critique.....	7
Chapter Overview	17
CHAPTER TWO. THE ROAD TO ARMS IN THE “QUEEN CITY OF MOBS”	
Racial Repression and the 1829 Riot	22
Religious Abolitionism and the 1836 Riot.....	28
Immigration, Urbanization, and the 1841 Riot	39
CHAPTER THREE. THE GATHERING STORM	
Abolitionists, Political and Radical.....	50
Black Manhood and the African-American Military Experience.....	61
The Rise of the Radical Republicans	65
CHAPTER FOUR. “WHITE MAN’S WAR”	
Early Rejection.....	78
Tension and Conflict in Cincinnati	86
Setting the Stage	89
Enemy at the Gates	95
The Impressment of Willing Men.....	99
CHAPTER FIVE. “LET THEM BE TREATED LIKE MEN”	
The Formation of the Black Brigade	104
The Service of the Black Brigade	111
Emancipation and Enlistment	119
CHAPTER SIX. DICKSON, CLARK, AND THE SYMBOLS OF CITIZENSHIP	
The Report of Colonel Dickson	125
Peter H. Clark and the Language of Citizenship.....	131
The Fight for Equal Pay, Equal Rank	138
Equal Citizenship as Law.....	144
CHAPTER SEVEN. CONCLUSION.....	153
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	163

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To the men of the Black Brigade, their families, and descendants

The appearance of history depends upon the point from which you look at it. In the “Black Brigade” I attempt to delineate the Siege of Cincinnati from the standpoint of the colored people of the city, to whom it was a serious matter, however much of a joke it may have been to others.

—Peter H. Clark, Cincinnati, April 20, 1868

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

All we ask is give us our *common* and *natural rights* as men, and every other condition of the human family will find its level.

—Marshall P. H. Jones, “Reflections,” *Colored Citizen*, November 7, 1863

The Quest for Citizenship

“Why should we fight?” Writing in 1867, African-American abolitionist William Wells Brown noted that the recently-concluded Civil War had raised this powerful question within the African-American community. After all, throughout the early nineteenth century, free and enslaved black Americans had been prevented from exercising their full rights as citizens of the United States.¹ Across the country, race and ethnicity were almost unvaryingly wielded as “social signifiers” to reinforce white supremacy and keep African Americans from engaging on equal terms in the broader American society.²

This outright rejection of equal African-American participation in society was not necessarily inevitable. In the early American republic, as John Saillant has argued, Lemuel Haynes and other proponents of black republicanism promoted an understanding of American society that would unify white and black American interests through a

¹ William Wells Brown, *The Negro in the American Rebellion: His Heroism and His Fidelity* (Boston: Lee & Shepard, 1867), 142.

² Franklin W. Knight, “Introduction: Race and Identity in the New World,” in *Assumed Identities: The Meanings of Race in the Atlantic World*, ed. John D. Garrigus and Christopher Morris (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2010), 5.

system of mutual benevolence. However, this position was eventually rejected in the early decades of the nineteenth century by the majority of white Americans, who were unwilling to extend equal rights to African Americans. White republicans adapted this perspective and promoted the idea that benevolence and equal treatment only extended up to—and not across—the racial divide. Therefore, black Americans were to be increasingly segregated—politically, socially, and (through colonization efforts) physically.³ As Cincinnati citizen and black activist Peter H. Clark described in the *Liberator*, they were even ostracized linguistically: whenever white speakers publicly referred to “Americans” or “humanity,” they universally meant a more narrow definition of “white men.” African-American activists like Clark worked to counter this trend by adopting terms such as “colored Americans” or “colored citizens” to describe themselves.⁴ After all, they reasoned, the privileges of citizenship were viewed by both black and white Americans in comparison to the limitations of slavery. The well-known African-American abolitionist William Wells Brown bluntly argued that “slavery has been the cause of all the prejudice against the negro. Wherever the blacks are ill-treated on account of their color, it is because of their identity with a race that has long worn the chain of slavery.”⁵ Yet despite African-American efforts, white Americans were largely unwilling to look past enslavement to see them as equals or to put into practice the

³ John Saillant, “Lemuel Haynes’s Black Republicanism and the American Republican Tradition, 1775-1820,” *Journal of the Early American Republic* 14, no. 3 (Autumn 1994): 293-324. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3124515> (accessed February 19, 2018).

⁴ Stephen David Kantrowitz, *More Than Freedom: Fighting for Black Citizenship in a White Republic, 1829-1889*, Penguin History of American Life (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), 35.

⁵ Brown, *Negro in the American Rebellion*, 361.

principles of individual liberty and equality they had claimed for themselves in their own struggle against the British Empire.

As Leon Litwack has chronicled, opportunities were severely curtailed for African Americans in the fledgling republic: by 1790, Congress had limited official naturalization to whites only. Two years later, militia participation was officially limited to white involvement. This latter action was particularly significant because martial activity was seen (as described in the Supreme Court's *Dred Scott* opinion of 1857) as one of the primary "duties and obligations of citizenship." Throughout the early nineteenth century, the federal government continued to further ostracize black Americans, admitting states with constitutions that explicitly limited or denied African Americans' legal rights; and despite efforts by black and white abolitionists and proponents for African-American citizenship, multiple United States Attorneys General in the early nineteenth century maintained that free black Americans were not eligible to apply for citizenship. This position was later confirmed by Chief Justice Roger B. Taney's *Dred Scott* decision, which held that African Americans were entitled to "none of the rights and privileges which [the Constitution] provides for and secures to citizens of the United States."⁶

But these rulings never quite settled debates over black citizenship because both the uncertain nature of American citizenship and the differing legal positions of local, state, and federal governments allowed ample room for differing interpretations. Citizenship, then as now, was culturally constructed; but at the time, the definition of citizenship was far more fluid than is usually understood. Today, American citizenship is

⁶ Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961), 31; *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, 60 U.S. 393, 400, 404 (1856).

more concretely defined in terms of nationality (though this, of course, carries its own cultural constructions) and aims—however imperfectly—to provide civil, political, and socioeconomic rights for all citizens of that nationality. But this construction of citizenship did not arise until dynamic shifts around the time of the Civil War forced Americans to wrestle with the national understanding of citizenship. As late as 1862, Attorney General Edward Bates, a Missourian, was asked by Secretary of the Treasury Salmon Chase to determine if black men could even be considered citizens of the United States. After examining all pertinent legal documents and court rulings, Bates determined that no ruling could be given, as there was no fixed definition for citizenship. At the time, citizenship was publically determined by a complex web of allegiances and obligations given in exchange for protections and privileges—and this web was highly dependent on a variety of factors, including birthplace, gender, employment, civic office or membership, and race.⁷ Even Taney’s ruling on Dred Scott ignored statements by the federal government in 1803 that protected black American seamen from British impressment by declaring that said seamen were “citizens of the United States.”⁸

Because of citizenship’s complex nature, gaining access to it meant even more than acquiring certain political and legal rights—it also encompassed (as many black Americans understood it) an understanding of universal brotherhood and bonds of friendship or respect that stretched across racial lines. Being seen as fully equal members of the nation would secure for black Americans the unquantifiable and intangible benefits

⁷ Christian G. Samito, *Becoming American under Fire: Irish Americans, African Americans, and the Politics of Citizenship during the Civil War Era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 2.

⁸ Litwack, *North of Slavery*, 31-32.

that citizenship offered.⁹ But to fully realize their citizenship, American minorities (such as Irish Americans, Native Americans, and African Americans) could not wait and hope that these changes would automatically come to them: they all understood that citizenship needed to be performed and demonstrated to be achieved. If they wanted to be *recognized* as American citizens, they had to *carry out* the actions American citizens were expected to do. Through this process, they hoped that the majority white population would eventually come to accept and promote minority claims to citizenship. To this end, black Americans—like other racial minorities—sought to demonstrate their status as citizens through martial participation.

The onset of the Civil War in 1861 did not precipitate any immediate changes for the status of African Americans, and for the first few years of the war, there was only scant hope that either “sympathy” or “legislation” favorable to black Americans would be adopted by white-dominated legislatures.¹⁰ But despite the legacy of “slavery, social and political proscription” given to both black Americans in general and Cincinnatians in particular, Peter H. Clark confidently declared that African Americans wished “to be numbered among the children of the nation,” to “secure the blessings of liberty,” and to be “invested with the privileges” of citizens.¹¹

⁹ Kantrowitz, *More Than Freedom*, 6; Elizabeth Ann Regosin, *Freedom’s Promise: Ex-Slave Families and Citizenship in the Age of Emancipation* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2002), 2; Brian Moffett Taylor, “‘To Make the Union What It Ought to Be’: African Americans, Civil War Military Service, and Citizenship,” (PhD diss., Georgetown University, 2015), https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/handle/10822/760870/Taylor_georgetown_0076D_12985.pdf?sequence=1 (accessed February 19, 2018), 10.

¹⁰ Brown, *Negro in the American Rebellion*, 142.

¹¹ Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati: Being a Report of its Labors and a Muster-Roll of its Members; Together with Various Orders, Speeches, etc. Relating to It* (Cincinnati: Joseph B. Boyd, 1864), in Library of Congress Collection, <https://archive.org/details/blackbrigadeofci00clar> (accessed February 19, 2018), 4, 11.

But this continued desire for citizenship was not reciprocated with acceptance by the majority. In the Ohio River Valley, black efforts to volunteer for Union military service were instead met with vicious impressment and forced labor by the Cincinnati police force. A police-headed effort rounded up any African Americans who could be found into pens and forced them to construct entrenchments south of the Ohio River. But from this adverse situation arose an organization that—despite its unlikely beginnings—would have critical local and national import for black recruitment efforts. Only three weeks later, on September 20, 1862, this makeshift force of African Americans gathered together to celebrate their martial service and to present white abolitionist Judge William Martin Dickson with a sword for serving as the colonel of their “Black Brigade of Cincinnati.”¹²

The Black Brigade of Cincinnati was later immortalized by Peter H. Clark as the “first organization of the colored people of the North actually employed for military purposes,” and it was the only martial unit of African Americans employed prior to the Emancipation Proclamation. The eventual success of the Black Brigade in 1862 allowed Clark to use his 1864 history of the unit to argue subtly that black soldiers’ efforts to secure equal pay and equal rank were grounded in their status as American citizens rather than their desire for pecuniary gain.¹³

This thesis argues that several forces were at work in the eventual success of the Black Brigade: ongoing alliances with white abolitionists; vibrant African-American political engagement; and a tradition of martial volunteerism in the black community—

¹² Ibid., 1-14.

¹³ Ibid., 3.

even prior to the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation. Shared political and religious principles with white abolitionists (such as William M. Dickson) provided the stable relationships and moral framework necessary for white abolitionists to intervene in support of black Americans—not because of the general Northern wartime focus on preserving the Union, but because of the ethical implications of slavery. The success of their intercession on behalf of the Black Brigade was made possible by the unwavering commitment of African Americans to enter national military service. Working together, the labors of white and black abolitionists produced a direct and lasting impact on black military involvement in the Civil War, while their principles continued to frame the struggle for black citizenship after the war.

Literary Review and Critique

Despite the Black Brigade's national import as the first organization of African Americans actually employed for military purposes during the Civil War, it has been relatively downplayed or ignored in most scholarly studies. Unfortunately, reliance on secondary sources in many overviews has exacerbated the omission. As a result, the only treatment that the work generally receives is in the context of the immediate defense of Cincinnati, and not in the broader contexts of the Civil War, abolitionism, or black struggles and achievements in the nineteenth century. Sources that do mention the Black Brigade are usually dated, discuss the Black Brigade only in passing, and almost uniformly rely on a limited number of primary sources. In addition, scholarly surveys of the defense of Cincinnati tend to focus on the formation of the Black Brigade within a narrow framework of time. As a result, these surveys often ignore or minimize both the overt volunteerism of black Americans and the positive interventions by white

abolitionists. This work seeks to reverse these trends by placing the study of the Black Brigade in its surrounding context, introducing new primary sources to Civil War studies, and re-analyzing existing material on the Black Brigade (both primary and secondary).

In spite of the unfortunate neglect of our nation's first African-American military unit in survey texts, those same brilliant and well-researched works have provided excellent contextual information for the study of the Black Brigade. First, there are some excellent works on the city of Cincinnati in the nineteenth century in general, usually dealing with a small subsection of the city's history, but in a way that sheds light—however unintentionally—on the causation of the Black Brigade. Many of these works are unpublished Ph.D. dissertations, such as the work of Richard Folk, John David Buggein, and Silas Niobeh Tsaba Crowfoot. Silas Crowfoot uses his background in urban studies to examine the black community of Cincinnati and the response to the violent anti-black riots of 1829, 1836, and 1841; John Buggein, on the other hand, addresses the vibrant marketplace of religion in Cincinnati during the century. The main limitations of these two works are Crowfoot's lack of engagement with religion, and Buggein's with abolitionism.¹⁴

Folk's thesis is over thirty years old, but is worth dealing with at length. His work explaining the relationship between abolitionists and black Americans in Ohio provides a

¹⁴ Richard Folk, "Black Man's Burden in Ohio, 1849-1863" (PhD diss., University of Toledo, 1982), in ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/docview/302700880/5937C2485FE54DBCPO/40?accountid=7014> (accessed February 19, 2018); Silas Niobeh Tsaba Crowfoot, "Community Development for a White City: Race Making, Improvementism, and the Cincinnati Race Riots and Anti-Abolition Riots of 1829, 1836, and 1841" (PhD diss., Portland State University, 2010), in ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/docview/518673252/5937C2485FE54DBCPO/8?accountid=7014> (accessed February 19, 2018); John David Buggein, "A Marketplace for Religion, Cincinnati, 1788-1890" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2002), in ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/docview/305563525/5937C2485FE54DBCPO/11?accountid=7014> (accessed February 19, 2018).

useful background for understanding the benefits that African Americans gained from the attention of white abolitionists, including physical protection, legal counsel, and increased rights through their working relationships. However, Folk is simultaneously at his best and his worst when discussing the complexities of relationships between white and black abolitionists within the city of Cincinnati. He correctly assesses the struggle of some white abolitionists to move beyond seeing African Americans as parts of a broader group oppressed by “an abstraction called slavery” rather than as individual human beings. Nonetheless, what Folk fails to address is the direct action taken by white abolitionists to assist their fellow citizens (regardless of race), particularly during times of crisis. Actions and events do not take place in a vacuum; they are shaped by the character and, indeed, consciences of their various actors. For many historical actors, their sentiments were shaped by education, society, ideologies, or some sort of religious or moral worldview—a fact that Folk ignores.

Something impelled abolitionists in Cincinnati to intervene directly in the plight of black Americans in their own city during the 1800s; I suggest that denominational affiliations and teachings may have helped play a role in this action. Religion, as Mark Noll has summarized in *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, was a major factor in American life at the eve of the Civil War. With a rate of regular attendance hovering somewhere between 60 and 80 percent, Americans were more susceptible to imbibe and practice religious principles. And, as Kenneth Stampp has shown, churches were the primary drivers of the antislavery impulse throughout the war.¹⁵ By dismissing abolitionist’s religiosity as a motivating factor, Folk fails to address the role that religious

¹⁵ Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Era of Reconstruction: 1865-1877* (New York: Knopf, 1966), 101.

abolitionists like William M. Dickson played in quietly spurring actions of concerned Cincinnatians. Despite the sometimes difficult nature of their relationship, African Americans relied on the motivation and ability of white abolitionists to visibly impact the welfare and well-being of the African-American community in times of crisis, such as during racial riots or during the formation of the Black Brigade in September of 1862.¹⁶

In addition to studies on Cincinnati, there are excellent secondary sources that cover topics that impact the study of the Black Brigade, including works on black volunteerism, religion in America, the African-American community, and the border region. George Marsden's classic work on New School Presbyterianism, Ian Binnington's look at emancipation in Cincinnati newspapers, and the studies of David Gerber, Dovie King Clark, Charles Wesley, and C. G. Woodson on black communities in Ohio all provide added context on the background of the Black Brigade.¹⁷

Of particular note are three recent works from this decade—one each from Gary Gallagher, Christopher Phillip, and a collaboration between Bob Luke and John David Smith. Gallagher's *The Union War* convincingly re-frames the Northern cause for fighting the Civil War and spends a great deal of time discussing emancipation and black volunteerism. In a similar vein, black military volunteerism is almost the sole focus of

¹⁶ Richard Folk, "Black Man's Burden in Ohio," 141-44; Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2006), 11.

¹⁷ George Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003); Ian Binnington, "Standing Upon a Volcano: Cincinnati's Newspapers Debate Emancipation, 1860-1862," *American Nineteenth Century History* 10 (June 2009): 163-186; David A. Gerber, *Black Ohio and the Color Line, 1860-1915* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1976); Dovie King Clark, "Peter Humphries Clark," in Luella G. White et. al., "Distinguished Negroes of Ohio," *Negro History Bulletin* 5, no. 8 (May 1942), <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/docview/1296735743/citation/A6CA7AE2A472420BPQ/4> (accessed February 19, 2018); Charles Harris Wesley, *Ohio Negroes in the Civil War* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press for the Ohio Historical Society, 1962); C. G. Woodson, "The Negroes of Cincinnati Prior to the Civil War," *The Journal of Negro History* 1, no. 1 (Jan. 1916), https://www.jstor.org/stable/2713512?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents (accessed February 19, 2018), 1-22.

Luke and Smith's *Soldiering for Freedom*, which contains excellent information on the history of black recruitment during the war. Luke and Smith claim that black martial volunteerism "laid the foundation for African Americans' quest for true citizenship and freedom." Christopher Phillips's magnum opus, *The Rivers Ran Backwards*, is the result of twenty years of labor and seeks to provide a comprehensive look at the history of the western border region, particularly "how a traditional western political culture that traditionally accommodated slavery was transformed by the era of the Civil War."¹⁸ Each of these works in turn reshapes or reframes our understanding of emancipation, black volunteerism, or Western conceptions of African Americans, though no mention is given of the first organization of black Americans for military purposes—outside of a single sentence in Phillips's work, which incorrectly claims that the laborers on the Cincinnati entrenchments were predominantly African Americans.¹⁹

Historically, academic accounts of black military service have sometimes treated it as an automatic process or have downplayed the relationship between martial volunteerism and citizenship. Thankfully, many recent works have begun to address this shortcoming. Building off of the work of early pioneers such as James H. Kettner, historians like Elizabeth Ann Regosin began to examine how the concept of citizenship could enlighten our understanding of African-American emancipation and the blessings

¹⁸ Gary Gallagher, *The Union War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); Bob Luke and John David Smith, *Soldiering for Freedom: How the Union Army Recruited, Trained, and Deployed the U.S. Colored Troops* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 5 (quote); Christopher Phillips, *The Rivers Ran Backward: the Civil War and the Remaking of the American Middle Border*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 9 (quote).

¹⁹ Phillips, *The Rivers Ran Backward*, 200.

of liberty.²⁰ Both Shannon Smith Bennett's dissertation on the relationship between violence and citizenship and Andrew Diemer's *The Politics of Black Citizenship* examined African Americans' pursuit of citizenship in the border regions, while Stephen Kantrowitz's *More Than Freedom* similarly examined black activism in Boston.²¹ Specific research on the ties of martial volunteerism and citizenship has also seen a recent flourishing, particularly in Christian Samito's *Becoming American Under Fire* and Brian Moffett Taylor's "To Make the Union What It Ought to Be." Together, these two works showcase the desire of black volunteers to use their military service to advance African-American claims on American citizenship in a pattern previously followed by German and Irish Americans.²² Finally, Karin Petlack's dissertation on the relationship between Union-established martial law and expansions of African-American civil liberties underscores the importance of disruption to the regular social order in establishing African-American citizenship efforts.²³ In these works on citizenship, little attention is given to the Black Brigade in particular, but—as with the works of Gallagher, Phillips, Luke, and Smith—they provide a rich storehouse of contextual material.

²⁰ James H. Kettner, *The Development of American Citizenship, 1608-1870* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1978); Regosin, *Freedom's Promise*. While Kettner provides a look at citizenship prior to the Fifteenth Amendment, Regosin's takes place during the period of Reconstruction.

²¹ Shannon Smith Bennett, "Citizen Soldiers, Citizen Workers, Citizen Rioters, Violence, and Manhood in the Ohio Valley, 1862-1886" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2013), in ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, <http://ezproxy.baylor.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/1426630694?accountid=7014> (accessed February 19, 2018); Andrew K. Diemer, *Free African Americans in the Mid-Atlantic Borderland, 1817-1863* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2016); Kantrowitz, *More Than Freedom*.

²² Samito, *Becoming American under Fire*; Brian Moffett Taylor, "'To Make the Union What It Ought to Be.'"

²³ Karin Leann Petlack, "A Dilemma of Civil Liberties: Blacks under Union Military Control, 1861-1866" (PhD diss., University of California-Davis, 2013), in ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, <http://ezproxy.baylor.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/1449815864?accountid=7014> (accessed February 19, 2018).

Unfortunately, even books and articles examining the defense of Cincinnati cover the Black Brigade only in passing. The list of journal articles on the defense of Cincinnati contains many authors, including Roger Adams, Geoffrey Walden, James Ramage, Gail Stephens, Vernon Volpe, and David Roth. Counting a short work by Robert Wimberg, a review of these works still finds only truncated discussions of the Black Brigade, and erroneous and contradictory information is unfortunately present in a few.²⁴ Only three recent works have sought to address the Black Brigade specifically: Matthew Elrod's "The Impact of the Civil War on Northern Kentucky and Cincinnati, 1861-1865"; Jim Leeke's "The Black Brigade"; and Edgar Toppin's "Humbly They Served: the Black Brigade in the Defense of Cincinnati." Two of these works have major limitations when it comes to an in-depth discussion of the Black Brigade. Elrod's unpublished master's thesis spends a total of four pages on the Black Brigade and its impact on the city, and Leeke's twelve-page magazine article (including numerous pictures) lacks formal citations. Therefore, Edgar Toppin's noteworthy twenty-three page journal article from 1963 stands as the only in-depth secondary source treatment of the Black Brigade.²⁵

²⁴ Roger C. Adams, "Panic on the Ohio: The Defense of Cincinnati, Covington, and Newport, September 1862," *The Journal of Kentucky Studies* 9 (September 1992), 80–98; James A. Ramage, "Panic on the Ohio!: Confederates March on Cincinnati, September 1862 - II. Panic in Cincinnati," *Blue & Gray Magazine* 3, No. 5 (April–May 1986), 11–15; David E. Roth, "Panic on the Ohio!: Confederates March on Cincinnati, September 1862 - III. 'Squirrel Hunters' to the Rescue," *Blue & Gray Magazine* 3, No. 5 (April–May 1986), 16–18; Gail Stephens, "This City Must Not Be Taken," *Traces of Indiana & Midwestern History* 22 (Spring 2010), 4-17; Vernon L. Volpe, "Dispute Every Inch of Ground: Major General Lew Wallace Commands Cincinnati, September, 1862," *Indiana Magazine of History* 85, no. 2. (June 1989), 138-50; Geoffrey R. Walden, "Panic on the Ohio!: Confederates March on Cincinnati, September 1862 - I. Introduction," *Blue & Gray Magazine* 3, No. 5 (April–May 1986), 7–8; Geoffrey R. Walden, "Panic on the Ohio!: Confederates March on Cincinnati, September 1862 - IV. The Defenses of Cincinnati," *Blue & Gray Magazine* 3, No. 5 (April–May 1986), 19–29; Robert J. Wimberg, *Cincinnati and the Civil War: Under Attack!* (Cincinnati: Ohio Book Store, 1999).

²⁵ Matthew Elrod, "The Impact of the Civil War on Northern Kentucky and Cincinnati, 1861-1865" (MA Thesis, Northern Kentucky University, 2006), in ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/pqdtglobal/docview/304908607/67469A5201BB430CPQ/2?accountid=7014> (accessed February 19, 2018), Jim Leeke, "The Black Brigade," *Timeline* 18, no. 4

It is possible that a number of the sources have been dissuaded from a deeper investigation by the superior quality of the initial thirty-page history of the Black Brigade—Peter H. Clark’s *The Black Brigade*. Clark—born in 1829—grew up in Cincinnati and attended Oberlin College before becoming the acknowledged leader of the black school movement in Cincinnati through his teaching career and headship of Gaines High School.²⁶ It was Clark who, at the request of the Black Brigade members themselves, compiled a history of the group in 1864, including a record of relevant speeches and reports by the white abolitionist William Dickson and other members of the Black Brigade.²⁷ This source, along with brief chapters on the Black Brigade in George Washington Williams’s *A History of the Negro Troops in the War of the Rebellion, 1861-1865* (1888) and William Wells Brown’s *The Negro in the American Rebellion: His Heroism and Fidelity* (1867) have remained the primary documents consulted in references to the Black Brigade for the past one hundred fifty years.²⁸ However, *The Black Brigade*, though compiled by the black activist Peter H. Clark, relies heavily upon (and quotes in its entirety) the report to the Ohio legislature by the Black Brigade’s white commander, Judge William Martin Dickson. While Clark himself has not received the attention that he is due as a major influence on the black activist movement, Nikki Taylor

(July/Aug. 2001), 42-63; Edgar A. Toppin, "Humbly They Served: The Black Brigade in the Defense of Cincinnati," *The Journal of Negro History* 48, no. 2 (1963), 75-97.

²⁶ Dovie King Clark, "Peter Humphries Clark," in White et. al., "Distinguished Negroes of Ohio," 176. Peter H. Clark was not, as is commonly claimed, the grandson of William Clark, the explorer. Clark himself may have fabricated this myth in order to boost his own claim to American citizenship. Nikki Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist: The Radical Life of Peter H. Clark* (University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 18, 233.

²⁷ Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 3.

²⁸ Brown, *Negro in the American Rebellion*; George Washington Williams, *A History of the Negro Troops in the War of the Rebellion, 1861-1865* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1888).

has recently completed a biography of him that has begun to restore him to the public light. However, even Taylor's work fails to address more than briefly Clark's sole preserved writing, dedicating only two pages of her work to the subject.²⁹ The same cannot be said for Dickson: no scholarly work examines—even briefly—the life or motivations of the Black Brigade's commander.

In this work, I have sought to broaden the scope of the primary sources used in my study of the Black Brigade from the set of primary sources and newspapers utilized by prior researchers. This has been done primarily by compiling disparate sources used in examinations of the Black Brigade, while also using the papers of the leader of the Black Brigade of Cincinnati: abolitionist William Dickson. Despite having a prominent role as an activist within the Republican Party and a lively correspondence with influential American politicians, Dickson's speeches and papers have not been utilized by other historians researching the Black Brigade or in any broader examinations of abolitionism or Cincinnati politics.³⁰ Additional primary source documentation was compiled on Peter H. Clark, Powhatan Beaty (a Black Brigade member who went on to become a Medal of Honor recipient), and Lew Wallace (the military commander of Cincinnati) through supplementary reviews of available personal manuscripts, the *Official Records*, and

²⁹ Nikki Taylor, *America's First Black Socialist*, 102-3.

³⁰ The William Dickson Papers are located at the William L. Clements Library of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Dickson's personal correspondents included Abraham Lincoln, Lew Wallace, Roscoe Conkling, James A. Garfield, Grover Cleveland, William Howard Taft, Rutherford B. Hayes, Salmon Chase, and George B. McClellan, among others. Susan Swasta, "Finding Aid for William Dickson Papers, 1849-1912," in William L. Clements Library Manuscripts Division Finding Aids, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/clementsms/umich-wcl-M-2051dic?view=text> (accessed February 19, 2018).

Friedrich Hassaurek received regular updates from William M. Dickson while Hassaurek served as the Ambassador to Ecuador during Lincoln's first term. This correspondence is found in the Friedrich Hassaurek Papers, in Columbus, Ohio. "MSS 113 Friedrich Hassaurek Papers: Collection Synopsis," in Ohio Historical Society Finding Aids Collection, <http://www.ohiomemory.org/cdm/ref/collection/aids/id/1407> (accessed February 19, 2018).

Wallace's autobiography, to name a few.³¹ Those individuals crucial to the history of the Black Brigade also played key roles beyond the unit in American history, ranging from black education and civil rights to popular literature and military heroism.

That is not to say that this work aims to be a biography of any one of the members or historians of the Black Brigade. Rather, if anything, this work aims to incorporate broader history with a type of microhistory (which has been characterized by Charles Joyner as "asking large questions in small spaces"). Writers of microhistories strive to draw attention to individual histories while seeking to make observations about the larger culture.³² In places where this work intersects with individuals, I aim to personalize information already covered in broad-based quantitative histories, which have all too often ignored historical effects upon the individual.

My work will seek to expand our understanding of the Black Brigade through two other means: by approaching the Black Brigade from a more comprehensive approach and by underscoring the positive contributions of the Black Brigade to African-American citizenship efforts. I have sought to link disparate elements that have received treatment in some sources but not in others, expanding our view of the Black Brigade's formation and impact, while re-assessing our understanding of the Black Brigade in light of Clark and Dickson's attempts to use the history of the Black Brigade to advance African-

³¹ Examples of works consulted include: George Irving Reed, Emilius Oviatt Randall, and Charles Theodore Greve, eds., *Bench and Bar of Ohio: A Compendium of History and Biography* (Chicago: Century Publishing and Engraving, 1897), in Google Books, <https://books.google.com/books?id=4gQ9AAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false> (accessed February 19, 2018), 1:144-45; Lew Wallace, *Lew Wallace: An Autobiography*, Vol. 2. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1906. Reprint. New York: Garret Press, Inc., 1969); U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 70 vols. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1880-1901).

³² C. W. Joyner, *Shared Traditions: Southern History and Folk Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1999), 1.

American citizenship. Historians who address *The Black Brigade*—particularly modern historians (even in otherwise stellar works by Nikki Taylor and Brian Taylor)—almost universally portray the Black Brigade in an overall negative light. These interpretations stand in stark contrast to Peter H. Clark’s *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati* and Judge Dickson’s report, which, while not ignoring the initial mistreatment of black Cincinnatians, also highlight the eventual positive results of the crisis in light of political, economic, and social gains toward black citizenship.³³

Chapter Overview

This study of the Black Brigade is divided into five chapters, with an introduction and a conclusion. As the main purpose of this book is to deepen historical understanding of the Black Brigade and citizenship, I have found it essential to provide contextualization in Chapters One and Two. Chapter One, “The Road to Arms in the ‘Queen City of Mobs,’” traces the story of the relationship between the black and white communities of Cincinnati up to the race riots of 1841. It briefly tells the history of racial discrimination in the city of Cincinnati and examines the black response, seeking answers as to what motivated the African-American community in successive riots to begin repelling rioters through armed defense. Discussions regarding black manhood and religious abolition form the two foundation stones of this journey toward both African-American self-reliance and partnership with white abolitionists. The second chapter, “The

³³ Nikki Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom: Cincinnati’s Black Community, 1802-1868* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2005), 182-83; Brian Moffett Taylor, “‘To Make the Union What It Ought to Be,’” 155-57. Nikki Taylor’s more recent work focuses more attention on Peter H. Clark’s *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati* in her brief survey of their time of service; as a result, she now seems to portray the results of the Black Brigade in a more positive—though still limited—light. Nikki Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist*, 102-3.

Gathering Storm,” continues this theme by examining black and white reactions in Cincinnati after 1841 and during the era of the Fugitive Slave Law, including growing abolitionist interest and impact in politics. Correspondingly, this period also saw an increase in African-American commitment to martial actions, including the formation of the Attack Blues militia in Cincinnati.

Chapters Three, Four, and Five all focus directly on the role of the African-American community of Cincinnati within the Civil War. Chapter Three, “White Man’s War,” examines early African-American efforts to volunteer for Union military service, which were summarily rejected. Analyzing how discourses of martial volunteerism helped to construct black citizenship can help to unravel the threads of why black Americans like Powhatan Beaty would take up arms to defend a nation that had consistently denied them the rights of citizenship.

Chapter Four, “Let Them Be Treated Like Men,” deals specifically with the Black Brigade’s role in the defense of Cincinnati. The initial part of the chapter deals with the first phase of the Black Brigade’s service, which saw the free black males of the city forced to work on Cincinnati’s entrenchments under guard and without relief, despite their earlier offer of support. Crucial to this portion of the chapter are the concepts of martial law, military defense, and civilian labor. Due to the brutality used by the Cincinnati police force in rounding up the Black Brigade, this chapter also includes a brief examination of the police force at that time and its aggressively racist tactics. The second half of the chapter covers the second phase of the Black Brigade’s term of service, when it was allowed to participate freely in the defense of Cincinnati after the intervention of Cincinnati’s abolitionists. Working for the same wages as white laborers,

the Black Brigade took its place as the first formal organization of African Americans actually employed for military purposes during the Civil War. The chapter concludes with an examination of further military volunteerism by the men of the Black Brigade and other African-American males in the latter half of the Civil War.

The fifth chapter, “Dickson, Clark, and the Symbols of Citizenship,” discusses the remembrance of the Black Brigade, specifically through the 1864 publication of Dickson’s report and Clark’s *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*. By examining how black martial volunteerism was described by abolitionists after the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation but before the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, this chapter seeks to show how abolitionists explicitly and implicitly intertwined political arguments into their histories. The thesis concludes with an examination of the continued impact of Black Brigade members after the war, as well as the memorial built to commemorate the Black Brigade by the city of Cincinnati.

By adopting this structure, I intend to show the extended commitment of abolitionists (black and white) to the African-American quest for citizenship. This desire for citizenship underpinned African American efforts to volunteer early in the Civil War, and explains why so many black Cincinnatians volunteered to serve as soon as treatment improved in the Black Brigade. For many Cincinnatians, service in the Black Brigade served as a stepping-stone to early enlistment in Union regiments when the authorizations accompanying the final Emancipation Proclamation in January of 1863 gave them the opportunity to do so.

Many of the elements I have described are demonstrated in William Dickson's final speech to the Black Brigade. Some of his final lines in particular serve as a microcosm of the import of their service, concluding with the following:

Go to your homes with the consciousness of having performed your duty—of deserving, if you do not receive, the protection of the law, and bearing with you the gratitude and respect of all honorable men. You have learned to suffer and to wait; but in your hours of adversity, remember that the same God who has numbered the hairs of our heads, who watches over even the fate of a sparrow, is the God of your race as well as mine. The sweat-blood which the nation is now shedding at every pore is an awful warning of how fearful a thing it is to oppress the humblest being. Until our country shall again need your services, I bid you farewell.³⁴

In this closing, Dickson describes the racism that the Black Brigade members actively encountered, combined with the efforts that the men of the Black Brigade made to overcome this racism. On display is also a nod to the religious and moral conceptions that motivated him and so many others to participate in the cause of abolitionism. Furthermore, Dickson's focus on the men's duty demonstrates his recognition of their recent labor on the entrenchments (the short-term involvement of the Black Brigade in the war) while asserting—even before the Emancipation Proclamation—the necessity of their services in the future (the long-term involvement of the Black Brigade's men in the war). This speaks directly to the increasing and more openly practiced volunteerism of black communities throughout the nineteenth century. Finally, Dickson underscores the need for continued vigilance to protect gained citizenship rights. This is reflected in the need for Clark, Dickson, and others to continue the struggle for African-American citizenship in later years. By providing a further examination of the topic here, I hope in

³⁴ Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 14.

some small way to help contextualize existing research while providing increased access to the topic of the Black Brigade for future historians.

CHAPTER TWO

The Road to Arms in the “Queen City of Mobs”

Hatred to the negro is characteristic of the people of Cincinnati; more so, probably, than any other city in the West.

—William Wells Brown, *The Negro in the American Rebellion*, 1867

Racial Repression and the 1829 Riot

The city of Cincinnati stands as an important microcosm of the social situation in the nineteenth-century United States. Cincinnati was northern in its geography and birthplace of its inhabitants, southern in politics and economics, and western in both aspirations and culture. These elements merged to form the general opinions of white Cincinnatians. As Nikki Taylor has pointed out, this blending of cultures resulted in a conglomeration of negative attitudes and actions against black Americans, including “economic repression, racial segregation and exclusion, and the denial of civil rights compounded by extreme and frequent mob violence.”¹

Cincinnati’s center sits in a valley along the shores of the gently meandering Ohio River. Numerous bluffs and hills, some over four hundred feet higher than the river waters, ring the central valley, which descends from the hills in a series of gradually descending plains. The Ohio River, eighteen hundred feet wide at the city center, separates it from the mouth of the Licking River, which emerges from between substantial river bluffs to divide the city of Newport, Kentucky from its westerly neighbor, Covington. When the city was first surveyed in 1784, it was named

¹ Nikki Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 4-5.

Losantiville, for this position across from the Licking River, but the name lasted only six years before Governor Arthur St. Clair renamed it in honor of his membership in the Revolutionary Army Society of Cincinnati. Cincinnati's position placed it north of the Ohio River, making it part of the Northwest Territory that passed from British hands to the United States with the Treaty of Paris in 1783. Four years later, the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 outlawed slavery in the territory, which included the area that would become Ohio. Meanwhile, Kentucky—Ohio's neighbor to the south—was admitted as a slave state. Situated along the watery border between these two political realities, Cincinnati was well-positioned for both trade and turmoil.²

Though African Americans in antebellum Cincinnati were free in name, they lacked access to the most basic rights and benefits of citizenship. This placed them in a liminal—and dangerous—state. When examining the city of Cincinnati, one must bear in mind that the border region was much more fluid than most modern histories portray it. Christopher Phillips, in his crowning achievement *The Rivers Ran Backward*, provides an excellent survey of the postbellum shift in cultural memory to a “One North” and “One South” perspective that uses the Ohio River as a distinct boundary between the North and the South. Phillips argues that the regionalisms of America have been written out of our Civil War histories, thus failing to recognize a “western political culture that traditionally accommodated slavery.”³ In Ohio's early days, Ohio growers hired slaves from Kentucky to work their fields and continued to do so even into the 1830s. Likewise, slaveholders frequently brought their enslaved domestic servants north of the Ohio without

² Wendell P. Dabney, *Cincinnati's Colored Citizens: Historical, Sociological, and Biographical* (1926; reprint, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1926), 10, 17.

³ Phillips, *The Rivers Ran Backward*, 6-10.

consequence. Borrowing from the southern mindset, Cincinnatians considered family manufacturing and domestic service to be inferior, servile, and associated with African Americans. As a result, residents of the city workhouse could not even be impressed upon to help carry their own water.⁴

Even more so than slavery, the border states of the Midwest were dedicated to the cause of white supremacy, establishing its doctrines as the foundations for their societal framework through a series of Black Laws. In the early nineteenth century, Ohio, although technically a free state, was hardly friendly to black settlement. In 1802, voting was limited to white, male citizens of the state, and a measure to prevent black immigration was only narrowly defeated. Two years later, a series of laws were enforced requiring African Americans to possess certificates of freedom and to have sponsors to remain in the state, while also forbidding black testimony in court and black involvement in the militia. In addition, black Americans also encountered significant barriers to education. Without access to either standard forms of self-improvement or legal protection, black Americans were frequently targeted without repercussions. This was particularly true in Cincinnati: frequent anti-black riots rocked the community at a level seen only in Philadelphia during the antebellum years, causing abolitionists to dub Cincinnati the “Mob City—The Queen of Mobs.”⁵

⁴ Gerber, *Black Ohio and the Color Line*, 11; Stanley Harrold, *Border War: Fighting over Slavery before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2010), 66-67; Daniel Aaron, *Cincinnati, Queen City of the West* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1992), 296.

⁵ V. Jacque Voegeli, *Free But Not Equal: The Midwest and the Negro During the Civil War* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1967), 1; Folk, “Black Man’s Burden in Ohio,” 4; Thomas David Matijasic, “Conservative Reform in the West: The African Colonization Movement in Ohio, 1826-1839” (PhD diss., Miami University, 1982), in ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/pagepdf/303233791/Record/20171229A9054D98PQ/5?accountid=7014> (accessed February 19, 2018), 19-20; Litwack, *North of Slavery*, 93-94; Nikki Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 42; *Philanthropist*, October 20, 1841, quoted in Patrick Allen Folk, “‘The Queen City of Mobs’: Riots and

Chances to counter this white supremacy through social interaction were small, as the practice of white supremacy had led to the de facto social segregation of Cincinnati. Personal contact between black and white Cincinnatians was severely limited, with the former being banned from almost all hotels, restaurants, theaters, railroads, streetcars, and hospitals. John Malvin, reminiscing about the 1820s in Cincinnati, recorded that black Americans found “every door closed... excepting jails and penitentiaries.”⁶ Even in the city graveyard, black citizens were treated differently, being laid north-to-south rather than east-to-west. As a result, the black community in Cincinnati remained insulated and persecuted. Though Ohio served as a major route on the Underground Railroad for fleeing slaves, the state failed to attract substantial numbers of black permanent settlers. The poor treatment that the black community faced was similar to that experienced by fellow members of their race across the South, rendering living conditions—in Malvin’s words—“little better than in Virginia.”⁷

Over time, the black residents of Cincinnati were accorded the lowest place on the social ladder of the city. At the top were native-born or English-born Protestants, followed in descending order by the Germans, Irish, American Indians, and African Americans. Since groups that were higher on the social ladder often degraded those below them, many Irish and black Americans constantly provoked and insulted one

Community Reactions in Cincinnati, 1788-1848” (PhD diss., University of Toledo, 1978), in ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/pqdtglobal/docview/302887555/C28E8C48472C4E44PQ/1?accountid=7014> (accessed February 19, 2018), 361.

⁶ Gerber, *Black Ohio and the Color Line*, 6; John Malvin, *Autobiography of John Malvin: A Narrative* (Cleveland: Leader Printing, 1879), 39.

⁷ Aaron, *Queen City of the West*, 304; Nikki Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 45, 20, 26, 232; R. Douglas Hurt, *The Ohio Frontier: Crucible of the Old Northwest, 1720-1830* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 387; George Knepper, *Ohio and Its People* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1989), 204-5; Malvin, *Autobiography*, 39.

another, sparking fights to assert superiority or to resist disparagement of their own status. Faced with the precarious position of being a minority in an often hostile city, black Americans sought to strengthen their chances for uplift and attainment of the full rights of citizenship by two primary means: by building connections to the local white abolitionist community and by making their voices heard through the channels of moral suasion and self-respect.⁸

Yet even at this early stage, the black community of Cincinnati was beginning to be pushed toward other avenues of racial uplift. The first seeds of political action had been planted in the churches. The African Methodist Episcopal Church, which had begun operating under the headship of Richard Allen in the late eighteenth century, was legally established as a denomination in 1816. This denomination, which was immensely popular among African Americans, balanced ideas of brotherly equality with notions of black separatism, all while pushing for the granting of citizenship rights. As the seed germinated, Richard Allen and others began launching some of the earliest black petition drives, arguing that the right to petition the government for a redress of grievances was granted to all American citizens, including African Americans.⁹

The potential benefits of the other avenue of racial uplift—martial action—were not initially clear, coming as they did from an incident of violent oppression against Cincinnati's African American community. Cincinnati, as discussed, had created a strongly unwelcome climate for black citizens, which often flared up into low-scale violence. But as the city expanded throughout the 1820s, white Cincinnati laborers grew

⁸ Nikki Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 108, 425-26.

⁹ Paul Harvey, *Through the Storm, Through the Night: A History of African American Christianity* (Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield, 2011), 37-40.

increasingly frustrated by the influx of black low-wage workers, whom they viewed as potential competition. Worried about the economic climate and the increasing number of low-wage black workers, city officials issued a declaration in August 1829 that they would begin strictly enforcing Black Laws. Free African Americans were given a grace period of only thirty days to come into compliance with the laws—which included the requirement that every black citizen had to post five hundred dollars as a deposit with the city to ensure their good behavior.¹⁰ Without waiting for the allotted time to elapse, white citizens of Cincinnati began a violent campaign to rid the city of its black inhabitants. A series of riots in Cincinnati broke out, forcing 1,100 African Americans—nearly half of the black population—to evacuate the growing city of 24,000. As Silas Crowfoot has shown, at the time of the event, news of the incident was suppressed, allowing several hundred rioters to wreak their destruction without outside consequences from city, state, or federal authorities. Faced with no other recourse, some black residents eventually took up arms to defend themselves against the ongoing riots, killing one rioter and effectively ending the outbreak of violence. Though the Ohio legislature passed laws preventing black access to public benevolent associations and schools as a result of the riots, the black citizens of Cincinnati had seen the levelling power that martial ends could secure for them in times of crisis.¹¹

The riot of 1829 also catalyzed black political efforts. In direct response to the violence in Cincinnati, the first African-American convention was convened in September 1830. Held in Philadelphia, this convention elected Richard Allen as the

¹⁰ Knepper, *Ohio and Its People*, 135; Diemer, *Free African Americans*, 84.

¹¹ Crowfoot, “Community Development for a White City,” 207-9, 214, 237-41; Folk, “Black Man’s Burden in Ohio,” 5.

president of a newly formed association for the improvement of black Americans' situation and for the establishment of a colony in Canada to act as a refuge. Despite the inclusion of a colonization plan for Canada, delegates underscored their American citizenship and declared that only threats to their American citizenship had forced them to include this step in their plans. The following year, a second convention declared the commitment of African Americans to the Constitution, which "guarantees in letter and spirit to every freeman born in this country, all the rights and immunities of citizenship."¹²

Therefore, as a result of the 1829 riots, black Americans greatly increased the number of tools they used to attain full citizenship: while still seeking to build bridges to the local white abolitionist community and pursue moral suasion, they now took more concrete action to seek political and martial solutions to their oppressed condition.

Religious Abolitionism and the 1836 Riot

The task of establishing connections between black and white communities was not going to be an easy one. Prior to the 1830s, the tradition of slavery and racism had become so engrained in the United States that white abolitionists were sometimes unwilling to admit African Americans to their antislavery societies.¹³ In addition, abolitionism—to put it mildly—was not a popular position in Cincinnati. Opposition to abolitionism came from numerous proponents of both the Southern agricultural system and the Northern industrial system, whose merger most Cincinnatians believed could be

¹² Diemer, *Free African Americans*, 84-86.

¹³ Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease, *They Who Would Be Free: Blacks' Search for Freedom, 1830-1861* (New York: Athenaeum, 1974), 68.

achieved with ease if no interference arose, ensuring economic prosperity for the cities that straddled the border between them.¹⁴ As a result, the threat of being targeted by rioters for holding anti-slavery principles was a constant worry to many would-be activists.¹⁵ But a significant number of religious abolitionists were willing to take the necessary risks and stepped into the fight for racial equality.

The rise of Protestant religious abolitionism owed much to the revivalist and activist teachings springing forth from the Second Great Awakening in the United States. As American denominations underwent the “formative years” of the early nineteenth century, they were faced with an increasing need to compete with other religious denominations in the growing marketplace for religious activity.¹⁶ This was particularly the case in Cincinnati. Operating in the competitive atmosphere of a booming metropolis, churches and other religious groups adopted the rhetoric and forms of the business world, actively vying for congregants and debating what changes they were willing to make to increase growth while, at the same time, striving for doctrinal clarity to differentiate and distinguish themselves.¹⁷

Faced with the ongoing rapid expansion of the Presbyterian Church in the city, Cincinnati’s growing prominence, and the need to compete with other religious organizations, Joshua Wilson, a local Presbyterian minister, determined that it was in the church’s best interest to create a new theological seminary in Cincinnati. The General

¹⁴ Phillips, *The Rivers Ran Backward*, 44-48.

¹⁵ Pease and Pease, *They Who Would Be Free*, 234-35.

¹⁶ Sidney E. Mead, “Denominationalism: The Shape of Protestantism in America,” *Church History* 23, no. 4 (December 1954), 294.

¹⁷ Buggein, “A Marketplace for Religion,” iii, 161-62.

Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, however, felt otherwise, choosing Alleghanytown, Pennsylvania for a new seminary instead. Nonplussed, Wilson founded an Ohio Board of Education, secured pledges for \$4,000, acquired land on the outskirts of Cincinnati, and attained a charter for the foundation of what would become Lane Seminary on February 11, 1829. The college's board invited Lyman Beecher, a well-known eastern preacher, to become the first President of Lane Seminary. Feeling that "the moral destiny of our nation, and all our institutions and hopes... turns on the character of the West," Beecher accepted, and Lane Seminary began accepting its first students.¹⁸

In addition to the rise of religious educational institutions, the Second Great Awakening gave rise to a substantial voluntary association movement. Since the majority of denominations were seen as ecclesial authorities and governing bodies rather than activist hubs, most religious abolitionism in the city would take this form of voluntary associations of church members rather than official denominational organizations. By following this method, religious abolitionism found itself as one small part of the broad expansion of civil associations that were considered to be critical to the internal improvement of the nation. Driven by an intense desire to create a more moral society, Americans of a wide variety of denominations had expanded voluntary associations to a staggering level, rivalling the federal, state, and local expenditures on internal improvements. With so much capital and social engagement, associations wielded immense influence, as French aristocrat Alexis de Tocqueville observed during his visit to the United States:

¹⁸ Buggein, "A Marketplace for Religion," 180-81; Board of Education of the PCUSA, *Lane-Lebanon Alliance*, 15-16; Lyman Beecher, "Autobiography," quoted in Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catherine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1976), 102.

As soon as several of the inhabitants have taken up an opinion or a feeling which they wish to promote in the world, they look out for mutual assistance; and as soon as they have found each other out, they combine. From that moment they are no longer isolated men, but a power seen from afar, whose actions serve for an example, and whose language is listened to.¹⁹

These societies and associations grew to include the American Colonization Society, the United Foreign Missionary Society, American Home Mission Society, American Education Society, and American Bible Society.²⁰

Preceding the rise of abolitionist organizations was the formation of colonizationist organizations, such as the aforementioned American Colonization Society. These colonizationist organizations sought to bring about the end of slavery by funding the emancipation and gradual removal of black Americans from the United States and colonizing them on the shores of either the Caribbean or the African continent. Throughout the first few decades of the nineteenth century, abolitionists grew increasingly suspicious of and hostile to colonizationists. Abolitionists came to see colonizationists, who sought to remove black Americans rather than granting them civil rights, as hypocrites: intercession efforts that claimed to be backed by strong morals were, in many cases, simply masking much deeper-seated prejudices.²¹ By the early 1830s, abolitionists began intentionally seeking ways to stir public discussion, hoping to create what abolitionist Theodore Dwight Weld called a “line of attack for a general

¹⁹ Stephen Middleton, *The Black Laws: Race and the Legal Process in Early Ohio* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2005), 98; Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, (1835; reprint, New York: Random House, 2000), 632.

²⁰ Bradley J. Longfield, *Presbyterians and American Culture: A History* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 71-75.

²¹ Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 26-27.

pitched battle with the colonizationists.” To this end, they convinced students at Lane Seminary to host the Lane Debates in 1834.²²

The 1834 Lane Debates were a series of discussions held over a three-week period on the questions “Ought the people of the Slaveholding States to abolish slavery immediately?” and “Are the doctrines, tendencies, and measures of the American Colonization Society, and the influence of its principal supporters, such as to render it worthy of the patronage of the Christian public?” Beginning on February 4, the debates produced a powerful call for the linking of antislavery stances and what Larry Willey refers to as “evangelical fervor.”²³ Using techniques similar to those of Charles G. Finney, the foremost Second Great Awakening preacher, Theodore Weld and others hoped that their sponsored debates would serve as the tip of the spear of an antislavery revival in Ohio to bring slave-holders and their supporters to repentance, while converting colonizationists into fully devoted abolitionists.²⁴ In this effort, the abolitionists were extremely successful. Convinced by the arguments of transplanted Southerners to act decisively to end the ongoing sin of slavery, the student body voiced full support of immediate abolitionism and rejected their prior belief in colonization as a means to solving the issue of slavery. Lane Seminary students began to interact freely with Cincinnati’s black community, eating with them, staying with them, and attending

²² Litwack, *North of Slavery*, 24.

²³ Larry Gene Willey, “The Reverend John Rankin: Early Ohio Antislavery Leader” (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 1976), in ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/pagepdf/302810352/Record/5937C2485FE54DBCPQ/72?accountid=7014> (accessed February 19, 2018), 163-4.

²⁴ Lawrence Thomas Lesick, *The Lane Rebels: Evangelicalism and Antislavery in Antebellum America* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1980), 82.

their church services. In addition, Lane students founded both a private school and a lyceum for African Americans.²⁵

Backlash from the community was swift. The children of Asa Mahan, a trustee of the board of Lane Seminary and supporter of the debates, were attacked and nearly stoned in front of his Cincinnati house. Participants and supporters of the debates were likewise ostracized. With Lyman Beecher temporarily out of town, the pro-colonization board members took steps to curtail free speech on the campus and began the process of expelling two students: Theodore Weld, the organizer of the debates, and William Allan, the antislavery society president. In an act of protest, Theodore Weld, Asa Mahan, and the other so-called Lane Rebels chose to withdraw from Lane Seminary and shift their support upstate to Oberlin College.²⁶ Once established, their efforts to have Oberlin be the first American university opened to black students were successful.²⁷ With this move, the primary locus of Ohio anti-abolitionism moved from the south to the north. Beecher had hoped that the debates about the colonization society would help abolitionists and colonizationists realize they were working for the same cause from different angles; instead, as the organizers had hoped, the gap between the two approaches widened.²⁸

²⁵ Buggein, "A Marketplace for Religion," 184-87; Willey, "The Reverend John Rankin," 163-64; Henry B. Stanton, "Great Debate at Lane Seminary," in *Debate at the Lane Seminary, Cincinnati; Speech of James A. Thome; and Letter of the Rev. Dr. Samuel H. Cox against the American Colonization Society* (Boston: Garrison and Knapp, 1834), 3, quoted in Crowfoot, "Community Development for a White City," 161-64; Folk, "Black Man's Burden in Ohio," 119; J. Brent Morris, *Oberlin, Hotbed of Abolitionism: College, Community, and the Fight for Freedom and Equality in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2014), 24.

²⁶ Morris, *Oberlin*, 26; Buggein, "A Marketplace for Religion," 187-89; Willey, "The Reverend John Rankin," 164-68.

²⁷ Gerber, *Black Ohio and the Color Line*, 12.

²⁸ Richard Frederick O'Dell, "The Early Antislavery Movement in Ohio" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1948), 394; Matijasic, "Conservative Reform in the West," 166-70.

Over the next few years, both colonizationist and abolitionist movements continued their active civic engagement, each seeking to win converts to their cause. Building off of the foundation formed by the establishment of the Abolition Society of Cincinnati in 1821, Ohio abolitionists engaged in an explosively expansive campaign, founding the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society in 1835 and a total of 213 anti-slavery societies by 1837.²⁹ Colonizationists also followed up on earlier successes with new advances. In 1825, the Synod of Ohio had passed a pro-colonization petition by a nearly unanimous vote, and in the following decade, the Presbyterian presidents of Miami and Ohio Universities helped launch local colonization societies to counter abolitionist influence.³⁰ Though these activities paled in scope compared to the more active and organized anti-slavery resistance elsewhere across the North, they reflected a distinctive stand for the end of slavery in a region that was generally unfriendly to any form of abolitionism, whether immediate or gradual.

Just how unfriendly to abolitionists the community of Cincinnati was can be seen in its reaction to the activities of James Birney, a former slave-owner from Kentucky who had been converted to abolitionism by the Lane Seminary debates. In 1835, Birney, now an active member of the American Anti-Slavery Society, took steps toward moving his abolitionist newspaper, the *Philanthropist*, to Cincinnati.³¹ Anti-abolitionists, led by the commercial businessmen and newspaper-owners of Cincinnati led the resistance against Birney's intended move, declaring that "the Southern feeling is too strong in this city...

²⁹ O'Dell, "The Early Antislavery Movement in Ohio," 119-120.

³⁰ Willey, "The Reverend John Rankin," 158.

³¹ Crowfoot, "Community Development for a White City," 269-70.

to admit of the successful operations of a Society, tending to separate the ties which connect the city with those [southern] States, and withdraw from her their confidence and trade.” Unwilling to jeopardize the prosperity of the city, they sought to cut off the abolitionist press before it could establish itself.³² Despite staunch opposition, Birney successfully moved his press to Cincinnati early in 1836. That April, fights broke out after a black boy beat a white boy in a trivial scuffle. Civic order quickly deteriorated, and white mobs roamed the city unimpeded. For three days, rioters burned shops and homes owned by African Americans, and the rioting was only deescalated through personal action by the mayor. Three months later, Birney’s address on July 5 to a gathering of black Americans celebrating the Declaration of Independence was violently interrupted by protesters.³³

With Birney unintimidated and continuing his efforts to publish the *Philanthropist*, the protesters turned their efforts against the printing operation itself. One week after Birney’s 5th of July address, the offices of the *Philanthropist* were attacked: at midnight, thirty to fifty men broke into the printing shop and damaged the press. Two weeks later, a mob of several thousand gathered near the offices of the Anti-Slavery Society before launching a stronger assault: the press was completely destroyed and the offices ransacked. Their primary task accomplished, the rioters turned their anger upon local abolitionists and sought to drag them from their homes. Thwarted at each abolitionist’s house by their absence or quick escapes, the crowd returned to the printing

³² Charles Ramsey, “Abolition Society in Cincinnati,” *Cincinnati Republican*, Jan. 18, 1836, quoted in Crowfoot, “Community Development for a White City,” 272; Aaron, *Queen City of the West*, 301-14.

³³ Crowfoot, “Community Development for a White City,” 281-87, 309-12; Folk, “Black Man’s Burden in Ohio,” 28.

press, throwing its remaining pieces into the Ohio River. Throughout the night, remnants of the mob launched numerous assaults on the homes of black residents (particularly in Church Alley), sparking an exchange of gunfire.³⁴ The exchange gave the attackers pause, with many rioters unwilling to risk their lives for an assault. When it was discovered that the African Americans had fled for their lives to Lane Seminary during the reprieve, the crowd ransacked the homes before retreating. The mayor eventually diffused the situation by congratulating the mob and saying that enough had been accomplished.³⁵

In the 1836 riot, martial action by both black and white abolitionists had been crucial in preventing further bodily injury. The defense of African American homes was ultimately unsuccessful, but the efforts by white abolitionists to shield them after their retreat to Lane Seminary were effective. Until the mayor dispersed the mob, it had been seriously contemplating an attack on Lane Seminary; only the dissuading power of a hike of three miles over clayey roads covered in ankle-deep mud prevented the mob from pursuing its aims. But had the mob advanced on the Seminary, it would have been met by a well-armed student body, which had been given permission to open fire on the mob if they approached.³⁶

In the aftermath of the riot, Birney maintained his desire to continue publication, but Achilles Pugh, the publisher, nearly cancelled his contract. Only quick intervention by the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society to provide future financial guarantees for the safety of

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Woodson, "The Negroes of Cincinnati," 9.

³⁶ Lyman Beecher as recorded by Levi Coffin, quoted in Dabney, *Cincinnati's Colored Citizens*, 69. Beecher did mitigate his authorization to open fire with a caveat: "I told them not to kill 'em, aim low, hit 'em in the legs." Ibid.

Pugh's property kept Birney's *Philanthropist* in business.³⁷ A series of court cases assessing the damages owed to the abolitionists followed, with Salmon Chase representing the abolitionist parties. Despite the obvious guilt of the rioters, the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society and Achilles Pugh were awarded only a fraction of the assessed damages.³⁸

Faced with these blatant injustices, Cincinnati's white evangelicals continued to debate slavery and appropriate responses to it throughout the middle decades of the nineteenth century. A reanalysis of Walter Stix Glazer's research on Cincinnati provides some clues as to the relative importance of slavery debates to the community. Glazer's research reveals more than one hundred meetings of groups and organizations between 1839 and 1842. Although political organizations for Whigs or Democrats had three times as many recorded participants as any other type of meeting, slavery issues still mustered nearly a third as many participants. This ranks it as one of the most active categories, with nearly three times as many participants as local gatherings for patrons of the arts and as many participants as organizations gathered to discuss political banking issues (such as tariffs or state banks). During this time period, there were nine city-wide meetings of colonizationists, abolitionists, and anti-abolitionists. In general, participants in all organizations were disproportionately Unitarian, Presbyterian, or Episcopalian, but a detailed re-examination of Glazer's raw data from First, Second, and Fifth Presbyterian church records reveals that in 1840, Old School Presbyterians were disproportionately more active in anti-abolitionist meetings than their New School counterparts, while also

³⁷ Middleton, *The Black Laws*, 109.

³⁸ Ibid., 111.

remaining active in colonizationist meetings. New School Presbyterians, on the other hand, were active in colonizationist and abolitionist activities rather than anti-abolitionist meetings.³⁹

As the debates wore on, abolitionists increasingly denigrated those who continued to hold colonizationist positions for not being radical enough. For example, Birney's *Philanthropist* criticized Lyman Beecher on January 21, 1840, in "The Clergymen of Cincinnati" by declaring that Dr. Beecher, despite his anti-slavery actions over the years, had recently refused to read from the pulpit a notice calling for additional education for the black citizens of Cincinnati. Therefore, the *Philanthropist* concluded: "The anti-slavery friends of Dr. Beecher, abroad, will learn from this how much they have to hope from him. *Nothing!* NOTHING!!" Beecher did not quite see it that way; in a letter he wrote to Arthur Tappan (a New York merchant and abolitionist) in 1833, he confided that

³⁹ Glazer, "Cincinnati in 1840: A Community Profile," 129, 165, 168, 173, 261-97; Glazer's church records (including registers of communicants, members, baptisms, marriages, and deaths from 1830-1860) came from modern-day Christ Church Episcopal, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Covenant Presbyterian Church, Wesley Methodist Church, and Ninth Street Baptist Church; additional religious affiliation was retrieved from Cincinnati's "Vital Statistics" records of marriages, births, burial notices, as well as the cemetery records of Spring Grove Cemetery. Church membership lists from these sources covered Christ Church Episcopal, St. Paul's Episcopal, First Presbyterian (Old School), Second Presbyterian (New School), Fifth Presbyterian (Old School), Wesley Methodist, and Ninth Street Baptist records from the time. According to Glazer, these were the largest churches at the time aside from the Catholic churches; no information was extant on the other 35 churches in the city from that era. Glazer's information was cross-referenced with information from the Shaffer *Directory for Cincinnati in 1840*, the extremely thorough 1840 census conducted by Charles Cist, the 1838 tax list, and a variety of newspapers to create his data sample of 1,538 activists. Ibid., 29-30, 87, 91, 261-97, 307-8.

Unfortunately, even with Glazer's in-depth research, religious affiliation information is lacking for many of the activists: out of the 1,538 activists, the religious affiliation of only 229 are known. Proportions of participation in organizations reveal a higher proportion of activists participated in colonization movements than abolitionist associations. Anti-abolitionist associations had the fewest adherents, but of course, city records did not include unofficial gatherings, such as riots. Ibid.

In contrast to the evangelical camp, which turned out a number of well-known abolitionists, American Catholicism did not produce any well-known abolitionists until the autumn of 1862, when Cincinnati Archbishop John Purcell came out unambiguously in favor of immediate emancipation. There are many reasons for this difference of approach, not least of which were the systemic Catholic cautiousness of the period and the theological structures of Catholicism that empowered an overarching authority with the ability to settle moral questions. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, 126, 158; John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2003), 84.

he would “end slavery immediately” if he could, but, seeing that as an impossibility, his present goals were to “get the slaves out of bondage in the shortest time and best manner” and to “make emancipation easy instead of difficult; to make use of the current of human fears, and passions, and interests, when they may be made to set in our favor, instead of attempting to row up stream against them.”⁴⁰ The rationale for the tactics pursued by Beecher and other gradual abolitionists notwithstanding, Charles Wilson and Thomas Matijasic have shown that colonization and gradual abolitionism intentionally or unintentionally appealed to a growing number of Ohioans who opposed slavery but were also desperate to prevent both black participation in white society and black residence within the state.⁴¹ Though colonizationists had proved the appeal of their position, it was left up to black and white abolitionists to seek increased citizenship rights for black Americans.

Immigration, Urbanization, and the 1841 Riot

Complicating the abolitionists’ goals was the economic growth of the city. Between 1819 and 1830, the value of manufacturing goods produced by Cincinnati jumped from \$1 million annually to \$2.8 million.⁴² The reason for this boom was economic opportunity through the boat-building and meat-packing industries coupled with the city’s easy access to canals, steamers on the Ohio River, and the fertile Miami

⁴⁰ Knepper, *Ohio and Its People*, 208; letter by Lyman Beecher to Arthur Tappan, April 23, 1833, quoted in Charles Beecher, ed., *The Autobiography of Lyman Beecher* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1865), in Library of Congress Collection, <https://archive.org/details/autobiographyc02beec> (accessed February 19, 2018), 2:323.

⁴¹ Matijasic, “Conservative Reform in the West,” 31; Charles J. Wilson, “The Negro in Early Ohio,” *Ohio Archaeological & Historical Quarterly* 39 (1930), 719.

⁴² Hurt, *The Ohio Frontier*, 370.

Valley. Early economic expansion contributed to a thriving land speculation industry as land prices skyrocketed to meet growing industry needs. Walter Stix Glazer reports that in the early years, “a man could purchase an acre of land with a day’s work,” but by the mid-century, land value alone was responsible for the vast majority of a building’s worth in Cincinnati; analysis shows that between 1789 and 1836, some properties doubled in value every three years.⁴³ Cincinnatians were proud of their economic accomplishments, frequently referring to the city as “the Wonderful,” “Queen of the West,” or “The Precocious Daughter of the West.”⁴⁴

The economic boom encouraged growth and opportunities for low-income workers, causing friction between the majority white laborers and minority black laborers, who, given the limited economic opportunities available to them, were often willing to do the same work for a lower wage. Some white Cincinnatians even saw emancipation and colonization efforts as an attempt to free slaves from the South and to send them north, where it was quickly assumed that they would steal jobs from white workers by undercutting them in labor negotiations. Black Americans, however, sought jobs in Cincinnati simply because it was easier to find jobs in the city than it was to find employment in smaller locales: the progress and economic opportunities that seemed to be the rights of other citizens of Cincinnati were powerful incentives for African Americans.⁴⁵

⁴³ Glazer, “Cincinnati in 1840,” 45-46, 61-62.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 82.

⁴⁵ Knepper, *Ohio and Its People*, 206; Nikki Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 483.

Though faced with significant economic obstacles, black Cincinnatians refused to have their rights of citizenship lessened and sought to pursue their own entrepreneurial endeavors to mitigate the effects of racism. In riverfront industries, as in most other aspects of life in Cincinnati, black residents were prevented from enjoying the economic mobility that the city had to offer. For example, artisans were prevented from advancing in their trades, and skilled workers were forced to take unskilled jobs to avoid unemployment. Consequently, some black Cincinnatians were able to establish the Iron Chest Company (a successful real estate company) and several lucrative businesses in the coal, bedstead manufacturing, or barbershop industries and achieve some small measure of success. In addition, a large number of black Cincinnatians took positions on riverboats, which provided opportunities for temporary escape from Cincinnati, but injected even more instability and transience into the black community.⁴⁶

In conjunction with the economic boom came a significant increase in population: census counts revealed 9,600 residents of Cincinnati in 1820, 46,300 in 1840, and 115,438 in 1850—even after a crippling cholera epidemic that took 4,832 souls the previous year.⁴⁷ This stream of humanity would continue to flow into the bowl-shaped valley of Cincinnati until by 1870 Cincinnati had the highest population density in the nation, averaging 37,143 people per square mile.⁴⁸ This teeming mass came from every corner of the country, as well as from Europe, and included a hodge-podge of nationalities. Southern, Irish, Yankee, Border State, Ohioan, English, Middle Atlantic, Pennsylvanian,

⁴⁶ Nikki Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 100-4.

⁴⁷ Richard Folk, “Black Man’s Burden in Ohio,” 26.

⁴⁸ Knepper, *Ohio and Its People*, 160, 316.

and German populations each had a significant presence and a representative population of 5 percent or larger. Of these, the largest of the groups was the significant German immigrant population, which represented 28 percent of the total in 1840. The contrast with the small African American community was sharp: despite coming from a wide variety of state backgrounds, the black community only numbered 2,258 residents in 1840, representing less than 5 percent of the total.⁴⁹

Although they came from a variety of backgrounds, most Cincinnatians were content to focus on their own business endeavors. However, this generally peaceful co-existence was occasionally punctuated by bitter political, denominational, or ethnic disturbances. This was particularly the case after a significant number of German and Irish immigrants came to the city in the 1840s and 1850s, which—combined with growing trade ties to the lower South—heightened ethnic, racial, and social tension. This ongoing tension caused racial and ethnic minorities to gather in clusters for protection; though these clusters were scattered across the city, some districts held particularly large groups of one community. For example, Germans gathered in the “Over-the-Rhine” neighborhood, while African Americans were found in larger numbers in the slums of “Little Africa” or a neighborhood pejoratively called “Bucktown.”⁵⁰

As Nikki Taylor has argued, African Americans were “excluded from the republic” by their marginalization within the community of Cincinnati. Prevented from exercising their full economic, social, political, legal, or religious potential, black

⁴⁹ Glazer, “Cincinnati in 1840,” 21, 98. A closer look at the numbers shows the breadth of the diversity of nativities: Western States 1%, Southern States 5%, Ireland 6%, New England 8%, Border States 9%, Ohio 9%, England/Scotland 10%, Pennsylvania 11%, New York & New Jersey 12%, Germany 28%, and Other/None 2%. Ibid., 21, 98.

⁵⁰ Glazer, “Cincinnati in 1840,” 94-102; Knepper, *Ohio and Its People*, 204-5; Litwack, *North of Slavery*, 168.

Americans who sought freedom and protection ended up in a system of repression. Yet despite these challenges, they continued to seek ways to assert their rights and to reap the benefits that citizenship within Cincinnati and the United States could provide. At the forefront of these efforts were the black male elites of Cincinnati. It is also this group of black Americans in Cincinnati about which we know the most, though even that knowledge is limited by the small body of literature produced on or by black Americans in Cincinnati during the nineteenth century. The obstacles of poor education and censorship limited the production of records by the black community, and outside information on the community was severely curtailed by the catastrophic fire that ravaged Cincinnati's public records in 1884.⁵¹ James Oliver Horton and Stacy Flaherty have catalogued a list of black leaders from 1830 to 1860; their analysis shows that Cincinnati had a disproportionately high number of light-skinned African Americans in both the community and in leadership roles. This group, designated as mulattos in the national census, were sometimes permitted to vote or exercise greater influence in the city of Cincinnati. However, unlike mulattos in the Lower South port cities, mulattos in Cincinnati were more likely to continue to work with, live among, and promote the interests of the other members of the black community. Though nominal business success and community advancement endeavors resulted in the creation of a black elite, black Cincinnatians exhibited a continuing identity of cohesive community: regardless of skin

⁵¹ Nikki Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 6-8, 29.

color, being part of the black elite did not offer any protection from mob violence or other targeted racism.⁵²

Such attacks even on middle-class African Americans had a debilitating and degrading impact on Cincinnati's black communities. As Richard Folk notes in *Black Man's Burden in Ohio*, Ohio's foundational principles for maintaining stability were grounded in the ownership of private property, trust, and honest labor. Black Americans were denied access to these fundamental societal structures, pushing many to reject middle-class values and unwittingly perpetuate stereotypes about the black community.⁵³

Therefore, black elites in Cincinnati sought to achieve increased acceptance in broader American society by the establishment of a set of black ideals that promoted both virtue and personal identification with the causes of black abolition and citizenship. This can be clearly seen in the records of the history of Allen Temple, the oldest black church in the city. Allen Temple had been founded in two stages in 1815 and 1824 as it split from the white Methodist church and then joined the African Methodist Church. When they set out, the members sought to answer the "great question" of white Cincinnatians who asked whether or not black residents could successfully form and lead a church.⁵⁴ The continued success of the church throughout the century was due, in Peter H. Clark's

⁵² James Oliver Horton and Stacy Flaherty, "Black Leadership in Antebellum Cincinnati," *Race and the City: Work, Community, and Protest in Cincinnati, 1820-1970*, ed. Henry Louis Taylor (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 71-73, 82-88; Nikki Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 100-104.

⁵³ Folk, "Black Man's Burden in Ohio," 83-84.

⁵⁴ Erica Ball, *To Live an Antislavery Life: Personal Politics and the Antebellum Black Middle Class* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 2; Rev. B. W. Arnett, ed., *Proceedings of the Semi-Centenary Celebration of the African Methodist Episcopal Church of Cincinnati, Held in Allen Temple, February 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1874; With An Account of the Rise and Progress of the Colored Schools, also a List of the Charitable and Benevolent Societies of the City* (Cincinnati: H. Watkin, 1874), in Emory University Collection, <https://archive.org/details/26316729.4929.emory.edu> (accessed February 19, 2018), 13-18, 31.

words, to the church's adherence to "self-respect." By seeking to be able to worship as they desired, African-American congregants had established this foundational principle. This desire for self-respect in the church and in the black community had in turn sparked pursuits of "learning," "business training," and "power of control over men." In time, African-American leaders believed, the self-respect of black Cincinnatians would lead to respect from whites, and both races would "kneel at the same table" as those made out of "one blood" by God.⁵⁵

Churches' cultivation of "self-respect" went hand-in-hand with other forms of self-improvement. Black activists looked to the formation of educational institutions and benevolent organizations as a means to gain the skills and knowledge necessary for racial uplift. In 1839, a series of schools for African Americans were established, with both black and white teachers. The vast majority of the funds for this school system came directly from black families.⁵⁶ These efforts had some small positive effects. An anonymous writer to the *Colored American* on March 11, 1837, declared that organizations for mental or moral improvement played an important role in clearing black Americans from the "charge of indolence, or indifference, to our own welfare."

On the other hand, self-improvement efforts were not enough to garner African Americans respect from the white majority, and injustice continued. Of all of the clear signs of injustice, most black Americans would point to one as the most galling: the rapid granting of citizenship to white immigrants while denying the benefits of citizenship to

⁵⁵ Peter H. Clark, quoted in Arnett, *Proceedings of the Semi-Centenary Celebration*, 99-102. Peter H. Clark was an active member of the church, and his house was used for the official chartering of a new AME church plant in the Walnut Hills neighborhood on February 8, 1862. Brown Chapel A.M.E. Church, "Our History," <http://www.brownchapelamecincinnati.org/about-us/our-history/> (accessed February 19, 2018).

⁵⁶ Pease and Pease, *They Who Would Be Free*, 34; Woodson, "The Negroes of Cincinnati," 11.

native-born Americans on account of their race. Regardless of their nativity, black Americans had to establish their bona fides as loyal citizens to a degree above all other racial classes.⁵⁷

Efforts to mitigate this imbalance by reaching out to new immigrants for abolitionist support had mixed results. In 1840, African Americans sought to win Irish immigrants to the abolitionist cause; this effort, however, ended in failure and ultimately drove a wedge further between the two minority groups. Irish immigrants, as eager as black Americans to secure their rights of citizenship, prioritized their own standing over commiseration with other deprived citizens: by distancing themselves from African Americans, Irish Americans were doubling down on their own claims to citizenship and a higher place in the national racial hierarchy.⁵⁸ Conversely, white and black abolitionists were more successful building connections with the German community in Cincinnati.⁵⁹ Peter H. Clark would later call them “the only freedom-loving people of this city” and friendships—like the one between non-German abolitionists like William M. Dickson and German immigrants like Friedrich Hassaurek—were common.⁶⁰

But ultimately, the advances that black and white abolitionists had made in the city were not enough to prevent further civil disturbances. In 1841, the Ohio Supreme Court ruled that the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793 did not apply to slaves who escaped while travelling through the state of Ohio. This ruling, though considered extra-judicial by some, authorized Ohio residents to prevent, by force if necessary, attempts to kidnap

⁵⁷ Diemer, *Free African Americans*, 121.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 124-25.

⁵⁹ Nikki Taylor, *America's First Black Socialist*, 64.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

slaves who had escaped from their masters while with them in the state. Angered by this decision and spurred on by a series of anti-black articles in the *Daily Enquirer*, whites—particularly Irishmen and Kentuckians—began to decry black Cincinnatians and gathered a mob for an assault on the Bucktown district.⁶¹

Nearly 950 African Americans (about 42 percent of Cincinnati's black community) mounted a defense of the First Ward against a crowd of around 1,500 whites initially armed with stones. James Wilkerson, a mixed-race former slave, took charge of the defense, distributing arms to around fifty men and moving women and children to safety. As the attack on black homes began, the residents began to pepper the white mob with gunfire, forcing them back. Firearms were procured by the rioters, and a general engagement took place. The ad hoc black militia held off several assaults and repeatedly drove the rioters back until the white rioters brought a six-pound cannon into action at one in the morning. What happened next is a matter of contention. Widely conflicting reports have the black militia reported as retreating to the hills or launching a flank movement through Bucktown and capturing the cannon. Final casualty numbers are impossible to verify, but several residents were reported as having been killed in the action.⁶²

The militia temporarily quelled the riots by arresting three to five hundred black Cincinnatians, who agreed to go to jail in exchange for militia protection for their families. They also promised to declare their acceptance of the Black Laws, offered to

⁶¹ Harrold, *Border War*, 67; Folk, "Black Man's Burden in Ohio," 28-29.

⁶² Crowfoot, "Community Development for a White City," 347-62; Levi Coffin, quoted in Dabney, *Cincinnati's Colored Citizens*, 70; Woodson, "The Negroes of Cincinnati," 14-16; Nikki Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 120-22.

surrender their weapons, and vowed to report those who were a threat to the status quo and stability. This bargain was not upheld by the militia. With many of the black males out of the way, small bands of rioters roamed the streets, attacking the houses of both black and white abolitionists at will until many of the remaining black Americans fled to Lane Seminary for protection. The Presbyterian students once again hastily arranged a defense and were provided with arms and ammunition from the state arsenal by Governor Thomas Corwin. Only the threat of direct military conflict and the quick action of religious abolitionists and the state government dissuaded the more active elements of the mob from conducting an attack on the institution. From Friday, September 3, through Monday, September 6, rioters had the run of the town; the mayhem was only halted after the direct intervention of state militia units with orders to shoot rioters on sight.⁶³

Though the black community was prevented from reacting as strongly as they may have preferred by mitigating factors, such as the need to protect their families, they showed they were willing to take direct action if their rights were infringed upon too drastically. To this end, they were willing even to take up arms to assert their freedom and rights during times of riot and attack. Though they were arrested by the militia and their communities were targeted while they were imprisoned, the black men had shown their commitment to exercising their rights to keep and bear arms in self-defense. The point had been made: assaults upon the black community could be faced with organized military action; African Americans were willing to stand for their place as citizens of Cincinnati. There were two other positive developments. First, the anti-abolitionist crowd

⁶³ Ibid. Thomas Corwin had previously shown his support for the black community of Ohio by admitting one of their petitions to the legislature as a member in 1839. Unfortunately, backlash from this effort led the legislature to impose a new rule barring the admittance of petitions by black residents. Middleton, *The Black Laws*, 100.

was convinced that a significant number of law-abiding citizens, black and white, would be able successfully to resist most future assaults. Consequently, the number of public riots dropped off dramatically. Second, abolitionists re-committed themselves to the cause of black citizenship, becoming for the first time a major political force able to go toe-to-toe with the proslavery forces of the state.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Woodson, "The Negroes of Cincinnati," 16.

CHAPTER THREE

The Gathering Storm

The expectation prevalent at the time of the adoption of the Constitution and the Ordinance, that slavery would gradually and at no remote period wholly disappear, has not been realized. Instead of slavery restriction we have slavery extension; instead of diminution of slave population we have a vast increase; instead of reduction in the number of slave states, it has been doubled.

—Salmon P. Chase, Speech at Toledo on the Fugitive Slave Act, May 30, 1851

Abolitionists, Political and Radical

In October of 1845, white abolitionist Jonathan Blanchard and the more moderate Nathaniel Rice held a well-popularized debate in Cincinnati regarding slavery. Blanchard staunchly promoted the position of abolition, calling slavery an obvious sin. He sought to establish the humanity of black Americans by frequently appealing to the basis of Scripture, stating that “the Bible knows nothing of determining men’s rights by the hue of their skin,” “abolitionists take their stand upon the New Testament doctrine of the natural equality of man,” and “I rest my opposition to slavery upon the one-bloodism of the New Testament.”¹ Rice, on the other hand, sought to draw a distinction between slavery as merely a social injustice and slaveholding as a sin regardless of circumstance. The arguments of Rice, like those of the colonizationists, show that abolitionism existed at

¹ Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, 41; Jonathan Blanchard and Nathan Rice, *A Debate on Slavery: Held in the City of Cincinnati on the First, Second, Third, and Sixth Days of October, 1845, Upon the Question: Is Slave-holding in Itself Sinful, and the Relations Between Master and Slave, A Sinful Relation?* (Cincinnati: Wm. H. Moore & Co., 1846), 17, 44, 108.

one end of a continuum of disparate stances on slavery, while the majority of Americans fell somewhere between two extremes.²

But in addition to the Biblical argument used by both sides, Blanchard also liberally sprinkled his arguments with ties to American republicanism, including the “natural and *inalienable* rights to person, property, and the pursuit of happiness.”³ This increasingly political rhetorical stance was an indicator of the new abolitionist breed that was increasingly focused on active party-political engagement and attempts to secure broader American cultural support. Blanchard’s rhetoric was persuasive, causing Cincinnati’s Sixth Presbyterian Church to withdraw even from the more abolitionist-accepting New School wing of Presbyterianism to embark on a new course as an independent church and center for abolitionist activity.⁴

Some Presbyterians and other abolitionists engaged in the most direct form of abolitionist activity by helping slaves escape from slave states on the Underground Railroad. In Ripley, Ohio, fifty miles southeast of Cincinnati, the Presbyterian minister John Rankin served as an active participant in the anti-slavery cause both as the president of Ripley College and a member of the Underground Railroad. Rankin was the one responsible for housing the “real Eliza” upon whom Harriet Beecher Stowe based her famous character’s harrowing ice-crossing escape.⁵ But Rankin was not the only Ohioan

² John F. Lyons, “The Attitude of Presbyterians in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois Toward Slavery, 1825-1861,” *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society* 11, no. 2 (June, 1921), https://www.jstor.org/stable/23323590?seq=14#page_scan_tab_contents (accessed February 19, 2018), 76.

³ Blanchard and Rice, *A Debate on Slavery*, 44.

⁴ Buggein, “A Marketplace for Religion,” 352-53.

⁵ Folk, “Black Man’s Burden in Ohio,” 120. Inspired to do more to help black Americans, Rankin eventually withdrew from the New School denomination over the issue of membership for slaveholders, forming the Free Presbyterian Church of America in 1847. *Ibid.*

helping to spirit slaves northward; in fact, twenty-three Ohio towns have been recorded as points of entry for fleeing slaves. In particular, the African American population in southern Ohio and the evangelical congregations of their towns played an integral role in the escape route, including a sizeable and influential group of ministers.⁶

Black Cincinnatians were particularly active, having noticeably begun spiriting escaped slaves northward as early as 1815.⁷ Within the town of Cincinnati, Levi Coffin noted that many escaping slaves were immediately secreted into areas of town with high concentrations of African Americans to prevent their recapture. The Dumas House, a highly respectable black boarding house and hotel on the edge of Bucktown, was one especially popular hiding spot as it was often overlooked by fugitive slave hunters as being too overt of a waystation.⁸ The abolitionists' fugitive slave efforts only increased with the continued rise of slavery south of the Ohio River in Kentucky. From 1820 to 1850, the slave population of the Kentucky border counties south of Ohio increased by 14 percent. In addition, those counties immediately south of Indiana—which fronted the western border of Cincinnati's Hamilton County—saw an increase of over 50 percent.⁹

In 1852, the impact of Cincinnati's religious abolitionists on national political activity became evident with the publishing of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by New England-born Presbyterian Harriet Beecher Stowe. The work saw instant success, with 300,000 copies selling in the first year alone. Harriet, a daughter of Lyman Beecher, had married Lane Seminary professor Calvin Stowe during her eighteen years in Cincinnati (after moving

⁶ O'Dell, "The Early Antislavery Movement in Ohio," 237-38.

⁷ Harrold, *Border War*, 27.

⁸ Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, 148.

⁹ Harrold, *Border War*, 41.

to the city at the age of 21). For Harriet Beecher Stowe, Cincinnati, a city “on the confines of a slave state,” provided countless opportunities to examine the corrupting influence of slavery. She had witnessed slaves’ humanity, observed mobs of anti-abolitionists, and experienced the frustration of seeing abolitionists hide their opinions on the matter of slavery for fear of retribution from Kentuckians or fellow Cincinnatians. In her writing, Stowe attempted to make use of her wide range of first- and second-hand knowledge on slavery while providing information on the validity of such facts in a companion volume titled *Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in 1853.¹⁰ Stowe’s success helped put Cincinnati on the antislavery convention circuit, with later antislavery conventions held in the city being much more nationally-attended than those prior. For example, the 1852 antislavery convention in Cincinnati attracted more than two hundred delegates, “making it the largest antislavery convention west of the Alleghenies.”¹¹

But rescuing slaves from the South or publishing pro-abolition novels, though beneficial both for those assisted and for advancing the cause of abolitionism, did little initially to advance the quest for citizenship of Northern African Americans, of whom 93 percent still lived in a state that excluded them from voting in 1840.¹² Of course, not having the right to vote did not mean that black Americans remained uninvolved in the fight for freedom in Ohio. They held frequent state conventions (the highest number of any of the states) to condemn colonization, call for black suffrage, and to rally support

¹⁰ Buggein, “A Marketplace for Religion,” 353-357; quote from Harriet Beecher Stowe, introduction to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, & Co., 1878), vii; Knepper, *Ohio and Its People*, 217; Willey, “The Reverend John Rankin,” 181.

¹¹ Nikki Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist*, 261, n12.

¹² R. J. Young, *Antebellum Black Activists: Race, Gender, and Self* (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), 36.

against anti-black and pro-slavery laws. But, as Jane and William Pease summed up: “In one word,... black America was powerless.”¹³ African Americans had few bargaining chips to win over prejudiced politicians, voters, and abolitionists beyond their ability to pledge future votes if they were granted the ability to exercise their rights. As a result, African Americans always relied upon—at least to some degree—support from white abolitionists to advance the cause of equality and secure political power.¹⁴

Faced with the limitations placed upon African-American suffrage and the question of whether *moral* results could even be achieved through a *political* system that had almost universally backed inequality, white and black abolitionists weighed their options, debating whether they should join political movements or critique them from the outside.¹⁵ Several different opinions on how to engage with the political movement arose. The first approach, led by William Lloyd Garrison and predominant in the American Anti-Slavery Society, pushed for immediate emancipation, rather than working gradually through the political system or the churches. The second approach rejected Garrisonian tactics. Along with its allies, the Lewis Tappan-led American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society sought to bring about change through both civic and religious channels. Others, such as the members of the fledgling Liberty Party, sought to accomplish the end of slavery primarily through political means.¹⁶

Black Americans faced a particularly difficult debate, which came to a head to 1843 at the National Convention of Colored Citizens in Buffalo, New York. Led by

¹³ Pease and Pease, *They Who Would Be Free*, 298.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 298-99.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 296.

¹⁶ Harrold, *Border War*, xiii.

Henry Highland Garnet, a proponent of black political action and engagement with the Liberty Party, the convention ended up backing political engagement, despite the pleas of Frederick Douglass and Garrisonian members to refrain from doing so. The convention then turned to the question of armed resistance. In his “Address to the Slaves of the United States,” Garnet argued that the only way for African Americans to gain the civic justice they deserved was an open military revolt, using “RESISTANCE!” by any means necessary. Douglass took an alternative position, arguing for the adoption of “moral suasion” rather than physical force to achieve the black community’s aims. Douglass’s argument for the delegates to refrain from violence “a little longer” won the day—but only by a single vote.¹⁷ Instead, the delegates tempered the language of their resolutions to avoid causing public outcry, but still declared their commitment to securing citizenship with their bold statement: “WE ARE AMERICANS.”¹⁸

Garnet’s message of martial action was rejected by the convention, but it was increasingly popular with a young cadre of black activists, including William Wells Brown and Cincinnati’s Peter Clark, who advocated for increasing militancy. William Wells Brown was an escaped slave from Kentucky who was a lecturer and writer in New York and Massachusetts; his house in Buffalo served as an important stop on the Underground Railroad for many escaped slaves. Peter H. Clark was a radical intellectual who had been born in 1829 in Cincinnati. By the 1850s, he was seen a “representative colored man” of Cincinnati—meaning that he was seen as one of the black community

¹⁷ Pease and Pease, *They Who Would Be Free*, 189; Harvey, *Through the Storm, Through the Night*, 66; Henry Highland Garnet, *Walker’s Appeal, with a Brief Sketch of His Life: And Also Garnet’s Address to the Slaves of the United States of America* (New York: J.H. Tobitt, 1848), in Project Gutenberg Collection, <https://archive.org/details/walkersappealwit16516gut> (accessed February 19, 2018), 96.

¹⁸ Philip S. Foner and George E. Walker, eds., *Proceedings of the Black State Conventions* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 2:306-21.

leaders by white elites. This may partly have been due to his lighter skin color, which allowed him to begin voting in the city long before his fellow African Americans. Like Brown, he also was a supporter or participant in the Underground Railroad, and had a long personal friendship with Levi Coffin.¹⁹ Drawing from Garnet's example, Brown began arguing that African Americans should take up arms against the government if they were forced to serve in the Mexican War, while Clark vehemently argued that black Americans should immediately "seize" the rights that were theirs and "never petition for a right again."²⁰ Similarly, the Convention of Colored Freemen of Ohio, meeting in Cincinnati, resolved to "in no case... deal more mildly with the robber of body, than with the highwayman or the assassin," despite renowned abolitionist Sojourner Truth's tearful appeal for the delegates to embrace "peace and forbearance."²¹

Despite his outspoken opposition to Garnet in 1843, Frederick Douglass did eventually commit himself "against the doctrine of non-resistance" in 1854, and probably would have condoned Brown's outspoken doubt that he could "hardly subdue himself to counsel non-resistance" if a favorable opportunity presented itself for a slave revolt.²² Two years later, Douglass invited the ascendant Clark, who had served as the editor of the short-lived but well-read *Herald of Freedom*, to become his assistant editor for the *Frederick Douglass' Paper*. With a shared outlook and mindset, Douglass and Clark

¹⁹ Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, 62, 149; Nikki Taylor, *America's First Black Socialist*, 3-4, 24, 45, 93-94. Clark would later serve as one of Coffin's pallbearers at his funeral. Nikki Taylor, *America's First Black Socialist*, 92.

²⁰ Young, *Antebellum Black Activists*, 60-61, 182; Kantrowitz, *More Than Freedom*, 237.

²¹ Quoted in Morris, *Oberlin*, 168.

²² Pease and Pease, *They Who Would Be Free*, 235; *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, October 13, 1854; William E. Farrison, *William Wells Brown: Author and Reformer* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 124.

briefly joined the Radical Abolition Party, which was an immediatist, uncompromising political party that sought to extend all citizenship rights to African Americans and push the federal government to stamp out slavery where it existed throughout the country. In addition to Douglass and Clark, the party also contained the likes of John Brown, a white abolitionist who would lead a slave insurrection at Harper's Ferry in 1859.²³ The development of black activism had only gradually led to these extreme ends. The majority of black leaders had promoted moral suasion during the 1830s; in the 1840s, this policy had given way to political action. But now, in the 1850s, political action was joined by increasing calls for more extreme measures.²⁴ These radical positions were not necessarily as popular among ordinary black Americans. Unlike most African Americans, the leaders of the abolitionist movement tended to disproportionately be professionals, which often caused them to be high-handed and insensitive to their supporters' more difficult efforts to navigate the unstable social environment of the North. As such, abolitionist leaders could more easily afford to debate potential political or martial actions at a moral and philosophical level, while the majority of African Americans developed a more pragmatic attitude.²⁵

This difference was especially stark in the West, which unlike the East (with its concentration of leaders in New York and Boston) had a more decentralized leadership structure. In Ohio, where Cincinnati had the largest black population in the state, prominent activist leaders could also be found in Columbus (the state capital), and in the

²³ Nikki Taylor, *America's First Black Socialist*, 88-94; "The Radical Abolitionists," *New York Times*, 29 May, 1856.

²⁴ Nikki Taylor, *America's First Black Socialist*, 44-45.

²⁵ Pease and Pease, *They Who Would Be Free*, 291.

Western Reserve around Oberlin College.²⁶ The middle way of practical abolitionism practiced by a larger number of Western abolitionist leaders and followers prevented the acrimonious schism that took place between abolitionists on the East Coast. As J. Brent Morris has summarized, the pragmatic belief of many Western abolitionists was that “one could be an abolitionist and seek ‘perfect,’ immediatist ends but still work to extinguish slavery through ‘imperfect’ or moderate means.” By embracing whatever tactics would achieve the most success or progress, Western abolitionists sidestepped many of the aforementioned deeper ideological disputes, focusing instead on pragmatic political action.²⁷

Prior to 1839, abolitionists had supported anti-slavery candidates wherever they could find them, but beginning in 1839, abolitionists began to clamor for their own political parties. The first major abolitionist party in the state of Ohio was the Liberty Party, which had split from the Garrisonian abolitionists by promoting the belief that the Constitution was essentially an anti-slavery document. In 1840, antislavery activists ran James Birney, the Cincinnati editor, for President on the newly-founded Liberty Party ticket, but the result was a lackluster third place, with only 6,797 votes (or .3 percent) out of a total of 2,411,808 cast. Abolitionists did not give up hope, however. Four years later, the Liberty Party had a sizable impact on the national election, siphoning away enough votes in New York from the Whigs that Henry Clay lost the state and the Presidency to Polk. In 1848, some members of the Liberty Party joined with some Northern Whigs and Democrats to form the Free Soil Party, which had a more narrow focus of preventing the

²⁶ Ibid., 290-91.

²⁷ Morris, *Oberlin*, 7-8.

expansion of slavery (rather than seeking abolition). With the support of Ohio abolitionists, the Free Soil Party secured a crucial victory in the 1848 election: with the Legislature split between Whigs and Democrats, the Free Soil representatives held the political power to select which party would control the speaker's gavel and the legislative agenda. After some political maneuvering, the Democrats secured Free Soil support, in exchange for repealing the state's Black Laws in 1849.²⁸

Through this repeal, African Americans secured access to the benefits of the writ of habeas corpus, public education, the ability to enter into contracts, and even—in the case of some mixed-race Ohioans—suffrage. But despite the advances they had made, black Ohioans were still barred from legally defined citizenship and its accompanying benefits of voting, serving on juries, or volunteering for military duty.²⁹ Naturally, black Americans continued to protest these withheld rights. In 1850, two representatives of the State Convention of Colored Men were allowed to present their grievances directly to legislators, appealing to them on the basis of universal brotherhood and inherent rights, “identical with the principles of democracy and the genius of the Christian religion.”³⁰

Black political efforts in Ohio were in particular catalyzed by the Fugitive Slave Laws enacted at the state and federal levels. These laws required government and law enforcement officials to assist in recapturing escaped slaves. If officials failed to comply, they faced sixty days in prison and a fine of five hundred dollars. Due to the legal restrictions on African Americans, any of them who were apprehended could not testify

²⁸ Willey, “The Reverend John Rankin,” 216-17; Harrold, *Border War*, xiv; Knepper, *Ohio and Its People*, 210-12.

²⁹ Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 335, 462-63, 482-83, 566-67; Nikki Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 177.

³⁰ William H. Day, quoted in Middleton, *The Black Laws*, 147.

in their defense and did not face a jury of their peers; faced with return to a life of slavery, escaped slaves from the South who had settled in Ohio often left for Canada. A series of well-publicized cases brought underneath the Fugitive Slave Law took place throughout Ohio, rallying angered citizens or abolitionist lawyers like Rutherford B. Hayes, Samuel Chase, and William Dickson to their defense.³¹

At the heart of these cases was the principle of black citizenship, as the *Dred Scott* case of 1857 demonstrated. In Chief Justice Roger Taney's ruling, he dedicated nearly half of his decision to opposing black citizenship. He declared that African Americans were "beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior, that they had no rights which a white man was bound to respect...."³² Black abolitionists and elites sought to subvert these proslavery arguments—particularly those that relied upon religious arguments—by "appealing to the spirit of religious texts, particularly the Golden Rule." They argued that slavery demeaned the God-given humanity and worth of mankind, asking: "Am I not a man and a brother?" and "Am I not a woman and a sister?" To black Americans, abolishing slavery was not enough, as long as the ideals of the Declaration of Independence and the full rights of citizenship were withheld.³³

Yet constant tension remained in the African American community about whether or not the American nation would ever actually recognize them as full citizens. On July 4, 1852, Frederick Douglass famously questioned a white American audience why he had

³¹ Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 389; Knepper, *Ohio and Its People*, 216-22; Reed, Randall, and Greve, *Bench and Bar of Ohio*, 1:144-45.

³² Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 569.

³³ Paul Harvey, *Bounds of Their Habitation: Race and Religion in American History* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 83-84.

been called upon to speak on such a patriotic occasion: “What have I, or those I represent, to do with your national independence? Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us?” He continued: “The fourth of July is *yours*, not *mine*. *You* may rejoice, *I* must mourn.”³⁴ These questions were asked and re-asked by African Americans across the country, including by the black community of Cincinnati in the nineteenth century—and there were no easy answers.

Black Manhood and the African-American Military Experience

The black military experience during this time period was complex and personal, but it usually played out in ways that ultimately increased self-confidence, asserted “black manhood,” and laid claim on the rights of citizenship. Important to these efforts were deep cultural ties between military service and identity as Americans.³⁵ For most Americans, a group’s martial participation symbolized that group’s acquisition of citizenship status; to be recognized for the defense of one’s nation naturally indicated that one was already a part of that nation. But along with suffering other deprivations of basic national rights, free black Americans were forbidden from serving in the peacetime militia: the passage of time had long since stamped out of the public memory black contributions to prior national military endeavors. Angered by this prohibition, the African-American 1845 New York State Convention had condemned the common

³⁴ Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (New York: Miller, Orton, and Mulligan, 1855), in Columbia University Libraries, <https://archive.org/details/mybondagemyfreed00doug> (accessed February 19, 2018), 441. Many black Americans celebrated on July 5 or August 1 (the date of British emancipation) to avoid violence from drunken crowds or to make a political point. August 1 celebrations in Cincinnati were often well attended. Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, 118-29.

³⁵ Samito, *Becoming American under Fire*, 47.

practice of accepting black men as soldiers when the nation's security was threatened, but ignoring their concerns once the fighting ceased. The delegates asked, "Are we to be thus looked to, for assistance in the 'hour of danger,' but trampled under foot in the time of peace? Did our fathers fight for American liberty that their children might be disfranchised and loaded with insults?"³⁶ But many black citizens were still willing to risk the chance of rejection in favor of the potential benefits of black military service.

In the early 1850s, William C. Nell, a black abolitionist and publisher in Boston, printed two editions of a pamphlet entitled *Services of Colored Americans in the Wars of 1776 and 1812*, which was later expanded into the 1855 book *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution*. At the heart of this work was the history of black citizens serving in the American military as "valiant and consistent soldiers in Freedom's army."³⁷ The historical figure who served as the center for Nell's narrative was Crispus Attucks, a victim of the Boston Massacre. By tying black martial sacrifice to the inception of the American nation, Nell sought to inspire whites to defend black citizens' common stakes in the defense of freedom while encouraging African Americans to resist slavery in as strong a fashion as Attucks once had. In so doing, Stephen Kantrowitz argues that Nell purposefully sought to demonstrate "black worthiness for full citizenship."³⁸ Inspired by Nell's writings, black Americans attempted to assert their citizenship through participation as members of their local militias. These efforts were, on the whole, successful: charters for black militias were granted in some Northern cities, while in

³⁶ Knepper, *Ohio and Its People*, 204; *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, October 30, 1845, quoted in Ball, *Antislavery Life*, 113.

³⁷ Kantrowitz, *More Than Freedom*, 5, 200-1, 220-21.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 200-1, 220-21.

Cincinnati, an African-American military company called the Attucks Blues was formed in 1854 without the approval of the governing authorities. Two years later, William Nell watched the Attucks Blues openly parade in the Cincinnati streets, demonstrating their growing authority and publically advancing the case that they were, in fact, citizens.³⁹

Efforts to establish black military service, including militias like the Attucks Blues, accelerated—and were accelerated by—widespread black American adoption of the concept of black manhood. In the conceptualization of black manhood, being treated as equal, arms-bearing citizens eager to defend democracy would help African Americans to counter prevailing racist notions of inferiority or correlations with infants, felons, and beasts. Letters from soldiers, oral accounts of service, and discussions within the broader black community all demonstrate wide support of this idea.⁴⁰ Analyzing the data from 1,004 resolutions passed by local and state black conventions from 1831 to 1859, R. J. Young notes that black males “sought to attain the qualities of an ideal of manhood” because “the ability to speak and act for themselves was highly valued as a sign of the nineteenth-century man.”⁴¹ As a result, the vast majority of black activists used the term “manhood” to express their understanding of both black humanity and citizenship.

This mindset was tied to several other beliefs: a sense of power (as opposed to slavery or weakness), a high valuing of freedom of movement, a desire for justice, and

³⁹ Kantrowitz, *More Than Freedom*, 214; Ball, *Antislavery Life*, 117.

⁴⁰ Samito, *Becoming American under Fire*, 52; Young, *Antebellum Black Activists*, 176.

⁴¹ Young, *Antebellum Black Activists*, 176, 189. Both James Oliver Horton and R. J. Young have extensively argued that black males—including Frederick Douglass—embraced through this gendered language a separation of roles and social spheres that precluded women playing a significant social role. In other words, “manhood” served as a symbol of citizenship to black male elites because they considered their sense of self and role as citizens as distinct from women and children. As a result, the language they adopted often veered toward speaking for just African-American males, as opposed to all of their race. Young, *Antebellum Black Activists*, 56-57, 176; Horton, “Freedom’s Yoke,” 51-76.

economic advancement. The free practice of all of these ideals of freedom and equality rested upon the concept of American citizenship, and the ability to act out that citizenship uninhibited. This belief in manhood was grounded in the conviction that black Americans could express both their common humanity and their male prerogatives just as well as their white counterparts. As a result, black citizens sought to fulfill the public and private roles they believed were theirs by right, including martial participation. Female abolitionists often encouraged this mentality, as when Sara Stanley, speaking at the Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society in 1856, encouraged black male abolitionists to "bring home your shield, or be brought upon it."⁴²

The most radical promoters of radical martial action gained a strong following and endorsed efforts like John Brown's unsuccessful attempt to provoke a slave revolt at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, in October of 1859. Even in the strongly anti-black community of Cincinnati, a mixed group of five hundred African-American and German Cincinnatians openly gathered at the German Institute on the day of John Brown's hanging in Virginia to commemorate the abolitionist's attempt.⁴³ Peter H. Clark addressed the crowd, stating his dependence on whites to "do justice to his race" by securing citizenship rights for African Americans—but to secure these rights, Clark encouraged the adoption of violent means. From the stage, he openly advocated using "all the weapons of freemen... *if necessary*" and declared that slaveholders with blood on their hands would soon be sent to "hospitable graves."⁴⁴ This extreme position mortified

⁴² Morris, *Oberlin*, 169; Young, *Antebellum Black Activists*, 57-60.

⁴³ Kelly D. Mezurek, *For Their Own Cause: The 27th United States Colored Troops* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2016), 14; Young, *Antebellum Black Activists*, 181; Morris, *Oberlin*, 6; Nikki Taylor, *America's First Black Socialist*, 99.

⁴⁴ Nikki Taylor, *America's First Black Socialist*, 100-1.

the majority of abolitionists, who were dismayed, rather than encouraged, by John Brown's raid. To them, efforts like John Brown's raid demonstrated the ineffectuality of violence as compared to political action.⁴⁵

The Rise of the Radical Republicans

By 1856, even Frederick Douglass supported advancing an abolitionist political solution, and he announced his backing of the nascent Republican Party. This new party had arisen from a juncture of former Free Soil party members with a large number of former Whigs and Democrats; soon, it had grown large enough to replace the Whig Party in America's two-party-friendly political system. Douglass's position was also adopted by the Convention of the Colored Men of Ohio that met in Cincinnati that year. Clark, however, remained uncommitted, warning that the Republican Party was untrustworthy and not radical enough. After all, the Republican Party gained much of its popularity for its moderate stance: though it promoted the containment and non-expansion of slavery, its platform did not contain any push for the less politically viable principles of black citizenship or emancipation. However, as the Republican Party gained steam and political clout, even Clark had to admit that half a loaf was better than none; Clark would leave the Radical Abolition Party that same fall to become a Republican.⁴⁶

Other abolitionists, particularly white abolitionists, were more enthusiastic supporters. William M. Dickson was one such Republican abolitionist interested in

⁴⁵ Nat Brandt, *The Town That Started the Civil War* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 244; Litwack, *North of Slavery*, 207.

⁴⁶ Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, 188-90; Harrold, *Border War*, xiv; Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 335, 462-63, 482-83, 566-67; Nikki Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 88-90, 177.

pursuing political solutions for the black community. Born into in a Presbyterian Scotch-Irish family in 1827, his life quickly took a turn for the worse when he was ten when his father passed away. William and his older brother John were raised by their mother, Rachel, but the family quickly descended into poverty without their father's farming income. Hoping to provide his brother with a better life, John offered to take on the trade of a cooper so that William could get an education. As a result of his brother's generosity, William was able to attend college at Hanover and Madison, carrying his weekly provisions the several miles to college on his back and returning on weekends. He eventually matriculated at the Presbyterian-operated Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, graduating in 1846.⁴⁷ Two years later, he was admitted to the law school at Harvard University, where he was treated as a son by Joel Parker, a Chief Justice of the New Hampshire Supreme Court and professor at Harvard. As a result, when Dickson graduated in 1850, he was provided with a letter of introduction to some friends of Justice Parker in Cincinnati who helped Dickson get on his feet and establish himself in the city.⁴⁸ Around this time, Dickson became an Episcopalian and began courting his wife, Anna ("Annie") Maria Parker (no relation of Justice Parker's), whom he had met and fell in love with while tutoring in Kentucky during Miami University's summer vacation. Annie was from an influential family (she could later count three governors among her

⁴⁷ Reed, Randall, and Greve, *Bench and Bar of Ohio*, 1:144; Biography, Folder 82, William Dickson Papers, Clements Library, University of Michigan (hereafter Dickson Papers). Having a denominational affiliation for a university was the standard practice of the time; in 1860, all but a handful of the four hundred institutes of higher learning in the United States were run by some form of religious organization. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, 13.

⁴⁸ Reed, Randall, and Greve, *Bench and Bar of Ohio*, 1:144; Biography, Folder 82, Dickson Papers; Charles Theodore Greve, *Centennial History of Cincinnati and Representative Citizens* (Chicago: Biographical Publishing Company, 1904), 769.

cousins), and Mary Todd Lincoln was her first cousin. The courtship was successful, and they were married in 1852.⁴⁹

The following year, while still a newcomer to the city of Cincinnati, Dickson ran for and won a shocking election on the Independent Free School ticket for the position of prosecuting attorney of the police court.⁵⁰ His position gained him quite a bit of social capital, particularly with minority communities for his commanding presence at the front lines in the midst of breaking up both anti-German protests and the Anti-Catholic Bedini Riot. But in 1854, Dickson resigned from his position on the police court to form a law partnership with Alphonso Taft (founder of the Taft political dynasty) and Thomas Marshall Key (the great-nephew of former Chief Justice John Marshall).⁵¹ Both were active abolitionists. Thomas Key was the drafter and promoter of the bill abolishing slavery in the District of Columbia. Alphonso Taft was a member of First Congregational Church, along with future governor and fellow abolitionist George Hoadley. There, Taft and Hoadley built up a strong friendship with black abolitionist Peter Clark when he started occasionally attending First Congregational Church in the late 1850s.⁵²

⁴⁹ Reed, Randall, and Greve, *Bench and Bar of Ohio*, 1:144-45.

⁵⁰ Reed, Randall, and Greve, *Bench and Bar of Ohio*, 1:145; “Unofficial Abstract of Votes, Given at City Election Held on Monday, April 4, 1853,” Folder 3, Dickson Papers; Henry A. Ford and Kate B. Ford, comps., *History of Cincinnati, Ohio, with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches* (Cleveland: L. A. Williams & Co., 1881), in Cornell University Library Collection, <https://archive.org/details/cu31924032193520> (accessed February 19, 2018), 381. Despite being nearly an unknown quantity, Dickson’s promise of reform netted him 6,771 votes, defeating the Democratic candidate by a margin of 514 votes. “Unofficial Abstract of Votes, Given at City Election Held on Monday, April 4, 1853,” Folder 3, Dickson Papers.

⁵¹ S. B. Nelson and J. M. Runk, *History of Cincinnati and Hamilton County* (Cincinnati: S. B. Nelson & Co., 1894), 186; Greve, *Centennial History of Cincinnati*, 769; Biography, Folder 82, Dickson Papers; *Encyclopedia of Northern Kentucky*, ed. Paul A. Tenkotte and James C. Claypool (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2009), s.v. “Key, Thomas Marshall.”

⁵² Nikki Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist*, 79-81; Yale College, *Obituary Record of Graduates of Yale College* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1869), 10:319.

Dickson quickly established himself as a fellow abolitionist trial lawyer. While in Kentucky, Dickson had witnessed the horrors of slavery firsthand. A family he stayed with had mistreated their slaves until one of the female slaves poisoned her children, set fire to the house, and, eventually, drowned herself. Utilizing his training in the law, Dickson actively pursued the legal defense of fugitive slaves, establishing a reputation for strong arguments on behalf of his clients. He was assisted in this endeavor by a cadre of other abolitionist lawyers and politicians, many of whom also attended local Episcopalian churches—including Salmon P. Chase and Rutherford B. Hayes. Dickson built strong friendships with both men, and he frequently provided Chase with information about slavery cases, abolitionist politics, and the anti-slavery cause.⁵³ In his pursuit of abolitionism, Dickson was said to partake of the “uncompromising spirit of Sumner.”⁵⁴ Accordingly, Dickson declared the Republican Party’s attempts at its inception to deny any affiliation with abolitionists as being “timid” on the issue of slavery. But continued widespread opposition to the Fugitive Slave Law and the extension of slavery soon forced the party to change its position.⁵⁵

With his contacts broadening in the city and the state, Dickson threw himself into the machinations of politics, becoming one of the founders of the new Republican Party.

⁵³ Salmon P. Chase, *The Salmon P. Chase Papers*, ed. John Niven, vol. 1 (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1993), 1:244-45; Greve, *Centennial History of Cincinnati*, 769; Reed, Randall, and Greve, *Bench and Bar of Ohio*, 1:145. The high number of Episcopalian, New School Presbyterian, and Congregational churches that promoted abolitionism in Ohio is surprising, considering that most abolitionists were mostly concentrated in the Wesleyan Methodist, Free Methodist, United Presbyterian, Free Presbyterian, and Free Will Baptist denominations. Only during the Civil War did abolitionists come to control the Methodist Episcopal, Congregational, Baptist, and New School Presbyterian churches—and very few Episcopalians or Old School Presbyterians were ever abolitionists. Victor B. Howard, *Religion and the Radical Republican Movement: 1860-1870* (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1990), 3.

⁵⁴ Reed, Randall, and Greve, *Bench and Bar of Ohio*, 1:145.

⁵⁵ William M. Dickson, “Union, Secession, Abolition,” *Magazine of American History* 18 (July-December 1887), 211.

For a brief span, Dickson had been a member of the American Party (better known as the Know-Nothing Party), but he was pointedly unhappy with that nativist party's focus on "secrecy." He worked with Chase to prevent the nomination of the pro-slavery Jacob Brinkerhoff by the Know-Nothing Party, giving Chase the opportunity to win the gubernatorial nomination at the new Republican Party's convention later in 1855 with unified Know-Nothing and Freedom Party support. As a result, Salmon P. Chase successfully won the Ohio governor's race that fall on the Republican ticket.⁵⁶ Chase returned the favor by appointing Dickson to the three-person Court of Common Pleas, where he served for almost a year. This court acted as a regional court of review, and members of the court were well-compensated, with an annual salary of \$2,000. Dickson's youth initially caused objections from older members, but his sound judgment and diligent pursuit of the law soon won him renown among judges, lawyers, and the general populace that lasted far beyond his short tenure in office.⁵⁷

Faced with their general election losses, the Republicans' main opponents in Ohio began seeking to tie the rise of the Republican Party to the cause of black equality. The Democrats, led in Ohio by Samuel S. Cox, described Republicans as promoters of racial equality, which they saw as a far worse evil than the continuation of slavery. Cox summed up the Democratic position in a speech against recognizing ministers from Haiti and Liberia, declaring that the lessons of history clearly demonstrated that "this Union [was] made for white men; that this Government is a Government of white men;" and

⁵⁶ Biography, Folder 82, Dickson Papers; Chase, *Papers*, 1:245; Dabney, *Cincinnati's Colored Citizens*, 81.

⁵⁷ S. B. Nelson and J. M. Runk, *History of Cincinnati and Hamilton County* (Cincinnati: S. B. Nelson & Co., 1894), 161; Reed, Randall, and Greve, *Bench and Bar of Ohio*, 1:145; Greve, *Centennial History of Cincinnati*, 769.

that the Founders never sought the equality of the races in any matter.⁵⁸ This attack seemed to work; in the October 1857 election, Republican and Ohio Governor Salmon Chase won reelection by only four-tenths of one percent. The militant anti-extensionist stand of the Ohio Republican party was simply not a strong enough issue to sustain the fledgling party.⁵⁹

The *Cincinnati Gazette* admitted temporary defeat for the abolitionists on October 20, 1857: “Until some further call for action... by some overt attempt to carry out the absurd and monstrous tenets to which the [Democratic] party is full committed, on the slavery question, agitation is not likely be recommended.” Hoping to regain votes by linking both radicals and conservatives, the Republican Party recommitted itself to the old Whiggish principle of fighting corruption and promoting morality. The *Cincinnati Gazette* pledged its support on March 26, 1858 for “moral honesty” and “integrity,” a theme which the Republican Party would push hard in Ohio during the 1860 elections.⁶⁰

This compromise position probably best described the average Republican, who was not typically an abolitionist. Of course, there were abolitionists in the party who sought full equality, some of whom have already been introduced in this work. But the vast majority still favored white supremacy, rather than full equality. Though most Republicans had a strong distaste for slavery, most Republicans also still believed that black women and men were inferior to their white counterparts. This dual adherence to both hatred of slavery and continuation of white supremacy would be held by the party’s

⁵⁸ Voegeli, *Free But Not Equal*, 14-15.

⁵⁹ Stephen E. Maizlish, *The Triumph of Sectionalism: The Transformation of Ohio Politics, 1844-1856* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1983), 236.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 237-38.

nominee in the 1860 election, Abraham Lincoln, and was a particularly popular opinion in the Lower Middle West, along the banks of the Ohio River and in the city of Cincinnati.⁶¹

During the lead-up to the election of 1860, the Republican Party was seeking someone who could appeal to both wings of the party and spark their enthusiasm, while still being able to win over undecided voters. Though it later became apparent that Abraham Lincoln was the perfect cast for this mold, the race was still wide open until the later ballots of the Republican nominating convention, when Lincoln's appeal became clear. Building up that appeal had taken a great deal of effort over a period of years. As a party insider, William Dickson had been aware of this need, and—despite his reputation as a “radical Republican”—he began laying the groundwork for the unification of the varied Republican Party factions in 1859, an effort of which he kept Lincoln well-appraised.⁶²

The key to this effort was strong commitment to anti-slavery principles and Lincoln's anti-corruption stand centered on his famous personal honesty. Both would be crucial to winning over different sets of Cincinnati voters and Ohio's Republican nominating delegates, a fact that Lincoln was well-aware of when he visited the city in September of 1859. Speaking in the clear night air to a crowd of well over three thousand, Lincoln sought to make his stance on existing slave states clear: “I neither then had, nor have, or ever had any purpose in any way of interfering with the institution of

⁶¹ Voegeli, *Free But Not Equal*, 3-4; Matthew E. Stanley, *The Loyal West: Civil War and Reunion in Middle America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 47.

⁶² Henry A. Ford and Kate B. Ford, *History of Cincinnati*, 118; William M. Dickson to Abraham Lincoln, 26 September 1859, Abraham Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C (hereafter Lincoln Papers).

Slavery, where it exists.” Unsurprisingly, this was met with long continued applause. However, he also won applause from the crowd for his emphatic statement that “I think Slavery is wrong, morally and politically. I desire that it should be no further spread in these United States, and I should not object if it should gradually terminate in the whole Union.”⁶³

Lincoln proceeded to make this distinction between slave and free states clearer, addressing the majority of his speech ostensibly to Kentuckians, and pointing out that the differences between those living south from those living north of the Ohio River rested not in climate or soil, but in cultural and legal differences. This effort reflected broader Republican attempts to counter the Democratic narrative put forward by Stephen Douglas and others that highlighted cultural and social bonds with the South: rather than associate their actions with Northern policy, Democrats tended to describe their opposition to black migration and emancipation as a regional, i.e., Western response.⁶⁴

In the closing of his two-and-one-half hour speech, Lincoln laid bare what the Republican Party needed: candidates who could clearly explain that slavery was wrong and prevent its expansion while not interfering with it where it existed. Anything less would result in an electoral landslide for the opposition.⁶⁵ Lincoln’s closing was astute. By crafting the job description to tailor his own positions, he knew he was also placing himself in a better position to get the nod for the nomination. He had already quietly announced his intention to the Illinois delegation to campaign for President, and his

⁶³ Abraham Lincoln, "Speech at Cincinnati, Ohio," in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, eds. Roy P. Basler et al. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 3:438–41.

⁶⁴ Stanley, *The Loyal West*, 33, 59.

⁶⁵ Abraham Lincoln, "Speech at Cincinnati," 3:460–62.

strategy called for increasing his national exposure by speaking in other states without drawing fire from openly announced candidates and without causing a popularity bubble too soon before the convention. Cincinnati was his break-out moment after the lull following the Lincoln-Douglas Debates, leading to further speaking tours, his Cooper Union speech, and—eventually—the Republican nomination.⁶⁶

As the campaign unfolded, Dickson kept in frequent correspondence with Lincoln, cautioning him to avoid certain “indefatigable” and “unscrupulous” politicians of poor character who would “destroy your moral power” in Cincinnati and Ohio, causing former conservative Whigs to bolt the party to rally around John Bell and the Constitutional Union Party in the general election. He felt it prudent to remind Lincoln that “your power with the people is their faith in your honesty *and in the honesty of your friends*.”⁶⁷ Overall, though, both Dickson and his wife were enthusiastic about Lincoln’s campaign stances and guardedly optimistic about his chances of winning the general election. In a revealing passage, Annie Dickson (who proudly shared her husband’s abolitionist beliefs) commandeered William’s letter to confide to her cousin Mary that she took “particular pleasure” in flaunting her opposition to slavery while visiting with their Southern relatives: “I am on this side of the line and can say what I please, for my heart is with old Abe on the slavery question.” Annie disclosed that she was bullish on her husband’s chances of achieving the same level of political success as Lincoln, but she closed the letter with the realistic admonition to Mary to “Keep cool... for you might be

⁶⁶ Gary Ecelbarger, “Before Cooper Union: Abraham Lincoln’s 1859 Cincinnati Speech and Its Impact on His Nomination,” *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 30, no. 1 (Winter 2009), 1-17.

⁶⁷ William M. Dickson to Abraham Lincoln, 21 May 1860, Lincoln Papers.

disappointed.”⁶⁸ Mary, however, was not disappointed—Lincoln’s election campaign was ultimately successful, and in recognition of his efforts on the campaign’s behalf, Dickson was selected by the Republican Party as one of the Presidential electors for Lincoln.⁶⁹

The election result in Ohio was resounding. With the Republican Party’s backing, Lincoln received more votes in the state than those cast for Stephen Douglas, John Bell, and John C. Breckinridge combined.⁷⁰ However, the results of the national election spelled trouble: though Lincoln had won the electoral vote handily, he had done so with only 39.8 percent of the vote—and almost no Southern support. Southerners—outraged at Lincoln’s election—did not take him at his word that he would not interfere with the practice of slavery in the South, and secession was openly discussed. In response, many Republican legislators quickly walked back any Republican support for the abolition of slavery. Ohio Representative John Sherman assured his brother, William Tecumseh Sherman, that Lincoln would adopt the Republican economic policy fully while taking a more conservative approach to slavery. Ohio Senator Benjamin F. Wade bristled at the claim that Republicans favored black citizenship, expressing his ardent hope that all African Americans would be forced to emigrate to Central America.”⁷¹

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ “Governor Dennison’s Certification of Ohio Electors in the 1860 Presidential Election,” 4 December 1860, Folder 8, Dickson Papers.

⁷⁰ Henry Harrison Simms, *Ohio Politics on the Eve of Conflict* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1961), 3. The final tally for the state of Ohio was: Lincoln: 231,610; Douglas: 187,230; Bell: 12,197; and Breckinridge: 11,405. Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 4-5.

As the crisis continued and Southern states began declaring their intention to secede, compromise options were quickly proposed in Congress.⁷² Within the state of Ohio, an embrace of the principle of compromise gained more and more adherents in early 1861, while the idea of peaceful separation did not have strong proponents. After all, almost all Ohioans could not bear to see the Mississippi in the hands of another nation, particularly if tariff rates differed sharply between the two nations. The Ohio legislature came out unanimously in support of the federal government's duty to prevent states from seceding to preserve the Constitution and the Union, while re-affirming the state's position that the federal government should not intermeddle with those states' domestic and internal affairs.⁷³

As the crisis grew, Dickson must have at least once regretted the optimistic report he had given Lincoln the previous year: "I asked [Clerk of the House of Representatives John W.] Forney how the Southerners would take your election, he said very kindly."⁷⁴ This would not—as history has shown—prove to be the case. With the firing on Fort Sumter, the nation was plunged into war. After President Lincoln's initial call for seventy-five thousand troops was issued on April 15, 1861, Judge Dickson was one of seven speakers at the city's first Union public meeting that night, which overwhelmingly carried motions in favor of the rights of the government. Dickson jubilantly notified Lincoln with the following telegram: "CINCINNATI SUSTAINS PROCLAMATION

⁷² Ibid. Ohio Senator Salmon P. Chase personally favored a compromise to give Southern states full representation in the House of Representatives in exchange for a constitutional amendment removing the fugitive slave clause. Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 17, 30.

⁷⁴ William M. Dickson to Abraham Lincoln, 9 June 1860, Lincoln Papers.

GREAT AND UNIVERSAL ENTHUSIAISM. WM. M. DICKSON.”⁷⁵ Throughout the war, he largely remained a “confidential friend” of the President, Secretary of Treasury Salmon Chase, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, and others through constant travel to Washington and advice on appointments and policy matters.⁷⁶

Black Americans, on the other hand, had to protect themselves by strategically distancing themselves from support for abolition under a Lincoln administration.⁷⁷ The citizenship rights owed to African Americans remained un-granted, and the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society summarized the race’s pitiable situation:

We the colored people of Ohio are not only exposed to all the outrages of the Fugitive Slave Law and the Dred Scott decision and the want of an effective... law for the protection of our wives, children, and ourselves against the manstealer and the kidnapper, but we are taxed without representation. We are excluded from any office or profit or honor in the state; we are constitutionally barred from the state militia; we are by law or prejudice shut out from all the benevolent institutions, which... are supported in part by the \$65,000 taxes which we annually pay into the state treasury. Young colored offenders are excluded from the state Reform School and Farm. The county infirmaries are closed to our poor. We cannot in any courts have an impartial trial by a jury of our peers. In short, this state of our nativity or adoption affords us no protection for our personal liberty, and denies us almost every civil and political right.⁷⁸

Making up this remaining ground toward equal rights would require recognition (at least politically) from a majority white population convinced of black Americans’ claims to citizenship or of the national benefits of doing so. With the country in crisis and

⁷⁵ Greve, *Centennial History of Cincinnati*, 815; William M. Dickson to Abraham Lincoln, 15 December 1861, Lincoln Papers.

⁷⁶ Reed, Randall, and Greve, *Bench and Bar of Ohio*, 1:145; William M. Dickson to Abraham Lincoln, 31 December 1860, Lincoln Papers.; Richard B. Pullan to Abraham Lincoln, 4 February 1861, Lincoln Papers.; William M. Dickson, “Salmon P. Chase’s Training for Finance,” *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 38 (July 1889), 474.

⁷⁷ Phillips, *The Rivers Ran Backwards*, 107.

⁷⁸ Gerber, *Black Ohio and the Color Line*, 24.

with a political party in power that could potentially be convinced of their dues, black Americans were eager to demonstrate their citizenship by sharing in the martial defense of the nation.

CHAPTER FOUR

“White Man’s War”

In 1861, colored men in the city of Cincinnati were prohibited the right of... offering to the authorities their services to assist in maintaining the Union and crushing out this unrighteous rebellion. They were told that this war... was a white man’s war, and no negroes were wanted.

—Marshall P. H. Jones, “Reflections,” *Colored Citizen*, November 7, 1863

Early Rejection

The dawn of the Civil War brought new challenges to black citizens in the form of widespread Northern martial volunteerism; in contrast to their white counterparts, African Americans were excluded from participation—despite their demonstrated willingness to participate. Gary W. Gallagher has powerfully argued that any consideration of slavery as the cause of the war should also bear in mind that black emancipation and black military involvement were in no way inevitable. In fact, if McClellan’s efforts to secure Richmond had been successful in 1862 and the Union effort had been victorious, there would have been little popular sympathy for either the Emancipation Proclamation or increased black citizenship. Though most white Americans would have agreed with Abraham Lincoln that four million slaves “constituted a peculiar and powerful interest” that was “somehow the cause of the war,” at the war’s beginning, free black populations comprised less than two percent of the North’s population, a percentage that was also reflected in Ohio’s census.¹ A short

¹ Abraham Lincoln, “Second Inaugural Address,” quoted in Gallagher, *The Union War*, 78; Gallagher, *The Union War*, 76-77, 88-89; Luke and Smith, *Soldiering for Freedom*, 8; George Knepper, *Ohio and Its People*, 205.

examination of Ohio's role in the conflict can help to underscore both how these obstacles to black citizenship gradually eroded and how the ties between martial volunteerism and citizenship continued to drive the attempts of African Americans to enlist.

After the firing on Fort Sumter, Lincoln issued his call for seventy-five thousand volunteers to serve for three months; Ohio's share of the total was to be thirteen thousand troops. Patriotic fervor swept the state, and over thirty thousand volunteers swamped the governor's office with requests while private militias hastened to Columbus to offer their services. Indeed, Cincinnati's enlistments alone more than met the quota as Irish, German, and other white communities rapidly formed individual regiments. Within the city of Cincinnati, and along the northern side of the Ohio River, small fortifications were thrown up to defend river crossings against any Confederate forces. The city was filled with so many volunteers that only a week after the assault on Fort Sumter "it seemed as though the entire force of able-bodied men were drilling, and, where not for the army, to act as Home Guards." In contrast to the eager acceptance of white troops into the ranks of the government's defenders, offers from hundreds of black Ohioans looking to join were refused. Both Ohio whites in general and Cincinnati whites in particular had made clear that riots would erupt if a black man wearing the Union blue set foot in the state.²

As Andrew Diemer has chronicled, many African Americans at the beginning of the war believed that martial volunteerism was the key to securing black citizenship. Despite warnings by the African Methodist Episcopal Church's *Christian Recorder* that enlistment attempts would be to "abandon self-respect and invite insult," supporters of

² Knepper, *Ohio and Its People*, 230-38; Luke and Smith, *Soldiering for Freedom*, 9; Dabney, *Cincinnati's Colored Citizens*, 22 (quote).

African-American enlistment arranged meetings and pro-Union displays in Baltimore, Boston, Cleveland, Detroit, New York, and Washington, D.C. In Philadelphia, Alfred M. Green, a black schoolteacher, reminded the audience that military service would serve the purpose of “creating anew our claims upon the justice and honor of the Republic.”³ But offers to provide troops were consistently refused. Ohio Governor William Dennison turned down flat an offer from Wilberforce College for a full company of men, stating that “the matter was in the hands of the white people” who “would take care of it.”⁴ Similarly, an offer by the Attucks Blues of Cincinnati to enlist was rejected.⁵

Undeterred, the black citizens of Cincinnati met to propose organizing a company of “Home Guards” for defensive purposes, should the need arise. At the mass meetings for the assembling of the Home Guards, a bevy of speakers called upon their brothers to rally in defense of their homes. This meeting was interrupted by the Chief of Police, who informed them that the proceedings must be stopped and that rioters were organizing to assault the meeting.⁶ In order to prevent further meetings, the police force confiscated of the keys to the meeting-house and forced the community to take down the American flag they had raised over their recruiting station. As the police force carried out these orders,

³ Luke and Smith, *Soldiering for Freedom*, 8; *Christian Recorder*, 20 April 1861; Diemer, *Free African Americans*, 189. Of course, this is not to say that the national African American voice was completely united on the subject. For example, one contributor to the *Weekly Anglo-African* called any effort to fight on behalf of the Union as “highly impolitic” and “uncalled for,” considering the treatment black Americans had received at the hands of their government. Quoted in Diemer, *Free African Americans*, 189.

⁴ Mezurek, *For Their Own Cause*, 28; Wesley, *Ohio Negroes in the Civil War*, 23 (quote).

⁵ Dabney, *Cincinnati's Colored Citizens*, 200.

⁶ William H. Parham to Jacob C. White, Jr., 12 October, 1861, quoted in James M. McPherson, *The Negro's Civil War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), 34-35; Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 5. Despite being present, Clark was uncertain whether or not a riot was being organized elsewhere or whether the threat of a riot merely served as a pretext for the police to intervene. Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 5.

they taciturnly and cruelly voiced their contempt to the black citizens: “We want you d—
d niggers to keep out of this; this is a white man’s war.”⁷

That same year, Lincoln issued a second call for soldiers, asking for 500,000 additional troops to sign three-year commitments. This time, Lincoln requested 67,000 troops from Ohio, and the state responded as fervently as before. In short order, Ohio put forth 77,000 additional white volunteers between 1861 and 1862.⁸ In desperation, one black Ohioan wrote to Secretary of War Cameron, begging him to “receive one or more regiments (or companies) of the colored of the free States.” The men were, in fact, already “partly drilled” and wanted to begin service “immediately” as a demonstration of their “will to defend the government.”⁹ The fact that this offer and others were still rejected frustrated the majority of black Americans. Giving vent to their feelings, Frederick Douglass wrote in the *Douglass Monthly*: “Why does the Government reject the negro? Is he not a man? Can he not wield a sword, fire a gun, march and countermarch, and obey orders like any other?... Men in earnest don’t fight with one hand, when they might fight with two, and a man drowning would not refuse to be saved even by a colored hand.”¹⁰

⁷ Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 4-5. Please note that proper usage dictates that the use of racial epithets should be avoided in modern usage except in historical contexts, and then only in direct quotations. All words (including the selective censoring) in this quote are preserved as originally published for historical, contextual, and argumentative purposes only.

⁸ Knepper, *Ohio and Its People*, 233; Luke and Smith, *Soldiering for Freedom*, 9.

⁹ Ira Berlin et al., *Free At Last: A Documentary History of Slavery, Freedom, and the Civil War* (New York: New Press, 1992), 18-19.

¹⁰ Frederick Douglass, *Douglass Monthly*, September 1861, quoted in McPherson, *The Negro’s Civil War*, 164.

The effort to secure emancipation for enslaved Americans had achieved no more success. Late in 1861, with the war continuing to rage, abolitionists embraced a new tactic. As Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts outlined in the fall of 1861, the key to success for securing black emancipation was to present the measure strictly as a *military necessity* as opposed to a measure of *philanthropy*. Using patriotism rather than moral suasion, emancipationists hoped to advance their cause with an enthusiastic public.¹¹ Across the North, adherence to the principles of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence had already begun to serve as the litmus test for loyalty. By working against Conservative Republicans' and Democrats' adherence to the documents' protection of white supremacy, radicals sought to appeal the Moderate Republican faction's devotion to the principle of equality before the law—hoping to win them over to their own undying belief that the documents (particularly the Declaration of Independence) stood as a condemnation of slavery and racism.¹²

This strategy slowly bore fruit, convincing many moderate Republicans of the need for the measure as a means to bring the Southern Confederacy to its knees. But it also had the unfortunate effect of increasing racist outbreaks against African-American migration and free workers. A well-circulated address by Ohio Congressman Samuel Sullivan “Sunset” Cox warned that cheap black labor would make white employment difficult to secure and would cause white wages to plummet. In Ohio alone, the winter of 1861-1862 saw over 30,000 citizens petition the state government to prohibit any future settlement by African-American migrants. Reaction to small abolitionist successes was

¹¹ Voegeli, *Free But Not Equal*, 16.

¹² Phillips, *The Rivers Ran Backward*, 228.

equally severe. When a compensated emancipation plan was enacted for the District of Columbia and signed into law on April 16, 1862, reaction in the border region was overwhelmingly negative.¹³ Former Ohio senator and governor William Allen decried the emancipation plan as a means to force Upper South and Border States to join “a northern confederacy of free states... in which they may rule supreme.”¹⁴

Efforts to secure emancipation through military means were only mildly more successful. For example, in August 1861, Major General John C. Frémont’s emancipation order in Missouri was quickly countermanded by President Lincoln after it caused furor in the Border States. Early in 1862, Major General David Hunter unilaterally began a heavy-handed recruiting effort of freed slaves in the Sea Islands of the South Carolina coast. Finding that coercive tactics were not securing enough recruits, he began offering freedom to all African-American volunteers and proclaimed a general emancipation order over South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida on May 9, 1862—once again without authorization. Though by this time Hunter had organized a rudimentary force of eight hundred contrabands, his efforts were quickly quashed by serious complaints from loyal Border States. Ten days after Hunter’s order was issued, it was cancelled by President Lincoln, and—lacking federal support—Hunter dismissed all but a handful from his African-American regiment.¹⁵

These actions by Lincoln were met with indignation by abolitionists. A meeting in Cincinnati to protest Frémont’s removal declared that Lincoln’s decision “justifies the

¹³ Gerber, *Black Ohio and the Color Line*, 28; Voegeli, *Free But Not Equal*, 17; Phillips, *The Rivers Ran Backward*, 216.

¹⁴ Phillips, *The Rivers Ran Backward*, 216.

¹⁵ Luke and Smith, *Soldiering for Freedom*, 14-17; Phillips, *The Rivers Ran Backward*, 214.

people in the worst fears of the designs of the administration.”¹⁶ Even Dickson, Lincoln’s friend, wrote in 1861 that Lincoln was “universally an admitted failure.” What was needed, Dickson felt, was a “war upon slavery”—and in this regard, Lincoln had failed to provide.¹⁷ Despite the challenges of the season, Dickson was still optimistic about the ultimate war effort but thought that the nation’s defeats would continue until the nation was ready to give up slavery, which could take several years. In the meantime, Dickson was in favor of continuing his legal work, waiting quietly for a “place where I can be of service.” He confided to his close friend Friedrich Hassaurek that he did not expect to be disturbed from his quiet life for some time—nor, necessarily, did he want to be for the time being: “In my books and studies, altogether philosophical and historical, I find a happiness that the active world cannot give.”¹⁸

African Americans, eager for citizenship, did not have the luxury of waiting and could not let the opportunities pass that the social upheaval caused by the Civil War provided. In 1862, John Mercer Langston, one of Ohio’s best-known abolitionists and a childhood friend of Peter Clark, tried once again to offer the services of free black men to the state. Appealing directly to Governor David Tod, Langston offered to raise a regiment of free black troops from within the state of Ohio using his connections at Oberlin College. Governor David Tod declined Langston’s offer, along with a similar offer from black students at Wilberforce University and a petition to replace white soldiers with new

¹⁶ Quoted in Howard, *Religion and the Radical Republican Movement*, 14.

¹⁷ William M. Dickson to Friedrich Hassaurek, 27 September 1861, Friedrich Hassaurek Papers, MSS 113, Ohio History Connection (hereafter Hassaurek Papers).

¹⁸ Ibid. Hassaurek was a fellow elector of Lincoln with Dickson; after he was appointed by Lincoln as Minister to Ecuador, Dickson kept him apprised by constant correspondence of happenings in the United States (particularly in Cincinnati) while he was away.

black American recruits at Camps Chase and Sandusky (to allow the white units to move to the front). In keeping with federal policy, Tod told Langston that he simply did not have the authorization for such measures. Besides, Tod continued, the U.S. government was a “white man’s government.... To enlist a negro soldier would be to drive every white man out of the service.” Langston, though disappointed, respectfully replied: “Governor, when you need us, send for us.”¹⁹

Internally, however, black Americans chafed under the constant social pressures that kept them from exercising their civic rights and duties. An allegorical piece from the *Chicago Tribune* (and reprinted in the September 1862 edition of *Douglass’ Monthly*) highlights the illogical nature of white society’s constant rejection of black enlistment efforts. In the fable, an all-consuming fire threatened to destroy Chicago; with everything on the line, the black citizens of the town turned out “a thousand black men” to assist in squelching the flames. But instead of thanking the African-American for their assistance, “above the din of machinery, the groans of the wounded, the shrieks of women and the deep groans of men, rose the contention over the offer that the black men made. ‘D—n the niggers,’ cried out the men who were more than suspected of being the incendiaries: ‘Let them go home and do their tasks—this is a white man’s fire!’”²⁰

¹⁹ Nikki Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist*, 28; Luke and Smith, *Soldiering for Freedom*, 9; John M. Langston, *From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol* (Hartford, CT: American Publishing Company, 1894), in University of California Libraries, <https://archive.org/details/fromviriniaplan00langiala> (accessed February 19, 2018), 206.

²⁰ For this paper’s policy on the usage of historical racial epithets, please consult footnote 7 in Chapter Four.

Tension and Conflict in Cincinnati

As the war entered its second winter, African Americans in Cincinnati became increasingly willing to collectively defend black citizenship. Peter H. Clark, by this time, was a respected educator and the superintendent of the Western District Colored School. From 1859 to 1895, he labored after hours to train in more black teachers; according to Dabney's account, every teacher who entered the black schools of Cincinnati between these dates had been trained by Clark.²¹ The *National Anti-Slavery Standard* reported on January 11th, 1862 on his rebuttal to a meeting of anti-abolitionist citizens. At the conclusion of the meeting, Clark arose and asked to give a rebuttal to the pro-slavery speakers. The majority agreed, and Clark's well-informed and well-performed speech won the crowd over. At his conclusion, they "would not permit him to stop" and regaled him with applause "in which even the pro-slavery men united." The author mused that "it was a triumph which the anti-slavery men of this city will long remember."

On the other hand, that March, abolitionist Wendell Phillips spoke at Cincinnati's Pike's Opera House about abolitionism, the war, and the Union. His reception was quite different from Clark's: he was met by a mob of several hundred who hurled rotten eggs, paving stones, and insults at Phillips. Eventually, with no police assistance forthcoming, Phillips was forced to end his speech early.²² It became evident that, despite the initial

²¹ Dabney, *Cincinnati's Colored Citizens*, 107. In 1856, a law had been passed by the Ohio legislature that only applied to Cincinnati, giving the African Americans of that city the ability to control their own school system. The Western District Colored School and Gaines High School (where Clark later served as principal) became two of the foremost conduits for upward black mobility throughout the middle decades of the nineteenth century, and were key foundation stones for the nascent black middle class of the city. Hugh Davis, *"We Will Be Satisfied With Nothing Less": The African American Struggle for Equal Rights in the North during Reconstruction* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, 2011), 81; Nikki Taylor, *America's First Black Socialist*, 86.

²² Phillips, *The Rivers Ran Backward*, 216.

outpouring of Union support, Cincinnati still sheltered a fair number of strong pro-Southern supporters: in 1860, William Yancey spoke unmolested at Pike's Opera House in favor of slavery. The following April, the city elected a pro-Southern mayor, returned a fugitive slave, and allowed cannons for the Confederacy to proceed southward.²³ Mayor George Hatch even in his annual report noted that Cincinnati had been "very intimately connected" with the South. Hatch also admitted: "There may have been among us some so closely connected with those in rebellion as to feel sympathy for them."²⁴ This mix of anti-abolitionist sentiment and undercurrent of Southern sympathy would feed into continued ill-treatment of black Americans in the summer of 1862.

As the war continued into its second year, violent action once again took place against black citizens. This time, white dock workers on the wharfs of Cincinnati got into an argument with African Americans on the docks; blows were exchanged, and a more general fight broke out. For two days, the situation simmered while the police attempted to maintain order. But on July 13, 1862, the majority of police left the city to help contain a Confederate cavalry raid into Kentucky led by General John Hunt Morgan. With the police force reduced by three-fourths, whites felt free to unleash a week-long assault on black communities. Smaller incidents against African Americans escalated until they launched a counter-assault into an Irish neighborhood. In retaliation, a white mob advanced on Bucktown, sparking a sharp exchange of fire. Resistance by black residents kept the marauders at bay, but numerous African-American houses and establishments were attacked. As the riots snowballed, some prominent Cincinnati residents became

²³ Toppin, "Humbly They Served," 77.

²⁴ George Hatch, "Annual Report," 18 April 1862, quoted in Wimberg, *Cincinnati and the Civil War*, 29.

concerned for the safety of the city's property and called for an ad hoc force of one thousand men to reestablish order. Only seventy-five volunteered. The rioting continued and most black Americans fled the city, returning only after the violence wore itself down.²⁵

With no help forthcoming from city officials, remaining black residents barricaded their doors and windows and organized a defense on July 16, promising to attack any "marauders that may threaten ourselves or our neighbors." A unit of fifty black men, armed with small arms and swords, paraded the streets seeking a confrontation with the Irish mobs. When this group refused a police order to disperse, several of the men were arrested, fined, and released. The group's weapons were also confiscated in an effort to prevent further violence.²⁶

When word of this action reached the city authorities, local police were quickly rushed back to the city to restore order. Rifle companies and white Home Guard units were quickly organized "for the protection of Cincinnati from invasion, and for the quelling of any riots or disturbances that might occur in our midst." In only three days' time, thousands of white recruits had signed up—an important trial run for the very real threat that would come in just over one month's time.²⁷ But the motivating factor for the

²⁵ Folk, "Black Man's Burden in Ohio," 372-76. During the week-long rioting in 1862, black stevedores and other workers on the levees of Cincinnati were particularly targeted by Irish workers. Some of the white low-wage workers who participated in the melee seemed to associate black laborers with the ongoing reduction of trade on the Ohio River. Their efforts to drive black residents from the riverfront trades was unfortunately successful: between 1860 and 1870, the number of black levee workers decreased by 87%. Meanwhile, white employment on the docks held steady. Leonard Harding, "The Cincinnati Riots of 1862," *Bulletin of the Cincinnati Historical Society* 25, no. 4 (Oct. 1967), 230-239.

²⁶ Bennett, "Citizen Soldiers," 47-48; "What Might Have Been," *Cincinnati Gazette*, July 23, 1862; Untitled, *Cincinnati Gazette*, July 18, 1862; "The Negroes Arming Themselves and Organizing," *Cincinnati Times*, July 17, 1863.

²⁷ Bennett, "Citizen Soldiers," 47-48; "Meeting of the City Officials—They Organize Themselves into a Company," *Cincinnati Times*, July 19, 1862; "City Militia," *Cincinnati Gazette*, July 21, 1862; "The

city's response was armed action by its African-American citizens; when white oppression led to an escalated response from black residents, the broader community reacted in fear. Reflecting on the incident, the *New York Tribune* noted that black residents were in a lose-lose situation: "Those who can find nothing to do are cursed as paupers and consumers of unearned bread; but let one of them go to work, and at once he becomes an object of Democratic malevolence and mendacity. He is working too cheaply, or he has a job that a White man would like, or some other ground of assault is imagined or invented."²⁸

Setting the Stage

Throughout 1861 and early 1862, Congress had taken a series of small steps toward official African-American involvement in the war effort. The First Confiscation Act was passed in August of 1861, authorizing the seizure of slaves from Confederate owners; this law was later strengthened through acts of Congress in March and July of 1862, which clarified that escaped slaves should not be returned to Confederate owners and would be "forever free." The Militia Act of July 1862 was passed on July 17, 1862, authorizing Lincoln to utilize African Americans in whatever military roles he should find necessary. Presuming that any units formed would consist of laborers, not soldiers, Congress set net African-American pay at only seven dollars, as opposed to thirteen dollars for white soldiers.²⁹

Organization of Two Regiments of City Guards for the Protection of Cincinnati," *Cincinnati Gazette*, July 22, 1862; "Butler Light Guards and Citizens of the Fifteenth Ward, Attention!" *Cincinnati Times*, July 21, 1862.

²⁸ Quoted in *Douglass' Monthly* (September 1862).

²⁹ Luke and Smith, *Soldiering for Freedom*, 14, 18-19; George W. Williams, *A History of the Negro Troops*, 88-89; Ira Berlin et al., *Free At Last*, 60.

Meanwhile, President Lincoln's policy regarding slaves had been seemingly desultory, leaving the option regarding runaway slaves up to local commanders while curtailing more radical actions. He advanced cautiously, seeking to placate the Radical Republicans who sought to muster African Americans into the army as well as Conservative Republicans and loyal Democrats who opposed both this effort and steps taken to care for refugee slaves.³⁰ To prevent generals from taking politically dangerous moves that could force the Border States toward the act of secession, Lincoln established that emancipating the slaves by military decree was only within his purview to command, and a responsibility which he would continue to "reserve to myself."³¹

As Union military reversals in 1862 threatened to prolong the war, public opinion finally began shifting enough toward emancipation that Lincoln felt the Border States could bear the stress of emancipation in rebel areas as a military necessity. Four days after the issuance of the Militia Act, Lincoln informed his Cabinet that he had made the decision to issue a proclamation freeing slaves within whatever states remained engaged in rebellion on January 1, 1863. Faced with the knowledge that public opinion would see the issuance of such a policy after a string of defeats as a sign of weakness, rather than strength, he withheld issuing this proclamation. In addition, Lincoln also waited to ensure that federal policies were in place to deal with large numbers of freed slaves, including whether to use formerly enslaved and free African Americans in military combat.³²

³⁰ Voegeli, *Free But Not Equal*, 41.

³¹ Quoted in Westwood, *Black Troops, White Commanders, and Freedmen During the Civil War*, 15; Samito, *Becoming American under Fire*, 59.

³² Voegeli, *Free But Not Equal*, 41-42. Unaware that Lincoln had already tentatively drafted the proclamation of emancipation, William Dickson wrote to his close friend Secretary of the Treasury Salmon Chase in August of 1862 to provide him with a proposed plan for the freeing of the slaves. In his proposal, Dickson outlined a plan whereby the Confederate states would be given a certain period to return to the

Such a move would have been unthinkable in 1861 or even early in 1862; nonetheless, as the war dragged on, resistance was slowly worn down. Despite existing white prejudice, there was a growing acceptance of black participation in the war effort within the North—but only in limited measures. To this matter, Lincoln had given great thought and had eventually decided to authorize the military to use black Americans as laborers but withhold support for their participation in combat units. This policy regarding black laborers was made public on August 5, 1862, in a *New York Tribune* piece about a meeting between Lincoln and “Western gentlemen” the prior day regarding an offer of two Indiana regiments of black troops. In one masterful stroke, Lincoln had satisfied nearly everyone: army commanders, conservatives, and radicals all had something to gain from the new policy. Commanders were given permission to convert refugees into militarily useful laborers; his continued opposition to arming black citizens pleased conservative elements; and radical elements took comfort in Lincoln’s commitment to begin allowing African Americans to participate in the war effort.³³

However, the vast majority of popular support for these actions was usually grounded in racism and was focused on bettering white citizens rather than empowering black citizens with the rights of citizenship. A representative example of the Northern rationale for the acceptance of black participation can be found in Cincinnati. The August 15, 1862 edition of the *Liberator* records Major General Lewis “Lew” Wallace’s speech at a pro-war rally in Cincinnati on July 31. In his address, Wallace made clear that he

Union; if they failed to act during by the appointed time, their slaves would be declared free and the former slaveholders’ land could be apportioned among the freed slaves. Though Chase discouraged Dickson from pushing the plan further, Lincoln’s proclamation the following month would include substantially similar elements. *The Biographical Cyclopaedia and Portrait Gallery With An Historical Sketch of the State of Ohio* (Cincinnati: Western Biographical Publishing Company, 1884), s.v. “Dickson, William Martin.”

³³ Voegeli, *Free But Not Equal*, 43.

“despised the negro race” and “couldn’t help it,” proclaiming: “I will fight, before the negro is put on an equality with the white man.” But he argued that African Americans should be freed and allowed to serve as laborers. In Wallace’s opinion, slavery was the “base of the rebellion” and employing black laborers would both “weaken the enemy and strengthen ourselves.” Sadly, even this position remained unpopular with a large segment of the population; as John Abbott, a contemporary of Wallace, noted: “Posterity will be slow to believe that, in the nineteenth century, prejudice could be so inveterate and crazy, that it required great moral courage to employ colored men even to dig ditches for the army.”³⁴

Following Lincoln’s authorization of black military laborers (and despite their tacit approval), Union military commanders in the field did not immediately take action to employ black laborers. Even moderate or abolitionist commanders continued to focus more energy and attention on continuing earlier efforts to enlist African Americans for combat duties than employing them as laborers. Major General Benjamin F. Butler, military commander of Louisiana and the Department of the Gulf turned down offers by subordinates to arm escaped slaves early in August of 1862, but later authorized them to

³⁴ John Abbott, *The History of the Civil War in America* (New York: Henry Bill, 1866) in Google Books, https://books.google.com/books?id=7xL41_5BnYsC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false (accessed February 19, 2018), 2:184-85. Abbott additionally surmised that an attempt by Wallace to utilize black laborers in Kentucky that August may have been responsible for removal from command. If Abbott’s ordering of events is accurate, Wallace attempted to utilize “an efficient corps of men” composed of both white and black Americans “to accompany his soldiers and relieve them of the toil of throwing up breastworks” in the weeks prior to the formation of the Black Brigade of Cincinnati. It is to this force that Abbott credits the creation of breastworks for Wallace’s command before General William Nelson’s defeat at Richmond, Kentucky. Presumably, this work would have taken place on the north bank of the Kentucky River or at Lexington. However, after additional research, I have been unable to find any corroborating evidence for this earlier effort. It is my supposition, based on the lack of a clear account of the Black Brigade in Abbott’s detailed description of the Siege of Cincinnati, that Abbott may have incorrectly conflated Wallace’s removal prior to the Battle at Richmond in August with General Horatio Wright’s assumption of oversight of the city of Cincinnati in September. If this were the case, Abbott may have incorrectly placed the efforts of the Black Brigade in his history. Abbott, *History of the Civil War*, 2:184-85.

use African Americans as military laborers. This second effort quickly fizzled out and was not pursued again. But as the middle of August approached, Butler found himself unable to procure white reinforcements. Believing that a Confederate assault on New Orleans was imminent, he began the process of federalizing the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Louisiana Native Guards (a set of African-American militia units that had previously been granted legal status by Confederate authorities in March 1862). This force did not enter Union service until September 27, 1862, and—thus reinforced—Butler awaited the Confederate assault that never materialized. Butler completed this action without orders on the subject, and formal authorization for the unit’s formation was finally retroactively received on November 20, 1862.³⁵

Similarly, efforts to enlist African-American soldiers were begun in late August of 1862 by Brigadier General James H. “Jim” Lane in Leavenworth, Kansas. Though Lane began officially recruiting at that time, formation of the enlisted African-American soldiers did not immediately come to fruition and Lane’s effort did not receive federal authorization. However, by October of 1862, five companies of what would later officially become the 1st Kansas Colored Volunteer Regiment had been raised, and members of these companies took part in a skirmish with Confederate forces at Island Mound, Missouri, that month.³⁶

In South Carolina, Brigadier General Rufus Saxton was appointed quartermaster of the South Carolina Expeditionary Corps. He picked up where General Hunter had left

³⁵ Luke and Smith, *Soldiering for Freedom*, 17; Westwood, *Black Troops*, 15; Samito, *Becoming American under Fire*, 44-46. In Virginia in 1861, Butler had previously made use of small forces of freed slaves as military laborers on an informal, ad hoc basis. Ira Berlin et al., *Free At Last*, 8-11.

³⁶ Luke and Smith, *Soldiering for Freedom*, 17-18. Fellow Kansas Jayhawker Charles R. Jennison is also alleged to have led a unit that included some freed slaves from Missouri on a raid in November of 1861, though the backing for this claim is, at this time, scarce. Phillips, *The Rivers Ran Backward*, 220.

off, seeking authorization from Secretary of War Stanton to enlist black soldiers following the recall of a large portion of the army in the South Carolina region to Virginia. At the very end of August 1862, Saxton received authorization from Stanton to begin enlisting up to five thousand black soldiers. This was the first formal government authorization for the enlistment of black troops. Having received his approval, Saxton took his time in putting the plan into action, delaying his efforts to enlist soldiers until after the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation was announced. Additionally, his efforts were slowed by resistance from African-American citizens who had past experience with Hunter's enlistment program. Nevertheless, Saxton gradually persevered in winning over their trust, and by November 1862 he had enough recruits to field a new unit, the 1st South Carolina Volunteer Regiment.³⁷

In summary, as the last days of summer passed in 1862, no organization of African Americans had yet been actually employed for military purposes, and there was little to no indication that federal policy would soon institute any broad-scale change anytime soon. Having an understanding of both the importance of martial service in the framework of citizenship and also the glacial pace with which black Americans were achieving this citizenship highlights the impact that achieving any military service—however small—would have on African-American efforts to achieve rights and recognition.

³⁷ Westwood, *Black Troops*, 15, 126; Samito, *Becoming American under Fire*, 6, 67; Luke and Smith, *Soldiering for Freedom*, 19-20.

Enemy at the Gates

In August of 1862, Confederate forces invaded Kentucky in three columns. Two armies under Major General Edmund Kirby Smith and Brigadier General Humphrey Marshall (totaling over 20,000 men) poured over the mountains and foothills from the southeast on August 16, while thirty thousand men under Full General Braxton Bragg advanced into the southern part of the state. Union Major General Don Carlos Buell's forces, numbering forty thousand, trailed behind Bragg's, posing no resistance to the Confederate's advance.³⁸ Initial planning by Generals Braxton Bragg, Sterling Price, and Kirby Smith had pegged the cities of Lexington and Cincinnati as "entirely unprotected," and they began concentrating toward these strategic targets.³⁹

The only other major force in the area was a small Union army of sixty-five hundred green troops positioned south of Richmond, Kentucky and operating under Major General William "Bull" Nelson. Though Nelson had just taken command of the small army, he ordered it to move south of the natural defenses of the Kentucky River; this action was in direct contravention of his orders from Major General Horatio G. Wright, who as commander of the Department of the Ohio had ordered Nelson to remain north of the river. A general engagement soon broke out between Edmund Kirby Smith's Confederate Army of Kentucky and Bull Nelson's Union Army of Kentucky on August 29-30, resulting in one of the most lopsided Confederate victories of the war. As the Northern Army fled the field, they left behind as casualties or prisoners their entire supply train, most of their artillery, and over four thousand men. With the Union Army of

³⁸ Phillips, *The Rivers Ran Backward*, 200; Wimberg, *Cincinnati and the Civil War*, 73.

³⁹ Braxton Bragg, quoted in Wimberg, *Cincinnati and the Civil War*, 66.

Kentucky destroyed, no forces of any significant size stood between the Confederate army and the major population centers of Louisville and Cincinnati.⁴⁰ Nine thousand men under Confederate Brigadier General Henry Heth were detached from Smith's forces with instructions to test the defenses of Cincinnati and, if possible, take the city. Though holding the city for long after capture would have been an impossibility, even a brief occupation by the Confederate army would have allowed it to seize funds from financial institutions and stores from Cincinnati's vast warehouses. In addition, the city itself could either have been burned or held for an exorbitant ransom (which was Heth's stated intent). Naturally, the citizens of Cincinnati were panicked by the prospect, and on August 31, a meeting was held by the citizens of Cincinnati at the Burnet House to discuss surrendering the city to avoid its destruction.⁴¹

On Monday, September 1, 1862, Union Major General Lew Wallace was directed by Major General Horatio Wright to proceed to Cincinnati to prepare a defense of the city. Despite the fact that there were virtually no forces at his disposal for the defense, Wallace accepted. After setting up his headquarters at the Burnet House, Wallace declared martial law, suspended all business, ordered all the men of the city to "assemble in convenient public places for orders," and dispatched telegrams to Governor Tod of

⁴⁰ Phillips, *The Rivers Ran Backward*, 200-1. The Confederates only suffered 78 killed, 372 wounded, and one missing. Wimberg, *Cincinnati and the Civil War*, 76, 79.

⁴¹ William Howard Neff, "The Siege of Cincinnati by a Pearl Street Rifle," ed. Louis J. Tucker, in *Bulletin of the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio* 20, no. 4 (October 1962), 258; Wallace, *Autobiography*, 2:604-28. After the war, Henry Heth revealed that he would have levied a ransom of \$15 million on the population of Cincinnati to prevent its destruction if he had captured the city. Wallace, *Autobiography*, 2:627-28.

Ohio and Governor Morton of Indiana requesting additional men and firepower to defend the threatened city.⁴²

Wallace's order of "citizens for the labor, soldiers for the battle" gave Cincinnati only two options: the gun or the shovel. It also discontinued almost all business and shut all of the saloons. Until sufficient military forces could be mustered, the police would serve as provost guards. According to Henry Howe, police officers roamed the streets with arms, forcing all citizens to join in the defense. There were sentinels posted "at every corner," making it "perilous to walk the streets without a pass."⁴³ Labor brigades were formed from citizens who preferred the shovel to the musket and were quickly deployed to begin digging entrenchments to cover the approaches to Newport and Covington, Kentucky, across from Cincinnati on the south bank of the Ohio. Within two days, Wallace had fifteen thousand laborers in the field, guarded by the initial volunteers and some surviving units recently returned from the Battle of Richmond.⁴⁴ Duty was required of every citizen, regardless of their social standing; for example, one wealthy manufacturer of clothing who had not yet volunteered for any duty was waylaid by the provost guard and "escorted to the fortifications where he labored faithfully with his shovel."⁴⁵

While awaiting reinforcements, Wallace began establishing lines of entrenchments south of the city, drafted a navy of steamboats, and appropriated funds and

⁴² Wallace, *Autobiography*, 2:604-8; Neff, "The Siege of Cincinnati by a Pearl Street Rifle," 260.

⁴³ Louis Leonard Tucker, *Cincinnati During the Civil War* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1962), 28; Toppin, "Humbly They Served," 81; Quoted in Wimberg, *Cincinnati and the Civil War*, 87.

⁴⁴ Neff, "The Siege of Cincinnati by a Pearl Street Rifle," 265; Wallace, *Autobiography*, 2:610.

⁴⁵ Neff, "The Siege of Cincinnati by a Pearl Street Rifle," 265.

supplies for the city's defense. After observing the overcrowded ferries at work plying the Ohio with their cargo of laborers, Wallace realized the need for a pontoon bridge to make the transfer of supplies and men possible by the time Heth's forces arrived. Upon meeting with three local builders, Wallace found out that they were previously unfamiliar with pontoon bridges; despite this handicap, they promised him that one could be built in forty-eight hours. Wallace was understandably astonished, as military engineers had taken three months to construct one across the Ohio at Paducah, Kentucky. However, by utilizing pre-built coal barges and the aid of a steamboat, the civilian engineers made good on their promise and completed a twenty-five foot wide bridge from shore-to-shore in only thirty hours.⁴⁶

With the entrenchments under construction, officials only wanted soldiers to fill them. In addition to the forces assembled in Cincinnati, Wallace oversaw a massive effort to bring in both raw and experienced soldiers from outside the city. Empty trains were sent up the railroad tracks into the interior; when each one was filled, it would be reversed to the city, and the process repeated. In short order, General Wallace cobbled together a fighting force of raw troops from Ohio and Indiana later affectionately known as "Squirrel Hunters" for the makeshift nature (and generally poor quality) of firearms they carried.⁴⁷ Volunteers began streaming to the city from all across the Midwest, including a force of abolitionists and Oberlin students from northeastern Ohio, who maintained an upbeat mood by singing "John Brown's Body" and other antislavery

⁴⁶ Wallace, *Autobiography*, 2:609-15.

⁴⁷ Neff, "The Siege of Cincinnati by a Pearl Street Rifle," 262; Gallagher, *The Union War*, 89; Wallace, *Autobiography*, 2:604-8; Tucker, *Cincinnati During the Civil War*, 27. Such was the wide variety in quality of armaments that Wallace observed some volunteers carrying Revolutionary War horse-pistols while another soldier arrived armed with only "a claymore inherited from a Highland forefather." Wallace, *Autobiography*, 612n1.

songs. The Squirrel Hunters were well-received in Cincinnati, with “cheers and hurrahs” greeting each new set of arrivals. Food and other provisions were supplied for the men by local residents, public parks were turned into dining halls, and public halls into barracks and headquarters. In short, every assistance that the city could offer to their defenders was rendered.⁴⁸

The Impressment of Willing Men

During the excitement, the black citizens of Cincinnati faced a great deal of uncertainty about the level of support they would be allowed to contribute to the defense of the city. Wallace’s order on September 2 had stipulated that “the citizens must... assemble in convenient public places for orders” immediately.⁴⁹ But the designation of these “convenient public places” was left up to Mayor George Hatch. In his accompanying proclamation, Hatch selected the city’s polling places as the most convenient gathering points. This instruction, then, seemed to exclude black citizens because they lacked polling places—but the proclamation also stipulated that “every man of every age, be he citizen or alien, who lives under the protection of our laws is expected to take part in the organization.”⁵⁰

Regardless of whether or not Hatch considered African Americans to be “citizens,” some black Cincinnatians reasoned that the phrase “or alien” would certainly oblige them to serve. As such, the question was put to the police provost-guards that

⁴⁸ Brandt, *The Town That Started the Civil War*, 247; Neff, “The Siege of Cincinnati by a Pearl Street Rifle,” 263 (quote); Dabney, *Cincinnati’s Colored Citizens*, 67. The reception in Covington, on the other hand, was quite cool: “taunts and curses” rained down on the passing troops from rebel sympathizers expecting the success of the Confederate army. Neff, “The Siege of Cincinnati by a Pearl Street Rifle,” 263.

⁴⁹ Wallace, *Autobiography*, 607.

⁵⁰ Wimberg, *Cincinnati and the Civil War*, 86.

same morning: “Does the Mayor desire colored men to report for service in the city’s defense?” The response—both to the initial query and to the follow-up questions was exceptionally brusque and dehumanizing. The volunteers were told that “all [the mayor] wants is for you niggers to keep quiet” and that the order did not apply to them because “Niggers ain’t citizens.”⁵¹ In other areas of the city, offers by prominent black citizens to provide service in the defense of the city (including offers to provide armed companies, “armed and equipped at their own expense”) were initially accepted, but before any further arrangements could be made, the city’s police force intervened and arrested those involved.⁵²

The reason the police intervened lies in the differences of rationale between Lew Wallace, George Hatch, and the primarily Irish police force. Later on the same day that the initial order was given, General Wallace—due to the exigency of the situation and the shortage of manpower—sought to have the African-American men participate in the defense of the city. As he had made clear the previous month, Wallace was fully willing to have black men participate in any way that would help lighten the burden for white soldiers and volunteers. However, his instructions to notify them of this was delegated to Mayor Hatch.⁵³ Prior to conveying the order, a council was held—whether with or without Wallace present is unclear—where the prevailing thought was that African Americans would not willingly work. As a result, the order was given to the police force

⁵¹ Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 6. For this paper’s policy on the usage of historical racial epithets, please consult footnote 7 in Chapter Four.

⁵² William Dickson’s Report to Gov. John Brough, quoted in Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 15-16; “The Cincinnati Correspondent of the Tribune Speaks of the Services of the Negroes in That City,” *Douglass’ Monthly*, Oct. 1862.

⁵³ Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 3-4.

to seize black Cincinnatians by force, thus depriving them of the opportunity to volunteer. This struck directly at the citizenship of black Americans, for, as Clark summarized, “freedom to volunteer would imply some freedom, some dignity, some independent manhood.”⁵⁴ For their part, members of the African-American community believed that this order had been racially motivated, having been influenced by the fact that Hatch and “nearly all of his police were Irish” and therefore at odds with the black community. They ascribed the reason for the order and subsequent cruel treatment to the refusal of the Irish community—particularly the police—to participate in the city’s defense unless black Cincinnatians were forced to partake as well.⁵⁵

When the police force began their arrests of African Americans, no prior warning was given to the black community, and no reason for the violent roundup was offered to those seized this way. Any questions put to them during the endeavor about the reason for their seizure were answered with oaths and an ominous “you will find out time enough.”⁵⁶ Ripped from whatever work or recreation they were currently employed at (and without any time to prepare for life in the trenches), the men were herded together at bayonet point into a vacant lot on Plum Street.⁵⁷ Throughout the process, the men were

⁵⁴ Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 6; Elisha Weaver, “Editorial Correspondence,” *Christian Recorder*, 20 September 1862.

⁵⁵ Elisha Weaver, “Editorial Correspondence,” *Christian Recorder*, 20 September 1862 (quote); Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 7-8. This anti-Irish mentality in the black community of Cincinnati stemmed from years of poor treatment and the Irish community’s rejection of abolitionism. It found outflow in many abolitionist writings, both black and white, such as in the Cincinnati *Evangelist* (a pro-abolition Protestant publication), which declared in 1863 that “Of the colored people in this city, we believe a larger proportion than of the Irish are worthy, inoffensive, and industrious, and they have a stronger claim to protection.” Quoted in Gerber, *Black Ohio and the Color Line*, 51.

⁵⁶ Elisha Weaver, “Editorial Correspondence,” *Christian Recorder*, 20 September 1862; Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 7.

⁵⁷ Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 7; Dabney, *Cincinnati’s Colored Citizens*, 24.

“roughly handled” and treated “like reptiles.”⁵⁸ The gathering process was invasive and dehumanizing: attics and cellars of private homes were not immune from search. In at least a few cases, if the police forces were informed that no black male resided in the house, they would take a bayonet and stab the mattresses repeatedly to ensure that nobody was hiding within. The impressment gangs continued to roam the streets of Cincinnati looking for more black men throughout the night of September 2, all of September 3, and into Wednesday, September 4.⁵⁹

The degradations did not stop once the African-American men were secured under guard. Their attempts to congregate on the shaded side of the yard were prohibited; instead, all of the black citizens were given the instruction to gather on the sunlit half and “squat,” while a standing order was issued to the police guards to shoot anyone that rose from their place. After the first squads of the black laborers were herded across the river into Kentucky, the same instruction was repeated while the rest of the men were brought forward. All of this was accomplished without provision or rations given to the African-American laborers, and the men were subsequently underfed during the initial term of service on the entrenchments.⁶⁰ Once across the river, the black Cincinnatians who had been ostensibly assembled to work on the fortifications were lined up and soldiers selected from their ranks those they desired to have as cooks for the other workers. Though this process was quite humiliating, one member of the Pearl Street Riflemen noted that the black men they selected for their regiment were quite pleased with the

⁵⁸ Dabney, *Cincinnati's Colored Citizens*, 24.

⁵⁹ Elisha Weaver, “Editorial Correspondence,” *Christian Recorder*, 20 September 1862; Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 7.

⁶⁰ Elisha Weaver, “Editorial Correspondence,” *Christian Recorder*, 20 September 1862; Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 7-8.

change of affairs—if only to be out from under the harsh conditions imposed by the policemen.⁶¹

Upon coming to Cincinnati around this time, one African American newspaper editor found the city in a state of gloom, with the face of each inhabitant showcasing belief in the imminent capture of the city by the Confederates. Those of the black inhabitants, especially those of the wives and families of the impressed members, were even more downcast.⁶² These African-American women suffered from the same uncertainty as their husbands and loved ones, and craved the same citizenship as men. The victims of the police impressment numbered far more than those in the trenches; as Ella Forbes has summarized, “white supremacy was not gender-based.”⁶³

Unable to change their condition yet still desiring to demonstrate their commitment to both the Union and citizenship, Cincinnati’s black residents turned to their abolitionist friends for assistance; the date was September 4, 1862.

⁶¹ “The Cincinnati Correspondent of the Tribune Speaks of the Services of the Negroes in That City,” *Douglass’ Monthly*, Oct. 1862; Neff, “The Siege of Cincinnati by a Pearl Street Rifle,” 265-66; Brown, *Negro in the American Rebellion*, 107.

⁶² Elisha Weaver, “Editorial Correspondence,” *Christian Recorder*, 20 September 1862.

⁶³ Ella Forbes, *African American Women During the Civil War*, *Studies in African American History and Culture* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1998), 4, 7.

CHAPTER FIVE

“Let Them Be Treated Like Men”

In coming time, strangers, viewing the works on the hills of Newport and Covington, will ask, “Who built these intrenchments?” You will answer, “We built them.” If they ask, “Who guarded them?” you can reply, “We helped in thousands.” If they inquire the result, your answer will be, “The enemy came and looked at them, and stole away in the night.”

—Lew Wallace, Proclamation to the Citizens of Cincinnati, 1862

The Formation of the Black Brigade

The plight of the African Americans working on the trenches of Cincinnati came to the attention of abolitionists at work in the city and on the trenches. Their pitiable condition, with “some of them half-starved and all so much abused” caused great consternation, and efforts were made to publicize the matter.¹ However, the *Cincinnati Gazette* was the only paper to proactively sympathize with the black citizens’ plight. “It would have been decent to have invited the colored inhabitants to turn out in defense of the city,” wrote the editor, in order to “compare their patriotism with that of those who were recently trying to drive them from the city.” But since this had not been done, the least that the city could do was to “let them be treated like men” during the remainder of their service.²

¹ Brown, *Negro in the American Rebellion*, 107.

² “The Colored Brigade,” *Cincinnati Gazette*, September 4, 1862; Bennett, “Citizen Soldiers,” 49. The Gazette’s editorial board believed that the war was being fought for a just cause and had been active throughout 1862 in promoting the idea that emancipation was the necessary next step to winning the war. Wimberg, *Cincinnati and the Civil War*, 34.

On September 4, 1862, abolitionists were able to discuss with Wallace the idea of having the city's African-American forces moved officially under military command due to their inhumane treatment. Wallace agreed, condemning the actions of the police force. For the task of leading the black laborers, Wallace selected Judge William Martin Dickson—who was recognized as “the colored people’s friend” and the object of their confidence—and empowered him to act as commanding officer.³ Impressed by Wallace’s wisdom in this instance and many other decisions made during those chaotic first days, the *Commercial* reported on September 5 that “Major General Wallace... has shown that he has the sound sense to reform an abuse or repair an error, the moment it is pointed out to him.”⁴

Dickson was present in Cincinnati when the call for citizens to take their places was issued. Writing after the fact to his friend Friedrich Hassaurek, Dickson noted that the Confederates had been able to advance and threaten the city because of the federal government’s obsession on capturing cities rather than armies. But Dickson highlighted a second issue for the continuation of the war as well: divine judgment. Dickson believed that the national embrace of black oppression “current among all classes and all parties in the U.S. makes us all our sufferings just; indeed we deserve much more.” Eager to help correct the first issue of confronting the Confederate Army, Dickson had quickly volunteered for duty and enlisted in a short-term volunteer regiment as a private. But before his unit could proceed across the river, General Wallace contacted him and offered him a temporary colonelcy and command of the black laborers. Given the opportunity to

³ Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 8-9, 16; Levi Coffin, quoted in Dabney, *Cincinnati’s Colored Citizens*, 63. Levi Coffin was a renowned Quaker abolitionist.

⁴ Wimberg, *Cincinnati and the Civil War*, 95.

confront both the Confederate advance and the issue of black oppression, Judge Dickson readily accepted.⁵

Under William Dickson and James Lupton, the acting camp commandant, the treatment of the black men quickly improved. Dickson immediately proceeded to Fort Mitchell, where the men were camped. At the time of his arrival, squads of soldiers were in the process of selecting servants and cooks from among the men, despite their protests; Dickson immediately put a halt to this practice and dismissed the police provost guards. In a quick consultation with the black citizens, they revealed their willingness to continue working on the entrenchments if the opportunity was provided to them to go back to their homes for the night to prepare and comfort their families, and assuming that their treatment improved. Despite their thirty-six hours of labor, poor treatment, and meager half-rations, the morale of the men was still quite good, and the chief engineer on the works had already commended them for efficient work.⁶

Greatly encouraged, Dickson secured all of the kidnapped men from the surrounding regiments and, that evening, marched the men back to Cincinnati to the juncture of Sixth Street and Broadway (at the edge of Bucktown and near many of the men's homes). Here, Dickson established his headquarters and outlined to the men his plan: upon their return tomorrow at the appointed time, he would personally ensure that they would be formed into a "Black Brigade" and "kept together as a distinct body" working on a designated section of fortifications. He assured them that he would do his best to ensure that they "receive protection and the same treatment as white men."

⁵ William M. Dickson to Friedrich Hassaurek, 27 September 1862, Hassaurek Papers.

⁶ William Dickson's Report to Gov. John Brough, quoted in Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 9, 16-18.

Having notified the city officials of his intentions, he then dismissed the four hundred tired laborers.⁷

Almost immediately, the police force once again began roughly seizing any African Americans they could find and threw them in prison. Despite the late hour, Dickson secured an order from General Wallace forbidding the arrest of any black man, conveyed this order to Mayor Hatch, secured the men's freedom, and—with the assistance of his newly-appointed staff and some local abolitionists—escorted them to their homes.⁸

The next day at five in the morning, though Dickson had only dismissed four hundred black Americans, seven hundred reported for duty, with the number eventually growing to around one thousand. Black citizens that had been in hiding either in town or who had fled to the countryside gladly made their reappearance and joined the unit. The number was swelled considerably by the confidence that the black residents of Cincinnati felt in both Judge Dickson and James Lupton, the acting camp commandant. The men were to be paraded back to the fortifications, where they eventually provided two weeks' worth of labor on the entrenchments and participated in military drills while stationed at Camp Shaler. At the outset, Dickson promised the men that they could leave whenever they so desired; only one man availed himself of the opportunity.⁹ As the *Christian Recorder* observed: "His Honor, Judge Dickinson [sic], is thereby convinced of the loyalty and willingness of the colored people to work for the Government; and," the

⁷ Ibid., 17.

⁸ Ibid., 18.

⁹ James Ramage, *The Siege of Cincinnati*, Film, directed by Paige E. Malott (Newport, KY: Aubergine Imagery, 2013); Brown, *Negro in the American Rebellion*, 108; Greve, *Centennial History of Cincinnati*, 833; Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 8-21.

editor added with relish, “it is said by good authority, that the colored people would do more in one day than the same number of Irish would do in two days.”¹⁰

The men congregated at the unit’s headquarters that morning were in their “oldest clothes,” well-prepared for the weeks of work on the trenches. With their diverse manner of equipage contrasting with their equally diverse degrees of skin tones, they formed a sight that was “picturesque,” to say the least.¹¹ As the men stood in their line of march by companies, James Lupton—a white hardware shop owner who had been appointed as the group’s Acting Camp Commandant—presented the men with a brand new national flag. Its inscription read in bold letters: “THE BLACK BRIGADE OF CINCINNATI.” As Lupton explained, “A flag is the emblem of sovereignty—a symbol and guarantee of *protection*.” Therefore, he admonished the men to “rally around it” with the ardent hope that “slavery will soon die.” Only on that day could there truly be “a land of the free—one country, one flag, one destiny.”¹² Thus encouraged, the men stepped forth to the strains of martial airs, accompanied by both “grins and jeers” and by the “good words of the citizens who lined the streets.”¹³ Preceded by Colonel Dickson, they proceeded down Broadway Street and crossed the river to their camp.¹⁴

These one thousand men of the Black Brigade represented a substantial commitment by the African-American population of Cincinnati to the war effort: at the

¹⁰ Elisha Weaver, “Editorial Correspondence,” *Christian Recorder*, 20 September 1862.

¹¹ Dabney, *Cincinnati’s Colored Citizens*, 25.

¹² Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 9.

¹³ Dabney, *Cincinnati’s Colored Citizens*, 25; William Dickson’s Report to Gov. John Brough, quoted in Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 19.

¹⁴ Dabney, *Cincinnati’s Colored Citizens*, 25; Elisha Weaver, “Editorial Correspondence,” *Christian Recorder*, 20 September 1862.

time, the total African American population in Cincinnati was around 3,700, so total involvement by the community in the Black Brigade was more than 25 percent.¹⁵ All elements of the community were represented, including a large number of the black communities' leaders, and each one of the members had an individual story to tell.¹⁶ James Brown was originally from Kentucky, and, as an active member of the Canadian emigration movement, frequently made trips back to the South to assist other slaves seeking to escape. William Henry Harrison was an active member of the colored school board committee and a dynamic abolitionist. Phillip B. Ferguson was a cabinetmaker, originally from Virginia, who had previously represented Cincinnati at the 1858 Ohio convention.¹⁷ Another cabinetmaker from Virginia was Powhatan Beaty, who had been taken to Cincinnati in 1849. In addition to his apprenticeship to a colored cabinetmaker, Beaty also studied acting under James E. Murdock, a white professional actor who had recently retired to an Ohio farm. And James Mason, who would serve as the Captain of Company C of the Black Brigade, was the former body servant of James Murray Mason, the Confederate Minister to England who was at the center of the *Trent* Affair.¹⁸

¹⁵ Nikki Taylor, *America's First Black Socialist*, 265.

¹⁶ Horton and Flaherty, "Black Leadership in Antebellum Cincinnati," 72; William Dickson's Report to Gov. John Brough, quoted in Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 22-30. James Oliver Horton and Stacy Flaherty's list of identified African-American leaders in Cincinnati from 1830-1860 unsurprisingly has a large amount of overlap with the roster of the Black Brigade, including: Milton Bentley, Rev. William Buckner, James Brown, Joseph Early, Phillip B. Ferguson, Thomas Goode, William Henry Harrison, John Jackson, James Johnson, William H. Mann, Jackson M. Moose, George W. Roots, and William P. West. This list may be incomplete, as the official roll of the Black Brigade only includes those who served during and after the second week of service. In addition, many of the remaining leaders not listed in the roster had family members and descendants participating in the Black Brigade. Ibid.

¹⁷ Horton and Flaherty, "Black Leadership in Antebellum Cincinnati," 77-79.

¹⁸ Errol G. Hill, *Shakespeare in Sable: A History of Black Shakespearean Actors* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 61; William Dickson's Report to Gov. John Brough, quoted in Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 26.

Observing on September 4, 1862, that the black citizens were now able to freely volunteer their services on the city's entrenchments, the *Cincinnati Daily Gazette* proudly declared that the Black Brigade "ends the idea of a white man's war."¹⁹

The willingness of the men of the Black Brigade stands in sharp contrast to some—though certainly not all—of the white units in the city. For example, the same day the Black Brigade sallied forth, the 106th and 108th Ohio Regiments refused to cross the Ohio River unless back-pay was received. Alarm bells were sounded at three in the morning to enlist the militia's help in preventing a mutiny; the bulk of the regiments' men finally agreed to cross the river if payment was delivered that same day, but one company from the 108th was arrested. Ordinary citizens were also shirking the call to the trenches. In Cincinnati, three tailors were found to be still busy at their work. These men were sent to the entrenchments, with the *Enquirer* commenting that the men should have been forced to wear the dresses they had been in the process of sewing.²⁰ In addition, several men were arrested in Covington, Kentucky, for not working on the fortifications; the *Commercial* also reported that in Newport, Kentucky, squads of men were "carried off to the fortifications and put to work."²¹ These men and other pro-Southern Kentuckians hurled invectives at soldiers guarding them while they worked, but the presence of armed soldiers kept them at their tasks of digging entrenchments.²²

Unfortunately, the willingness of black Americans to serve did not prevent interracial assaults in Cincinnati, despite the presence of federal troops and the

¹⁹ Richard Folk, "Black Man's Burden in Ohio," 370n59.

²⁰ Wimberg, *Cincinnati and the Civil War*, 94; *Enquirer*, September 5, 1862.

²¹ Wimberg, *Cincinnati and the Civil War*, 101; *Commercial*, September 5, 1862.

²² Neff, "The Siege of Cincinnati by a Pearl Street Rifle," 268.

implementation of martial law.²³ With most of the younger black men out of the city and incapable of stopping any assault, some Irish citizens began to throw rocks at the home of Isaac Troy, one of the black community's recognized leaders. When Troy threatened to open fire, a scuffle broke out, and a man named John Green attempted to wrest Troy's gun away from him. In the process, Green accidentally discharged the weapon, killing himself. Ten days later, another incident resulted in the fatal stabling of an African-American man by a soldier from Indiana.²⁴ However, the situation of the black community was remarkably improved overall once the military had enough troops to effectively establish martial law. Prior to military intervention, some small Irish mobs had begun assaulting the African-American churches, driving attendees away; but when the police force was temporarily replaced, black citizens were free to once again attend to their business and religious gatherings without fear of reprisal.²⁵

The Service of the Black Brigade

When the city of Cincinnati was threatened, help poured in from across the state. Within six days of Wallace's proclamation, seventy-two thousand men were arrayed for battle either in the entrenchments or at strategic crossing points (to contest any Confederate flanking movements toward the city). Fully sixty thousands of these men

²³ Petlack, "A Dilemma of Civil Liberties," 161.

²⁴ "Murderous Affray in the Fourth Ward," *Gazette*, September 6, 1862; Untitled, *Commercial*, September 16, 1862; Petlack, "A Dilemma of Civil Liberties," 161.

²⁵ Elisha Weaver, "Editorial Correspondence," *Christian Recorder*, 20 September 1862. Nevertheless, African-American church attendance during the early parts of the siege was depressed, partly due to the initial impressment of Grafton E. Graham, a pastor at Brown Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church (then known as Allen's Chapel), and other black ministers. Others were still "afraid to come for fear of being mobbed." Ibid.

were irregulars.²⁶ The abolitionist community, like other loyalist communities within Cincinnati and across the states of Indiana and Ohio, gave assistance, and units from as far away as Oberlin College arrived to defend the city. Cincinnati abolitionists sought to make their arrival as welcome as possible, and Quaker abolitionist Levi Coffin recorded helping fellow abolitionists serve meals at a makeshift table in the Ninth Ward that could seat five hundred soldiers at a time.²⁷

In less than a week, the volunteers built 5 fully bastioned forts and 28 cannon batteries on a line that stretched nearly eight miles across very broken terrain, with the south bank of the Ohio River securing each end of the line. The Black Brigade was assigned to a section of line along Cemetery Ridge and Three Mile Creek, between Alexandria Pike and the Licking River. Their share of the labor included constructing earthworks and roads, as well as clearing trees to open up fields of fire for the Union positions. This latter work often placed them far in front of the Union lines, resulting in them being mistaken for Confederate forces by the officer in charge of the 50th Ohio Volunteer Infantry. This officer sounded the alarm and ordered an artillery battery to begin firing on the Black Brigade, which the commander of the artillery had the good sense to refuse. When the officer continued to insist, the gunners fired blank cartridges and dispatched a flag of truce to prove the unit's nature and calm the officer's fears.²⁸

²⁶ Wallace, *Autobiography*, 2:609-24; Joseph S. Stern, Jr., "The Siege of Cincinnati," *Bulletin of the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio* 18, no. 3 (July 1960), 175.

²⁷ Quoted in Dabney, *Cincinnati's Colored Citizens*, 62.

²⁸ Jeannine Kreinbrink, *The Siege of Cincinnati*, Film, directed by Paige E. Malott (Newport, KY: Aubergine Imagery, 2013); U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), series I, vol. XVI, part 2, 664-65 (hereafter cited as *Official Records*); Wimberg, *Cincinnati and the Civil War*, 102-5; William Dickson's Report to Gov. John Brough, quoted in Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 20.

By the fifth of September, enough entrenchments had been built that Major General Wright could confidently notify Governor Tod to send no more volunteers to the front, and the situation had stabilized to the extent that lawful business (excepting the sale of alcohol) was allowed to resume daily until four in the afternoon (at which point the men were to resume drilling). In order to allow Major General Wallace to devote his full attention to the forces on the entrenchments, Wright removed him from direct command of the city of Cincinnati.²⁹

News that Heth was still advancing on the city changed Wright's calculus. In a series of telegraphs on September 7, he notified the governors of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Michigan to hurry their regular troops forward without delay. Brigadier General Henry Heth's Confederate forces arrived on the outskirts on September 8; upon surveying the entrenchments, Heth deployed his army but withheld an attack.³⁰ It is well that this was the case, for one soldier remarked that "militia situated like us are worthless when attacked by veterans. A hundred experienced cavalrymen, dashing down with drawn sabers, revolvers, and secesh yells will scatter us in a twinkling." The militiaman was not unprepared, however, and had concocted the perfect plan for the occasion: "When the others run—I'll drop beside this fence, simulate death, and open an eye to the culminating circumstances."³¹

The danger of the militia taking flight weighed heavily upon Wright's mind. On September 8, he notified Wallace to prepare to dismiss the men of the city back to their

²⁸ *Official Records*, I:XVI, pt. 2, 487-488.

³⁰ *Official Records*, I:XVI, pt. 2, 495; Wallace, *Autobiography*, 2:619-24.

³¹ Quoted in Tucker, *Cincinnati During the Civil War*, 32.

homes, where they could still be called upon if needed.³² But two days later, with the Confederate forces still outside the city and no certainty as to the whereabouts and intentions of Kirby Smith's larger force, Wright found it necessary to countermand this order and to request that Governor Tod once again send forward volunteers from across the state.³³ Wallace, too, was worried about the prospect of seeing the citizens break and run for the pontoon bridge, and he had a telegraph line installed along the whole front to call for reinforcements should a Confederate assault commence.³⁴ With such an inexperienced force, false alarms were frequent, and tensions remained high while Heth reconnoitered the line for a weak point.³⁵ As the month of September wore on, Wright was kept busy moving troops between Cincinnati and Louisville as needed. When Heth's army was present in front of Cincinnati, he shifted more troops there, which panicked civilian leaders in Louisville. Going over Wright's head, they notified Stanton and Lincoln, who then made inquiries of Wright. Wright quickly assured them that Cincinnati was the current intended target and that forces would be moved to reinforce Louisville should the case arise.³⁶

Despite the tension caused by the difficult work and the proximity of the enemy, spirits remained high within the Black Brigade: on September 7, 1862, the *Cincinnati Tribune* observed that black regiments going off-duty "gave three rousing cheers for Gen.

³² *Official Records*, I:XVI, pt. 2, 499.

³³ *Ibid.*, 504. Tod agreed to the necessity, telling Wright that fifty thousand men should reach him over the next two days. *Ibid.*

³⁴ Wallace, *Autobiography*, 2:620-23.

³⁵ Neff, "The Siege of Cincinnati by a Pearl Street Rifle," 269.

³⁶ *Official Records*, I:XVI, pt. 2, 505-513.

Wallace, and three more for Judge Dickson.”³⁷ Most other units maintained high spirits as well, causing a *New York Tribune* reporter to praise the city’s unified show of patriotism and diversity, with workers “side by side” of every age, trade, and social standing.³⁸ Similarly, an *Atlantic Monthly* noted the “representatives of all nations and classes,” giving particular attention to the Black Brigade, with its men “evidently holding it their especial right to put whatever impediments they could in the northward path of those whom they considered their own peculiar foe.”³⁹

Yet despite the presence of the Confederate forces outside of the city, there were still difficulties in securing the support needed. On September 8, the *Times* revealed the disturbing report that “some men hid in cellars and knee deep in water in a cistern to avoid service.” The following day, the *Gazette* relayed the order that three thousand additional men were needed to serve as laborers immediately—otherwise, the police force would impress them against their will. But by the next day, not even half of the men required had reported. With the workers still needed, the order was given for musicians to play in the streets; when curious men came out to see the commotion, they were arrested and put to work on the fortifications.⁴⁰

Notwithstanding their other provost duties, the police force still found time to pester and arrest the black laborers without cause whenever they returned to the city. On September 10, Major General Wright found it necessary to reiterate Wallace’s order for

³⁷ Brown, *Negro in the American Rebellion*, 108.

³⁸ Tucker, *Cincinnati During the Civil War*, 29.

³⁹ T. B. Reid, “The Siege of Cincinnati,” *Atlantic Monthly* 11, no. 64 (February 1863), 233.

⁴⁰ *Gazette*, 9 September, 1862; Wimberg, *Cincinnati and the Civil War*, 120; Toppin, “Humbly They Served,” 89.

Mayor Hatch to cease arresting African Americans without cause; going forward, Wright warned, all arrests of black citizens must be only for “crimes, “disorderly conduct,” or a direct order from either Wright’s or Dickson’s headquarters. In this same letter, Wright’s headquarters applauded the work of the Black Brigade, stating that “the negroes of the city so far have turned out and labored very cheerfully when called on to do so”—a direct rebuff of the police’s initial forced impressment.⁴¹

On the night of September 11, the Confederates retreated to the south under the cover of a thunderstorm. Heth’s army withdrew without confrontation, and Wright and Wallace thought it best to keep their inexperienced Union forces from pressing the pursuit too closely. The vast majority of Union civilian forces were mustered out of service two days later amid “cheers and the boom of cannon,” with the exception of some laborer units who had been hired on to secure the city’s entrenchments.⁴² From September 8 to September 13, laborers on the works were paid \$1 each per day, with about 1,780 men on the works each day during that time frame. Starting on Monday, September 15, laborers (including the members of the Black Brigade) were paid \$1.50/day.⁴³

The disappearance of the Confederates from in front of the defenses of Cincinnati did not mean that all risk of danger was gone. As the Black Brigade went about their

⁴¹ *Official Records*, I:XVI, pt. 2, 504-5.

⁴² Henry Howe, quoted in Wimberg, *Cincinnati and the Civil War*, 134; Wendell P. Dabney, *Cincinnati’s Colored Citizens: Historical, Sociological, and Biographical* (1926; reprint, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1926), 24; Wallace, *Autobiography*, 2:619-24; *Official Records*, I:XVI, pt. 2, 514, 517. It appears that some leaderless “Squirrel Hunters” continued to remain at the front of their own volition, causing General Wright to write Wallace as to the possibility of “get[ting] rid” of them, as they were “under no control.” *Official Records*, I:XVI, pt. 2, 524.

⁴³ *Official Records*, I:XVI, pt. 2, 667-68. Offers of increased pay for laborers enticed many white volunteers to forgo their previous commitments to their regiments. Toppin, “Humbly They Served,” 89.

work, a stray bullet accidentally fired by a member of the 4th Cincinnati Volunteers knocked a shovel from the hands of John Williams, a member of the Black Brigade's First Regiment, Company E. Though the bullet passed within a few inches of Williams's head, he "never flinched... [and] "gaily proceeded with his day's work, as if he enjoyed the smelling of gunpowder."⁴⁴ On the other hand, Joseph Johns—a member of the Black Brigade's Second Regiment, Company E—was accidentally killed by a falling tree in front of Fort Shaler on September 17. Though Johns was buried with honors by the officers and men of the Black Brigade upon their return to the city, he left behind a young wife and an infant. By his sacrificial service, Johns became one of the first African Americans to die during the Civil War while completing military duty.⁴⁵

On September 20, the Black Brigade of Cincinnati was ordered to return to the city and disband. Before the men left the works, Marshall P. H. Jones stepped forward from the men to address Colonel Dickson. On behalf of the entire unit, he wished to "deeply thank" Dickson for his efforts on their behalf and to present to him an engraved sword they had purchased.⁴⁶ After Dickson's acceptance, the Black Brigade marched back across the Ohio River with "music playing" and "banners flying" to Cincinnati. There, Dickson dismissed the men with a final address, retracing the accomplishments of the Black Brigade, particularly in light of their willingness to defend the very

⁴⁴ William Dickson's Report to Gov. John Brough, quoted in Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 24.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 27. Joseph's wife, Elizabeth, was later awarded a pension of \$12/month in 1900 for his service. *A Bill Granting a Pension to Elizabeth Johns*, Private Resolution 181, 56th Congress, 1st sess. (April 7, 1900), 1496.

⁴⁶ Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 13. Jones was a black civic leader in Cincinnati and a member of Company 1 of the Black Brigade's Third Regiment. William Dickson's Report to Gov. John Brough, quoted in Ibid., 28.

fortifications which they had built. He summarized, “In obedience to the policy of the Government, the authorities have denied you this privilege. In the department of labor permitted, you have, however, rendered a willing and cheerful service.” With the conclusion of Dickson’s address, the term of the Black Brigade was finished.⁴⁷

The service of the men of the Black Brigade was ultimately very well received. The abolitionist Levi Coffin declared the Black Brigade to be the “most orderly and faithful regiment that crossed.”⁴⁸ In a similar vein, the impartial Lew Wallace named Dickson as one of three Cincinnatians that were of particular assistance during the siege.⁴⁹ Personally, Dickson felt strongly that he had finally made his major contribution to the war effort and the advancement of racial equality: “I have the consciousness of having protected from outrage and slavery hundreds of poor helpless beings and of converting them into efficient workers, and having done good service for the country. This is all the reward I want.”⁵⁰

Before leaving the city, Wallace issued a final proclamation to the citizens of Cincinnati, applauding them for their honor and reminding them to always keep their organizations active and able to resist any future offensives.⁵¹ Nowhere was this admonition better received than in the black community. The Black Brigade may have served as the “first organization of the colored people of the North actually employed for

⁴⁷ Ibid., 13-14.

⁴⁸ Dabney, *Cincinnati's Colored Citizens*, 68.

⁴⁹ Wallace, *Autobiography*, 2:615. The other two were Peter Neff, Lieutenant Colonel of the First Reserve Regiment, and Major Richard M. Corwine, who was in charge of the forces guarding various river crossings on either side of the city. Ibid.

⁵⁰ William M. Dickson to Friedrich Hassaurek, 27 September 1862, Hassaurek Papers.

⁵¹ Reid, “The Siege of Cincinnati,” 234.

military purposes,” but by no means would it be the last—nor the last martial participation of black Americans from Ohio.⁵²

Emancipation and Enlistment

President Abraham Lincoln, though he had maintained a public opposition to emancipation and enlistment, had, in fact, been privately discussing taking such measures since June.⁵³ With Lee’s army in retreat following the Battle of Antietam on September 17, Lincoln decided that the moment had come. On September 22, 1862, two days after the Black Brigade was disbanded, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. In it, he declared that “all persons held as slaves” within any state still in rebellion on January 1, 1863, would be “then, thenceforth, and forever free.” Lincoln styled this step as a war measure, taken in the context of the recent acts of Congress.⁵⁴ But slaves would still not be free unless the Union Army reached their area; wherever Union armies did not march or establish a presence, slaves remained in bondage. Without military successes, emancipation was literally just a piece of paper and metaphorically just a mirage.⁵⁵ But the opportunities that the document could unleash for black citizenship more than outweighed its limitations. The Emancipation Proclamation, according to James McPherson, was “essentially a conservative document, but it

⁵² Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 3.

⁵³ Luke and Smith, *Soldiering for Freedom*, 19.

⁵⁴ Luke and Smith, *Soldiering for Freedom*, 19; Abraham Lincoln, “Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation,” September 22, 1862, full text in Burrus M. Carnahan, “Appendix E,” *Act of Justice: Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation and the Law of War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 165-68.

⁵⁵ Gallagher, *The Union War*, 150.

contained a revolutionary promise.”⁵⁶ When the promised Emancipation Proclamation was issued on January 1, 1863, it not only declared emancipation for designated areas still in rebellion, but also proclaimed that said freed persons would be “received into the armed service of the United States.”⁵⁷

Recognizing that hurdles to open black enlistment could now be overcome, Massachusetts received federal authorization and began to enroll African-American regiments in February of 1863. The Black Committee, organized by George Luther Stearns, began a multi-state push for black enlistment. Agents of the Committee traveled throughout the North, giving public speeches and conducting informal outreaches at barbershops, churches, and other local public places. John Mercer Langston was the primary agent responsible for the Western recruiting drive. As a result of his and others’ efforts, hundreds of Ohio African Americans traversed the nation, eager to join. Ultimately, about a third of the members from the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts Regiment were from Ohio, and the 55th Massachusetts was quickly filled as well.⁵⁸

While attempting to answer Lincoln’s 1862 call for additional troops, Ohio Governor David Tod had faced a crisis of dwindling recruitment numbers. As a result, he was ultimately unsuccessful in keeping Ohio’s numbers at a high enough level to avoid the institution of the draft in Ohio. However, Tod soon realized that black recruits could count toward the state’s draft quota for 1863 (thereby lowering the number of white

⁵⁶ McPherson, *The Negro’s Civil War*, 49.

⁵⁷ Abraham Lincoln, “Emancipation Proclamation,” January 1, 1863, full text in Burrus M. Carnahan, “Appendix F,” *Act of Justice: Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation and the Law of War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 169-72.

⁵⁸ Brown, *Negro in the American Rebellion*, 109; Knepper, *Ohio and Its People*, 238; Luke and Smith, *Soldiering for Freedom*, 28-29; Westwood, *Black Troops*, 92; Morris, *Oberlin*, 236.

Americans who would be drafted). Consequently, he applied for federal approval to form two regiments of black volunteers once the ranks of the Fifty-Fifth Massachusetts had been filled. In June 1863, an additional forty-eight Ohio recruits, led by Powhatan Beaty, traveled to Columbus and reported to the black recruiter O. S. B. Wall (Langston's brother-in-law) for final approval to join the Massachusetts regiments. However, Wall had just been informed that the Massachusetts regiments were full and no longer accepting recruits. Wall billeted the men with the black citizens of Columbus and called on Governor Tod to explain the dilemma and to offer the African American recruits as the nucleus of a new regiment. Tod explained that he had not yet received authorization, but that he would notify Secretary of War Stanton of the information. The next morning, on June 16th, the War Department granted approval for the raising of a black regiment from Ohio. From this approval, the Fifth and Twenty-Seventh United States Colored Troops were formed.⁵⁹

After the initial set of recruits, the recruiting drives were initially slowed as there were no state or federal bounties being offered for black soldiers. As a result, potential recruits took their time to cross-compare offers to enlist as soldiers at the lower federal rate of pay for black soldiers with other, better-paying offers to serve the war effort as sailors, teamsters, cooks, or laborers. Governor Tod recognized this difficulty and encouraged black Americans to consider the other non-pecuniary benefits of military service. Finally recognizing the importance of military service as a mark of citizenship, he admonished black men to join the regiments as "the only way... to enjoy these [civil and political] rights." In return, he declared that "in all respects" they would "be treated

⁵⁹ George W. Williams, *A History of the Negro Troops*, 133-134; Mezurek, *For Their Own Cause*, 2, 40-42; Morris, *Oberlin*, 236.

like the white soldier.”⁶⁰ John Mercer Langston appealed to his black brethren: “Of all the people in the land, we can less afford to miss playing a part in the mighty struggle going on....”⁶¹ African-American activist Anne Demby agreed. In 1864, she declared that any black American who refused to do their duty committed a “menial act.” She called on all black citizens to—with “God on the one hand, and the sword in the other”—strike down the “grim monster slavery, and trample his mangled corpse....”⁶²

In November of 1862, former Black Brigade member Marshall P. H. Jones summarized the gains that had already been accomplished just by initial black military service. In 1861, it was the feeling and prayer of the black community that the war would not end until black Americans were free to participate in the military, had secured their rights, and experienced social uplift. In the intervening time, the position of African Americans had been considerably improved through the Emancipation Proclamation and other federal actions by “Abraham Lincoln, our modern Moses.” Jones continued, “Colored men’s rights are now as clearly established as any axiom can be, so far as the general Government is concerned.”⁶³ But although the principle of emancipation had been promised and instituted, there was still much work to be done to transform the “axiom” into full practice. By participating in martial actions beyond local defense, former members of the Black Brigade demonstrated their dedication toward securing the larger ideals of equality and liberty that ostensibly served as the foundation stones of the country they now freely defended by force of arms.

⁶⁰ Mezurek, *For Their Own Cause*, 43.

⁶¹ Brandt, *The Town That Started the Civil War*, 248.

⁶² *Christian Recorder*, 8 October 1864.

⁶³ Marshall P. H. Jones, “Reflections,” *Colored Citizen*, 7 November 1863.

The organizations they joined and the types of service they saw differed greatly, but the former members of the Black Brigade served with distinction wherever they found themselves. Thomas Bowman, from Company F of the First Regiment, served in Company I of the 54th Massachusetts. He was wounded in the leg at Olustee, but continued to downplay his service to acquaintances back home.⁶⁴ Twenty-seven-year-old laborer Allen Cruse and eighteen-year-old barber Wallace Shelton would both go on to serve in the 27th United States Colored Troops, with Cruse placed in Company G and Shelton in Company E. Their regiment would serve with distinction at Petersburg.⁶⁵ Powhatan Beaty, having delivered the recruits to Columbus, himself enlisted as a private in Company C, 5th United States Colored Troops. Two days later, he was promoted to first sergeant. During the Battle of New Market Heights, Virginia, all of the white officers of the company were killed or wounded in action; immediately, Beaty took command and led the unit for the remainder of the fight. Recognizing that the unit's flag had been left behind six hundred feet toward the front, he led a counter-attack and re-secured the flag under fire. In recognition for his valor, Beaty was promoted to brevet lieutenant and awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor—one of only sixteen enlisted black soldiers (and one of the two from Ohio) to receive the Medal of Honor during the Civil War. He was twice recommended for a commission, but was twice denied the honor on account of his race.⁶⁶ Other men of the Black Brigade gave their lives in the

⁶⁴ Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 11.

⁶⁵ Kelly D. Selby, "The 27th United States Colored Troops: Ohio Soldiers and Veterans," (PhD diss., Kent State University, 2008), 54-55; Toppin, "Humbly They Served," 95.

⁶⁶ Mezurek, *For Their Own Cause*, 5; Kevin Grace and Tom White, *Cincinnati Cemeteries: Queen City Underground* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2004), 50; William A. Dobak, *Freedom By the Sword: The U.S. Colored Troops, 1862-1867*, Army Historical Series (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 2011), 378; *New York Globe*, May 3, 1884; Dabney, *Cincinnati's Colored Citizens*, 345.

Mississippi Valley, fought and died with Colonel Robert Gould Shaw as members of the 54th Massachusetts at Fort Wagner, or endured imprisonment in Richmond, Virginia, or Charleston, South Carolina.⁶⁷

If the performative actions of Beatty and black regiments at Olustee, New Market Heights, Port Hudson, Milliken's Bend, Fort Wagner, and other locations did not automatically win them the ardent love of their fellow citizens, they at least convinced many white Americans of their capabilities as a race. In a similar manner, the efforts of black laborers like the Black Brigade attested to doubters that black Americans were intelligent, productive, and dedicated to the cause of Union, emancipation, and citizenship. One contemporary white Republican commented, "It is daily being proved that the negro can take care of himself; that he ardently desires freedom; that he knows how to conduct himself as a free man; that he will fight, too.... The negro loves freedom, and will fight to obtain it."⁶⁸ It was now up to Dickson, Clark, and other abolitionists to drive that point home to the American public.

⁶⁷ Toppin, "Humbly They Served," 95; Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 13, 21.

⁶⁸ Voegeli, *Free But Not Equal*, 124-25.

CHAPTER SIX

Dickson, Clark, and the Symbols of Citizenship

...These poor outcasts, what has [America] done for them? Slavery, social and political proscription, these were her gifts to them; yet they hope for more: they wish to be numbered among the children of the nation, to be invested with the privileges wherewith she endows here sons, to feel the heart throb when gazing upon the country's flag; to say with proud joy: we too are American citizens! Is this too much to hope for?

—Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 1864

The Report of Colonel Dickson

As the United States entered 1864, continued opposition to emancipation and the ending of slavery was greater in the Lower Midwest than anywhere else north of the Border States. Most civilians and soldiers from these regions begrudgingly endorsed the Emancipation Proclamation only as a “war means” but refused to see it as a viable “war aim.”¹ With this perspective, it is no wonder that their position toward the political and legal equality of the races was even less friendly than their stance toward slavery. With a quiescent public content to let the war run its course without making any substantial changes to black citizenship, it would be up to Radical Republicans like William Dickson or radical abolitionists like Peter Clark to make the case for African-American citizenship compelling enough to goad the public into action.

Dickson had returned to his law practice after the Siege of Cincinnati, content to quietly influence the policies of the Lincoln Administration while publicly focusing on

¹ Stanley, *The Loyal West*, 63, 77.

drumming up support of the war effort in the state of Ohio. In a pro-Union party speech during the war, Dickson contrasted the principles of limiting the extension of slavery (which Dickson reminded the listeners were embraced by the Founding Fathers and by the Republican Party) with the positions of Confederate Vice-President Alexander H. Stephens, who believed that “the negro is not equal to the white man” and held that “slavery... is his natural and normal condition.”² He also reminded his listeners that the Southern rebels were the aggressors in the ongoing war, having promoted secession immediately after Lincoln’s election, despite Democrats still maintaining control over the Senate and the Judiciary—which would have allowed them to hold back all Republican nominations and laws indefinitely. By adopting this strategy in late 1863, Dickson was an early adopter of the Republican strategy to counter Democratic support of prejudice by showing that black Americans were more loyal to the Union than white Southern Democrats. Given the nature of the struggle, Dickson reminded his audience that there were two ways forward: “we must subdue the rebellion or we must submit to it; there is no opportunity for compromise.”³

His public and published stance on abolition was still strong, but Erasmus Darwin MacMaster, a Presbyterian minister and ardent abolitionist who had been President of Miami University when Dickson was a student, felt he could do even more. In a letter to Dickson, Darwin complimented him upon his recent speeches and success, which had come to his attention. MacMaster noted that the speeches demonstrated “the same mental

² William M. Dickson, *That We May Have Peace We Must Now Make War: Address of William M. Dickson at Greenwood Hall, Cincinnati, September 23, 1863* (Cincinnati: R. Clarke & Co., 1863), in Library of Congress Collection, <https://archive.org/details/thatwemayhavepea00dick> (accessed February 19, 2018), 15.

³ *Ibid.*, 4-5, 23.

characteristiks which were exhibited in your academick days, [sic]” but admonished him to press even harder for the destruction of slavery.⁴

Whether inspired by this letter, a request by Cincinnati citizens, or by his own moral convictions, Dickson began composing an official report on the efforts of the Black Brigade of Cincinnati in 1862. Completed in January of 1864, this report was submitted to the new War Democrat governor of Ohio, John Brough; in addition, it was read in the Ohio legislature and placed in both the state records and several newspapers.⁵

Dickson’s report was designed to underscore the importance of black military service while undermining arguments against their loyalty. First, Dickson provides a strong rationale for the unit to be remembered by the state: despite it not officially being recognized as an Ohio state regiment, it had provided dedicated service to the state’s defense. Second, this service had been willingly performed, and the men had offered to do far more. When rejected and oppressed, the men still cheerfully performed the service allowed to them. Third, Dickson takes great pains to contrast this cheerful performance with the constant violent and illogical oppression by the police force of Cincinnati. Finally, throughout his report, he offers a resounding recommendation for the African-American men’s intelligence, value, commitment to protecting private property, and unflagging labor. This logical progression is designed to slowly break down corresponding arguments against the Black Brigade’s service and commemoration (and, thereby, broader black military service). Readers are led to slowly agree that the Black

⁴ Erasmus Darwin MacMaster to William M. Dickson, 14 October 1863, Folder 11, Dickson Papers. MacMaster had been forced out of his later position at the Presbyterian Seminary of New Albany over his position on slavery. M. Melancthon Glasgow, *History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in America* (Baltimore, MD: Hill and Harvey, 1888), 614-15.

⁵ Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 14.

Brigade played some defensive role in support of the Union, completed this work willingly and cheerfully, was basely treated when their humanity and contributions were not recognized, and showed the capabilities necessary to provide greater and further assistance.⁶

Throughout the work, Dickson carefully includes humanizing and citizenship-promoting elements in his account of “the first organization of colored men in the West, for military purposes.”⁷ He calls attention to the fact that the officers of the men (with the exception of only three white volunteers) were also African-American; he evokes sympathy for the men’s families, who had to endure the “alarm and terror” of seeing their loved ones ripped from their arms and carried away; and he points out that the unit was compensated at the same rate as other units.⁸ All of this leads up to Dickson’s final contrast—the continued martial service and sacrifice of men of the Black Brigade (including the sacrifice of their lives) and the shame that Ohio had not taken steps to welcome her own citizens into its armed forces, compelling them to join another state’s forces. The pièce de résistance of Dickson’s report is a roster of seven hundred and six names of the members of the Black Brigade. Though this roll did not cover all of the participants of the Black Brigade (due to three hundred men being detached to work on gunboats or at duties in the city), the surviving list of members present at the entrenchments for the second week of the Brigade’s service provides the final evidence of individual service. By detailing the structure and individual members of the

⁶ William Dickson’s Report to Gov. John Brough, quoted in Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 15-21.

⁷ Ibid., 21.

⁸ Ibid., 15, 18, 21.

organization, Dickson both shows the individual humanity of each laborer and their relation to the whole. The remainder of Dickson's argument is implicit—Ohio had delayed granting these “colored citizens” the rights of defending their homes to its shame; what other rights was the state still withholding?⁹

Dickson's report appeared in a *Cincinnati Gazette* article on January 15, a copy of which he forwarded to Major General Lew Wallace in Crawfordsville, Indiana. Having finished the article, Wallace addressed a letter to Dickson commending him for his “impartial statement” that clearly demonstrated the men of the Black Brigade “did entitle themselves to the gratitude of every citizen.” Wallace did worry about the phrasing of one section, where Dickson underscored that “organized companies of [black citizens], armed and equipped at their own expense, tendered their services to aid in the defense of the city.”¹⁰ Wallace did not deny that this may have been the case, but he pointed out that he was not personally made aware of this offer. After all, he was officially on record both in an open-air speech in early July of 1862 and in public testimony before the Committee on the Conduct of the War around that time speaking in favor of the possibility of black soldiers (even if did not think that prejudice would allow them to stand side-by-side with white soldiers). Considering the circumstances present at the Siege of Cincinnati and the dire need for volunteers, Wallace solemnly assured Dickson that “no organized companies, with arms, ever reported *to me* directly or indirectly. For I assure you, Judge, had they done so, I would have accepted them.” In pointing out the potential for misconception, Wallace was not seeking any public modification of the report's text from

⁹ Ibid., 15 (quote), 21-30.

¹⁰ Lew Wallace to William M. Dickson, 15 January 1864, Folder 12, Dickson Papers; William Dickson's Report to Gov. John Brough, quoted in Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 15.

Dickson, telling him that he only wanted to dispel any doubts from Dickson's mind. To hammer this point home, he concluded the letter with the sentence: "This letter is between ourselves and for your own eyes, not the newspapers."¹¹

Whether influenced by the Black Brigade's service or simply the developments of the war, Lew Wallace genuinely seemed to have softened his position toward African-American citizenship by 1864. Serving as the Commander of the Middle Department (encompassing Delaware and eastern Maryland), Wallace oversaw the Maryland election that ended slavery in the state by the narrow margin of 379 votes. As the slaves were freed, Wallace issued a proclamation placing all freed slaves under "special military protection" and establishing the first Freedman's Bureau. When orders to free all slaves were not complied with, he even ordered some of his cavalry to forcibly free Margaret Toogood, the last slave in Maryland. Wallace kept the chain that had bound her as a souvenir, and it eventually found its way to the Oberlin College Library.¹²

Years later, Wallace would serve as a delegate at the Republican Convention that met in St. Louis in 1896. Serving on the resolutions committee, he helped prepare the party's platform, which included an "unqualified condemnation" of the "uncivilized and preposterous practice" of lynching.¹³ In 1898, Wallace foresaw the coming of the Spanish-American War after the sinking of the *U.S.S. Maine* in Havana harbor. Despite

¹¹ Lew Wallace to William M. Dickson, 15 January 1864, Folder 12, Dickson Papers; Lee Scott Theisen, "The Public Career of General Lew Wallace, 1845-1905" (PhD diss., University of Arizona, 1973), 113-15.

¹² Benson Lossing, *Pictorial History of the Civil War*, vol. 3 (Hartford, CT: T. Belknap, 1868), 346-47; Irving McKee, "*Ben-Hur*" Wallace: *The Life of General Lew Wallace* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1947), 70.

¹³ Robert E. Morsberger and Katharine M. Morsberger, *Lew Wallace: Militant Romantic* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1980), 415.

being seventy-one years old, Wallace repeatedly declared to Secretary of War Russell A. Alger his desire “to raise a Negro brigade from Indiana, Ohio, Illinois, and Kentucky” and lead it in the war. Though this offer was ultimately declined on account of Wallace’s age, it is consistent with his frequent post-Civil War commendatory statements on units of black soldiers in both the Union Army and the Ottoman forces.¹⁴

Peter H. Clark and the Language of Citizenship

In the wake of the publication of Colonel Dickson’s report, local African-American abolitionist Peter H. Clark was asked to write an additional unit history of the Black Brigade by its members. His selection as the brigade’s historian makes perfect sense: his biographer, Nikki Taylor, has described the thrust of his abolitionist work as “securing full equality and citizenship for free African Americans.”¹⁵ As Taylor observed, by enlisting the help of Clark, the members of the Black Brigade showcased their desire to have their work long-remembered. Peter H. Clark was both one of the foremost African-American intellectuals in the nation and a highly regarded Cincinnati community leader. His renowned editorials in the self-published *Herald of Freedom*, steeped in anti-oppressionist thought, had been frequently used in the community to make the case for black freedom and to spark debate. As a radical, Clark would not stand for propriety at the cost of conviction; one black contemporary noted, “In his veins coursed no bootlicking blood.”¹⁶

¹⁴ Ibid., 428. Wallace had served as the ambassador to the Ottoman Empire from 1881-1885. McKee, “*Ben-Hur*” *Wallace*, 190, 215-216.

¹⁵ Nikki Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist*, 105.

¹⁶ Ibid., 2-5, 93-94, 183. Although Clark did not officially become part of a socialist party until 1876, Taylor argues that socialism and radicalism marked the writings of Peter H. Clark until the 1880s. Nikki Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist*, 6.

Clark's historical work on the Black Brigade emphasizes many of the same points as Dickson's report, but differs in three primary areas. First, Clark particularly highlights the perspectives of the African-American community in light of their long quest for black citizenship, including the repeated rejection that community met with each earlier attempt to volunteer for service. Secondly, while Dickson's official report to a government agency highlights the unit's defensive purposes, Clark more firmly places the struggle within the larger offensive struggle against the promoters of slavery. Finally, Clark's narrative seeks to underscore the pursuit of citizenship more explicitly than Dickson's report by including the speeches of William Dickson, James Lupton, and Marshall Jones. Clark's writing style plays off of these speeches, interspersing the speeches' calls for citizenship with arguments of his own.¹⁷

A textual analysis of Peter H. Clark's *The Black Brigade* points to a developed or desired identity among black Cincinnatians as Americans, as well as their desire for full citizenship in both the community of Cincinnati and in the broader cultural context. A careful reading also reveals that this desire was encouraged in many ways by the white abolitionist community of Cincinnati. Accordingly, the language used in *The Black Brigade* is of utmost importance to our examination of black martial volunteerism.

First, the rationale: "You have, in no spirit of bravado, in no defiance of established prejudice, but in submission to it, intimated to me your willingness to defend with your lives the fortifications your hands have built." Colonel William Dickson's words to the Black Brigade serve as a demonstration that the men—despite the oppression they had faced—sought to not only continue to participate on the works, but

¹⁷ Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 1-14.

to offer a much higher sacrifice. Prominently, Clark utilizes the focus on black manhood as a euphemism for equal citizenship. Once again, the men are described as going “unwillingly” when moved “at the point of the bayonet”; conversely, the men move with “alacrity” when asked with a “gentlemanly request.” Language such as this highlights the eagerness of black soldiers to accept front-line roles—but only on equal terms and on an equal status with white Americans.¹⁸

Only on equal terms could the men of the Black Brigade advance their claim on the benefits of citizenship as equal members of the United States—what Marshall Jones described to William Dickson in collective terms as “our country.”¹⁹ Black Americans were eager to throw off the bonds of “slavery” and “social and political proscription” and to take up the privileges and rights of American citizens. To Clark, these true benefits of citizenship went beyond external legal formalities to the internal matters of the heart, soul, and mind. Elsewhere, he declared that “centuries of residence, centuries of toil, centuries of suffering have made us Americans. In language, in civilization, in fears, and in hopes we are Americans.” But, as he laid out in *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, oppressed African Americans wanted even more than this; they wanted “to feel the heart throb when gazing upon the country’s flag; to say with proud joy: we too are American citizens!” And as Brian Taylor observed: “In a society founded on the principle of republican equality,... *feeling* that one is a citizen has value that cannot be quantified or

¹⁸ Ibid., 12-13.

¹⁹ Ibid., 13. Marshall Jones was later a noted member of the colored school board that Peter Clark helped found after the war; much other surviving information about Jones has been lost, but in 1902 he was still proudly distinguished as “Marshall Jones, who presented a sword and flag to Col. Wm. M. Dickson of the “Black Brigade.” John B. Shotwell, *History of Schools of Cincinnati* (Cincinnati: The School Life Company, 1902), in University of California Libraries Collection, <https://archive.org/details/historyofschools00shotrich> (accessed February 19, 2018), 460.

measured. [emphasis added]”²⁰ Therefore, it was only under equal terms that the men could march “glowing with enthusiasm” under a national flag provided to them by James Lupton. This flag captured the humanity with which they were viewed by the white abolitionists of the city, and having been given “the treatment of men, they were ready for any thing. [sic]”²¹

As Clark notes, white abolitionists had been beneficial in celebrating or protecting the citizenship and humanity of African Americans in other ways. For example, Dickson had been kept busy during the month of September securing releases for members of the Black Brigade who were being thrown into prison for nonexistent crimes by vindictive anti-black “ruffians.” As such, it is no surprise that Dickson highlighted the men’s right to just treatment, noting in his speech to the unit that they were “deserving, if you do not receive, the protection of the law....”²² Other statements can be found in the speech by Captain James Lupton. He, like Dickson, was well-aware of the challenges to black citizenship faced by the men. Appealing to their manhood, he urged them to defend their homes because “slavery will soon die.” This, in turn, would produce “one country” that would be a “land of the free.”²³ Both speeches grounded their resolution to continue to push for black citizenship on religious principles. In Lupton’s speech, this took the form of recognizing shared participation in the principle that “there is but *one Flag*, as there is but one Bible, and one GOD, the Father of us all.” Dickson’s speech utilized a similar

²⁰ Peter H. Clark, Untitled, *Commercial*, 9 January 1867; Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 11; Brian Moffett Taylor, “To Make the Union What It Ought to Be,” 10.

²¹ Mezurek, *For Their Own Cause*, 36; Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 9 (quotes).

²² Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 14.

²³ *Ibid.*, 9.

closing, reminding the members of the Black Brigade that “the same God... is the God of your race as well as mine” and that “our country shall again need your services.”²⁴

The actions of the men of the Black Brigade and the speech by Marshall Jones reflect the strong relationship that the men of the Black Brigade had with Dickson, Lupton, and the other abolitionist officers. Though under no obligation to do so, “each and every one” of the men of the Brigade “determined to present a sword to Dickson as a symbol of their regard.”²⁵ The presentation of a sword as their gift served as two symbols. The first was the sword itself, which was chosen as it was “the emblem of protection.” Though arms could be used to force black men out of the city of Cincinnati, they could also serve as valuable means of security against armies without or aggressors within; and even when Dickson was not physically utilizing a drawn sword, the men of the Black Brigade felt confident that he would strike “in favor of freedom.”²⁶ The second symbol was the actual act of presentation of the sword. Through the act of presenting an officer, black Cincinnatians were participating in a distinctly martial demonstration that corresponded with a broader cultural focus on military pageantry.

A further examination confirms that though “the prejudices of the time... limited this to duty as a fatigue force” and the force did not have a “complete military formation,” the unit’s organizers, white and black, knowingly sought to perform the roles of soldiers with full military pageantry, of which the presentation of the sword to Colonel

²⁴ Ibid., 10, 14.

²⁵ Ibid., 11, 13.

²⁶ Ibid., 13.

Dickson was only a small part.²⁷ By adopting the full symbols of military service, the Black Brigade could advance their claims on the real benefits those symbols conveyed. To this end, the Black Brigade participated in distinctly military activities, including an address from the commanding officer, marches to and from the entrenchments “with their commander at their head” and “in line of march,” and being “presented with a national flag.”²⁸ As Nikki Taylor has noted, “Never before had black Cincinnatians been greeted with such ceremonial or symbolic citizenship.”²⁹

Testimonies from contemporary black soldiers in other units corroborate the importance of parades and military formations on the estimations of self-worth of the men and associations with the United States and the broader black race. For example, in Virginia, John C. Brock of the Forty-Third United States Colored Troops observed black soldiers on the march were a “noble band” toiling “for the rights of man, and elevation and liberty of our race.” Similarly, Sergeant George Hatton remarked that gatherings of African-American troops—including his own unit, the First United States Colored Troops—“felt as though I were in some other country where slavery was never known.” And upon hearing his first roll call, black soldier Elijah Marrs noted, “I felt freedom in my bones.”³⁰

Of particular note is the use of parades as a symbolic demonstration of both race and citizenship. As Mary Ryan has observed, parades demonstrate a common social

²⁷ William Dickson’s Report to Gov. John Brough, quoted in Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 15.

²⁸ Brown, *Negro in the American Rebellion*, 108; Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 9-13.

²⁹ Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist*, 102-3.

³⁰ Quoted in Samito, *Becoming American under Fire*, 52.

identity and serve as the characteristic civic ceremony of American life in the nineteenth century. The purpose of these parades was to serve as a “positive assertion of democracy” and “civil rights.”³¹ Parades, which were almost exclusively male affairs, celebrated “Republican manhood,” and marchers assumed “masculine posture”—particularly in military parades.³² The Black Brigade made use of military posture to assert their manhood, while the martial air was heightened on both advance to and retirement from the entrenchments by “music playing” and “banners flying.”³³ George Washington Williams, a historian and black soldier who served in the U. S. Army during and after the Civil War, made the observation that “the Negro’s love of music and song taught him the poetry of movement.”³⁴ Never would this have had a greater impact on marching than when soldiers, recently freed and of their own free will, advanced with—as Dickson put it in his report—“strains of martial music, from a band formed from their ranks, of their own motion.”³⁵ And if, as Ryan has noted, parades were an exercise in both social and individual discipline, then disciplined parades by oppressed minorities being met by “the good words of the citizens who lined the streets,” “by the waving handkerchiefs of patriotic ladies,” and “mutual cheers and greetings” from white fellow soldiers

³¹ Mary Ryan, “The American Parade: Representations of the Nineteenth-Century Social Order,” in *The New Cultural History*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1989), 134-37.

³² *Ibid.*, 148.

³³ Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 13.

³⁴ George W. Williams, *A History of the Negro Troops*, 168.

³⁵ William Dickson’s Report to Gov. John Brough, quoted in Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 19.

demonstrate the remarkable effect that simply possessing the symbols of equality could achieve.³⁶

The Fight for Equal Pay, Equal Rank

The timing and wording of William Dickson's report and Peter Clark's history demonstrate a desire to combat common existing stereotypes of African American military service and counter prejudiced actions toward them. At the time, the treatment of black soldiers was shaped by discriminatory practices that aimed to demonstrate the martial superiority of whites, including lowered pay for African American soldiers, segregation, and the near-total prohibition on black officers.

Despite having been promised by recruiters that they would receive equal pay, clothing, and treatment, African-American units had their pay cut in half, and were given proportionally more degrading assignments. The August 25, 1862 authorization for General Saxton to enlist soldiers had made no distinction in pay; but in June of 1863, the decision was made that the Militia Act of 1862 applied to black soldiers. As a result, instead of being paid \$13/month and either given clothing or a \$3.50/month clothing allowance like other soldiers, African American soldiers were only paid \$10/month, with \$3/month automatically deducted for clothing expenses. Pay was therefore used to make an unequal distinction between black and white Americans who were ostensibly engaged in the same fight.³⁷

³⁶ Mary Ryan, "The American Parade," 152; William Dickson's Report to Gov. John Brough, quoted in Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 19.

³⁷ Knepper, *Ohio and Its People*, 238; Brown, *Negro in the American Rebellion*, 248; Westwood, *Black Troops*, 11-12; Voegeli, *Free But Not Equal*, 103; George W. Williams, *A History of the Negro Troops*, 161.

Faced with the prospect of unequal federal remuneration, some regiments refused to accept anything less than equality. As one soldier in the 54th Massachusetts argued, an offer by the governor of Massachusetts for the state government to make up the difference in their pay “advertises us to the world as holding out for *money* and not from *principle*.”³⁸ Or, as John Payne, a soldier from Ohio, put it in a letter to the *Christian Recorder* on May 24, 1864: “Give me my rights, the rights that this Government owes me, the rights that the white man has. I would be willing to fight three years for the Government without one cent of the mighty dollar. Then I would have something to fight for.” By not being granted the same pay, Payne complained that he was “fighting for the rights of the white man.” The situation escalated to the extent that some of the black soldiers were eventually court-martialed and shot for stacking their arms or refusing orders. Worry about the lack of resolution of the pay crisis caused black recruiters to temporarily oppose enlistment. William Wells Brown declared that “our people have been so cheated, robbed, deceived, and outraged everywhere, that I cannot urge them to go.”³⁹

Writing in 1864, Peter H. Clark was well aware of these debates surrounding pay for black federal troops. In the initial impressment of the Black Brigade, the men were forced to labor without pay because the police had given them the status of criminals. This, of course, put financial and emotional strain upon the families of these men.⁴⁰ Therefore, Clark was careful to record that the men of the Black Brigade were not

³⁸ Kantrowitz, *More Than Freedom*, 291.

³⁹ Ibid., 291-93.

⁴⁰ Forbes, *African American Women*, 171.

seeking material gain, but rather something intangible and more lasting. In a speech by Marshall P. H. Jones to William Dickson on behalf of the Black Brigade, Jones made clear that the spirit of volunteerism was not inspired by pecuniary benefit, as the men had volunteered to join the unit after Dickson was placed in command but “before they knew they would be remunerated for their services.”⁴¹ Though the men did receive \$1.00 each day between September 3 and 8 in 1862 and \$1.50 per diem from September 15 onward, these financial gains were secondary to the worker’s willingness—a fact overlooked in the vast majority of writings about the Black Brigade.⁴²

As Clark highlights in *The Black Brigade*, this form of protest was driven by thirst for equality, not gain. In a speech given by Marshall P. H. Jones to William Dickson on behalf of the Black Brigade, Jones made clear that the men’s spirit of volunteerism was not inspired for pecuniary benefit, as the men had volunteered to join the unit after Dickson was placed in command but “before they knew they would be remunerated for their services.”⁴³ Initial defenses of the city were conducted without pay, and the black citizens were interested in volunteering on what would have been an equal basis with whites. In other words, the initial desire to work on the trenches could not have been spurred on primarily by some search for economic gain. As one soldier of the 54th Massachusetts wrote, “We have offered our lives a sacrifice for a country that has not the

⁴¹ Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 2.

⁴² Dispatch from J. H. Simpson (Major and chief Topographical Engineer of the Department of the Ohio) to N. H. McLean (Assistant Adjutant General and Chief of Staff, Department of the Ohio), November 27, 1862, quoted in Chester F. Geaslen, *Our Moment of Glory in the Civil War* (Newport, KY: Otto Printing Co., 1972), 22.

⁴³ Westwood, *Black Troops*, 15; Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 12-13.

magnanimity to treat us as men. All that we ask is the rights of other soldiers, the liberty of other free men.”⁴⁴

Eventually, following the protests of Clark and others, growing pressure on Congress led to the passage of a bill in June 1864 authorizing the distribution of equal pay retroactive to January 1. This struggle for equal pay demonstrated the refusal of the black community to accept degradation and what Christian Samito has termed “second-class citizenship”—while, at the same time, highlighting their belief in the possibility of a government that would recognize their equality.⁴⁵

Despite eventual advances in pay, black volunteers continued to face segregation and discrimination in rank. The Republican *Illinois State Journal* admitted on March 22, 1862, that “the nigger is an unpopular institution in the free States” and even those Republicans who were willing to let black Americans enjoy some freedoms “do not care to be brought into close contact with them.”⁴⁶ These feelings were widespread across the North, and even after the authorization of black soldiers was granted, they were relegated to lower ranks and were not considered for any commissions as officers with only a handful of exceptions. The Corps d’Afrique, a Louisiana militia unit marshalled into federal service, saw the bulk of the exceptions with a complement of approximately seventy-five black officers. In other units, the exceptions were far rarer: Massachusetts commissioned a total of ten black officers, Kansas only three, and the One Hundred and Fourth United States Colored Troops, two—including Major O. S. B. Wall, the black

⁴⁴ Brown, *Negro in the American Rebellion*, 251.

⁴⁵ Westwood, *Black Troops*, 15; Samito, *Becoming American under Fire*, 62.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Voegeli, *Free But Not Equal*, 28. For this paper’s policy on the usage of historical racial epithets, please consult footnote 7 in Chapter Four.

recruiter from Ohio. Finally, at least fifteen black men received commissions in various positions as surgeons and chaplains.⁴⁷

In contrast to the marked lack of advancement for African Americans present in federal and state units, black men that served in the Black Brigade were authorized to command one of the regiments and all of the companies. As the *Cincinnati Tribune* noted on September 7, 1862, the black officers “proved so decidedly superior” that their roles in the brigade were considerably expanded.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, neither this policy nor desegregation was carried forward in more formally enlisted organizations during the Civil War. The Cincinnati-based *Colored Citizen* remarked in 1864 that “The same Congress which decreed that colored men should be enrolled in the militia of the nation, refused to open the way to promotion for such gallant sons of our State as [Beatty], Holland, Brandon, and others, who have so nobly demonstrated the equal manhood of our race...”⁴⁹

Finally, in addition to unequal treatment in pay and promotions, African Americans faced discriminatory treatment on the battlefields and prison camps by Confederate soldiers. This discrimination, though never eliminated, was mitigated somewhat by President Lincoln’s order on July 31, 1863, that the Union would defend its citizen soldiers, regardless of “class, color, or condition.” Confederate executions and forced enslavement of captured soldiers would be met with commensurate reprisals: “[f]or every soldier killed... a rebel soldier shall be executed, and for every one

⁴⁷ George W. Williams, *A History of the Negro Troops*, 141-144.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Brown, *Negro in the American Rebellion*, 108. William Wells Brown was himself an active recruiter and orator. Luke and Smith, *Soldiering for Freedom*, 29.

⁴⁹ Quoted in McPherson, *The Negro’s Civil War*, 292.

enslaved... a rebel soldier shall be placed at hard labor....”⁵⁰ This order, from the commander-in-chief of the nation’s military, demonstrated how far black Americans had come in earning recognition for equal protection under the law—a key cornerstone of American citizenship.

Ultimately, over 5,000 African Americans from Ohio served in official military units during the Civil War, which was the second highest number of black troops provided by a Northern state; furthermore, this total does not take into consideration the hundreds or thousands of black Americans who volunteered in units outside of Ohio. During the war, a total of 180,000 black soldiers fought for the Union in over 150 regiments and 22 batteries, accounting for 10 per cent of Union forces; around 37,300 of these lost their lives. Nearly 200,000 other black Americans served as laborers, teamsters, or in other non-combat roles for the federal forces.⁵¹

Despite draft riots and mobs that targeted black soldiers, many of them were eventually met with cheers and honors as they paraded through Northern cities in uniform and in roles of prominence. Once again, this recognition was a noteworthy component of citizenship, and George Washington Williams described one such action by black soldiers in New York as a “vindication of their own manhood.”⁵² However, as the war wound down, most black soldiers were simply mustered out, with little to no fanfare. Indeed, Ohio troops—like other black soldiers from across the North and South, returned to strong opposition to black citizenship. But their claims to this citizenship were

⁵⁰ Westwood, *Black Troops*, 95.

⁵¹ Regosin, *Freedom’s Promise*, 3; McPherson, *The Negro’s Civil War*, 145, 241.

⁵² Mezurek, *For Their Own Cause*, 2; Knepper, *Ohio and Its People*, 238; Luke and Smith, *Soldiering for Freedom*, 4, 102-4; George W. Williams, *A History of the Negro Troops*, 179-80.

markedly stronger due to their martial participation: those who served in defense of the Union were able to more securely demand acceptance of their rights and demonstrate their deservedness of those rights.⁵³

For Peter H. Clark and the black community of Cincinnati, the ability to participate in military service warranted the only section italicized for emphasis by Clark in his record of Dickson's speech: "*Organized companies of men of your race have tendered their services to aid in the defense of the city.*"⁵⁴ The benefits of military service are why the Black Brigade and other early black volunteer efforts were such important stepping stones on the path to racial freedom; such efforts were extremely persuasive. In August of 1863, President Lincoln replied to the opponents of emancipation that "You say you will not fight to free negroes. Some of them seem willing to fight for you."⁵⁵ With such an outpouring of national support from African Americans, John M. Langston "believed that service in the war would obligate the government to consider the rights of its black citizens."⁵⁶

Equal Citizenship as Law

As the Civil War approached its conclusion, the national debate over the nature of national citizenship reached fever pitch. Loyalty was at the heart of the public conception

⁵³ Mezurek, *For Their Own Cause*, 3.

⁵⁴ Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 13.

⁵⁵ Quoted in James M. McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Princeton University Press, 1992), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7zvflm> (accessed February 19, 2018), 212.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Versalle Fredrick Washington, "Eagles on Their Buttons: The Fifth Regiment of Infantry, United States Colored Troops in the American Civil War" (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 1995), 34.

of citizenship, but its definition was also the center of debate. Proponents of black suffrage highlighted their loyalty to the Union cause, while its detractors emphasized racial divides and current state laws that continued to affect nearly the entire country. Despite the years of turmoil in the Civil War, no Midwestern states allowed black suffrage, and none of them had political support for such a move. Even returning soldiers offered little assistance in this regard, preferring to emphasize the cause of preserving the Union as their primary object; this tended to minimize the impact of emancipation while undermining the role that black soldiers had played on the front lines and in the entrenchments of Northern armies.⁵⁷

Efforts to enfranchise black Americans might still have remained in limbo without major political backing had it not been for the impending passage of the Thirteenth Amendment. The ratification of the amendment promised the annulment of the Three-Fifths Compromise, thereby increasing Southern representation in the House of Representatives by an additional nineteen seats. Faced with the prospect of a renewed Democratic resurgence in readmitted states, Republican representatives began to seriously consider securing the voting and civil rights of African Americans through additional constitutional amendments.⁵⁸

As a result, Republicans committed themselves to the position that wartime loyalty was the prime deciding factor, which immediately elevated the standing of African-American men in their eyes: by their military service, African-American soldiers

⁵⁷ Susanna Michelle Lee, *Claiming the Union: Citizenship in the Post-Civil War South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 12; Voegeli, *Free But Not Equal*, 171; Stanley, *The Loyal West*, 101.

⁵⁸ Jackson Willie Sherman, "Ohio and Amendment Thirteen: A State Biography of the First National Reform Amendment, 1861-1865" (PhD. diss., Ohio State University, 1969), v.

had proved themselves to be loyal citizens deserving of the nation's rights and privileges.⁵⁹ Congressmen of all factions declared themselves to be amenable to African-American voting under certain circumstances. Radical Republican supporters included Pennsylvanian William D. Kelley, who declared that, regardless of complexion, "a patriot is a better citizen than a traitor."⁶⁰ Republican Moderates were also amenable to this position, as typified by James F. Wilson of Iowa: "Loyal men, of whatever color, have more right to the ballot than have disloyal men, however white they may be."⁶¹ Likewise, Samuel McKee, a conservative from Kentucky, declared: "I prefer to trust the meanest black man with a loyal heart who ever wore the chains of slavery to the most intelligent traitor who has waged war against my country."⁶²

As a Radical Republican and abolitionist, Dickson was heavily involved in the push to promote suffrage for African Americans. For example, he addressed Oberlin College at the end of the war, seeking to promote the granting of "all men equal rights before the law." In the speech, he argued for black voting equality and "full rights" as a condition for reconstruction of the former Confederate states.⁶³ To Dickson's mind, granting African-Americans full rights of citizenship would promote self-respect and remove "the last exception" to the Constitution. He argued that prejudices could be overcome and—regardless—the Constitution was built to accommodate "different races

⁵⁹ Lee, *Claiming the Union*, 18.

⁶⁰ *Congressional Globe*, 39th Congress, 1st Session (May 8, 1866), 2469.

⁶¹ *Congressional Globe*, 39th Congress, 1st Session (June 4, 1866), 2948.

⁶² *Congressional Globe*, 39th Congress, 1st Session (May 9, 1866), 2505.

⁶³ William M. Dickson, *The Absolute Equality of All Men Before the Law, the Only True Basis of Reconstruction* (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1865), in Library of Congress Collection, <https://archive.org/details/absoluteequality00dick> (accessed February 19, 2018), 2, 12.

and sects, by securing to each absolute equality before the law.”⁶⁴ In his final appeal, Dickson turned to his religious principles, declaring that black Americans should be given the vote as “the Golden Rule of our most holy religion commanding us to do unto others as we would that they should do unto us, requires it. Can we withhold it?”⁶⁵

Once these rights were granted to African-American citizens, Dickson did want to see the wounds of the war healed quickly; as a result, he embraced the universal amnesty policy, and was influential in framing Lincoln’s Amnesty Proclamation that was eventually issued on December 8, 1863. While the Ohio Republican Party adopted a Reconstruction policy that supported black political rights and prohibited Confederates from holding office, Dickson held to amnesty as an important, smaller part of legal equality. He warned that permanent military control could not exist in the South forever and that Southern states should be re-admitted as equal members as soon as possible—but he re-stressed that guarantees must be secured that the readmitted states would not use their re-admittance to carry on their war against the Union.⁶⁶

Dickson’s unflagging interest in the black community did not stop with the end of the war. While still promoting the passage of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, Dickson continued to be involved in promoting black citizenship as African-Americans still lacked access to the most basic rights and benefits of citizenship. And as William Dickson observed: “There is no safety between absolute slavery and absolute freedom,”

⁶⁴ Ibid., 15, 18.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 19.

⁶⁶ Reed, Randall, and Greve, *Bench and Bar of Ohio*, 1:145; Jack Devon Morton, “Ohio’s Gallant Fight: Northern State Politics during the Reconstruction Era, 1865-1878,” (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2005), in ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/pqdtglobal/docview/305381049/89CDAD9A8C21475DPQ/1?accountid=7014> (accessed February 19, 2018), 15, 70; Dickson, *Absolute Equality*, 9.

and “Between slavery and freedom there can be no compromise.”⁶⁷ Two examples will suffice to showcase Dickson’s continued concern: he was personally instrumental in helping black Cincinnatians gain equal access to the Cincinnati street cars in 1864 and, in 1865, Dickson was engaged as the prosecuting attorney in the Blind Tom case. This sensational case pitted Tabbs Gross, a former slave and member of the Black Brigade, against General James Neill Bethune, a Southern plantation owner, in a custody battle over Thomas Wiggins, a sixteen-year-old black autistic savant and musical genius. The resulting trial ebbed back and forth as both Bethune and Gross were discredited, but with Tom still insisting upon remaining with Bethune. In a final effort to secure Tom’s freedom, Dickson suggested placing Tom with an uninvolved party, such as Levi Coffin, who could then reunite the boy and his parents. Dickson’s efforts were in vain, however, and Judge Woodruff ruled in Bethune’s favor.⁶⁸

Dickson was only nominally more successful at the Ohio Republican Party’s state convention in 1865. There Jacob Cox, James Garfield, and other New Republicans sought to shut down Radical influence in Ohio, believing that economic (rather than moralistic) leadership was what the voters craved. As such, the minority Radicals only secured a nominal declaration on black rights. Dickson was the sponsor for this resolution, which announced that the party was committed to principles of the Declaration of Independence including its precept that “all men are created equal.”⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Greve, *Centennial History of Cincinnati*, 769; Dickson, *Absolute Equality*, 19; William M. Dickson to Friedrich Hassaurek, 28 February 1862, Hassaurek Papers.

⁶⁸ Davis, “*We Will Be Satisfied With Nothing Less*,” 15; Greve, *Centennial History of Cincinnati*, 769; Deirdre O’Connell, *The Ballad of Blind Tom, Slave Pianist* (New York: Overlook Duckworth Press, 2009), 146-58.

⁶⁹ Felice Anthony Bonadio, “Ohio Politics During Reconstruction, 1865-1868” (PhD diss., Yale University, 1964), 84, 103-4.

As the campaign season began, Dickson became engaged in a substantial debate over slavery with Jacob Cox, a moderate Republican general nominated for the position of Ohio governor. Cox had published a letter opposing black suffrage on the grounds that “permanent fusion in one political community” was “an absolute impossibility.” Dickson, though careful to declare his continued support of Cox’s campaign and the Republican platform, challenged Cox on this point and on his proposed plan to exile black Americans to particular locations in the South.⁷⁰ Dickson, while admitting that acquired prejudices existed throughout the country, argued that black Americans should not be separated from their fellow countrymen any more than Catholics, Jews, or Protestants. Just as disputes between these three groups had been softened by full equality before the law, so too full equality would give African Americans “ambition to become... good citizens” while encouraging ambitious whites to treat them well and to seek their vote. Ultimately, Dickson believed that full and equal treatment had to be adopted: “if we are to treat the unhappy negro as a pariah” or “if we are to continue to extend over him our protecting arm, in the sense of treating and using him as a child... then it requires no prophet to foretell that we will have a bloody struggle of the races in the South. The negro will soon know too much, know his strength too well, to submit to less than his whole rights before the law.”⁷¹

Dickson’s letter was widely influential, and he received letters of support from sources as diverse as the British political philosopher John Stuart Mill and General

⁷⁰ Morton, “Ohio’s Gallant Fight,” 38-39; William M. Dickson, *Review of the Letter of General Cox, of Ohio* (Boston: Press of George C. Rand and Avery, 1865), 2. Dickson had backed Cox early on because of his support for Reconstruction on the basis of Southern acceptance to the principles of free labor, abolition of slavery, and loyalty. Prior to publishing his letter, Cox’s position on black suffrage was unknown. Bonadio, “Ohio Politics During Reconstruction,” 97.

⁷¹ Dickson, *Review of the Letter of General Cox*, 3-4.

Benjamin Butler. As Dickson had intended, his letter did not prevent Cox from the governorship, which he secured by a seven-point margin over his Democratic opponent, George W. Morgan.⁷² But his letter did draw attention to the need for the Republican Party to remain committed to both equality and union. As the Cincinnati *Daily Gazette* observed, there was a “falling off in the Union majority.... The cause of this is well understood. It was not because the party platform was too radical, but because it was not radical enough.” Cox himself changed his position on the matter a few years later, committing himself to promoting black suffrage.⁷³

In 1866, Dickson retired from a more active public life, due to the effects of nervous prostration or neurasthenia that hampered physical activity; all efforts to cure his condition by foreign travel or medical means were ineffectual, and he became a semi-invalid. Despite suffering from constant pain, William M. Dickson still found time to continue his writings, most of which discussed the Republican Party and morality, his primary focuses.⁷⁴ At the heart of his unrelenting push for political morality was black suffrage. Through private correspondence, he continued to advise high-profile national politicians like Rutherford B. Hayes on political strategy, urging them to stand strong on the principle of not allowing Southern states to return to the Union until they allowed “their loyal fellow citizens the same right which they claim for themselves.” At the same

⁷² Dickson, *Absolute Equality*, 21-24; Benjamin F. Butler to William M. Dickson, 15 August 1865, Collection #GLC05872, Gilder Lehrman Collection, Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, New York City; Morton, “Ohio’s Gallant Fight,” 47-48; Gerber, *Black Ohio and the Color Line*, 37.

⁷³ Quoted in Morton, “Ohio’s Gallant Fight,” 49-50; Howard, *Religion and the Radical Republican Movement*, 195.

⁷⁴ Reed, Randall, and Greve, *Bench and Bar of Ohio*, 1:145-46; Biography, Folder 82, William Dickson Papers, Clements Library, University of Michigan; S. B. Nelson and J. M. Runk, *History of Cincinnati and Hamilton County* (Cincinnati: S. B. Nelson & Co., 1894), 718.

time, he cautioned federal politicians to be clear that black suffrage was a moral necessity, not a punishment on the South for losing the war.⁷⁵

In conjunction with the efforts of Dickson and other Radical Republicans, black Americans sought to guide the Republican push for equality and union toward the promotion of full African-American rights. At the heart of this push was the drive for racial equality at the polls. Despite their belief that other issues needed to be addressed, such as female suffrage or equality in the educational system, black Americans almost universally agreed that this first matter had to take precedence.⁷⁶ Peter Clark was at the forefront of this effort, and was elected to be first president of the Ohio Chapter of the National Equal Rights League, the main lobbying body for the granting of black suffrage.⁷⁷ While it also carried on its broader mission to seek “the repeal of all laws... that make distinctions on account of color,” the League dedicated itself for the remainder of the decade primarily to the task of securing black suffrage.⁷⁸

Efforts by black and white abolitionists like Peter Clark and William Dickson, aided by the overt demonstrations of loyalty by African Americans during the Civil War, eventually secured enough support to secure the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1866 and the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments in the decade following the Civil War. These acts and amendments sought to counter Black Codes, reverse the *Dred Scott*

⁷⁵ William M. Dickson to Rutherford B. Hayes, February 25, 1867, quoted in Howard, *Religion and the Radical Republican Movement*, 154; *New York Times*, March 11, 1867.

⁷⁶ Davis, “*We Will Be Satisfied With Nothing Less*,” 3-4.

⁷⁷ Gerber, *Black Ohio and the Color Line*, 35.

⁷⁸ *Proceedings of a Convention of the Colored Men of Ohio, held in Xenia, on the 10th, 11th, and 12th days of January 1865, with the Constitution of the Ohio Equal Rights League* (Cincinnati: n.p., 1865), 17.

decision by Constitutional Amendment, and to prevent legally sanctioned discrimination in both the North and South. With their ratifications in 1868 and 1870, the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments finally secured black American males the stated rights of citizenship and suffrage (though putting these rights into practice would take far longer).⁷⁹ Despite the long struggle to achieve these rights, proponents of equal rights could be satisfied that the Fifteenth Amendment was primarily motivated by moral principles, rather than by political expediency.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Nikki Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 184; Regosin, *Freedom's Promise*, 5-7; Davis, "We Will Be Satisfied With Nothing Less," 3-4.

⁸⁰ Howard, *Religion and the Radical Republican Movement*, 209.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

The war has just begun. We have fought the first skirmish.

—Wendell Phillips, 1869

The success of the Black Brigade was by no means an automatic process; it came on the heels of a long fight for black equality in Cincinnati, amid intense interest and discussions about black enlistment. As Gary Gallagher has noted, American civilians paid close attention to military events and equated military service with defense of both the nation and republican ideals; in numerous writings, the army was cast as a “vital national institution.”¹ But by showing that it was only the government’s reluctance keeping them from serving as honorable volunteers in the fight for the Union, black Cincinnatians boosted their claims of loyalty. The Black Brigade’s volunteer spirit, martial parades, and recorded willingness to serve without pay were all important symbols of this quest for citizenship—and the success of African Americans’ martial service convinced the majority of their fellow citizens that loyalty was more important than race.²

Even after the acquisition of voting rights, martial volunteerism continued to be an important component of civil life for black Cincinnatians. In 1870, African Methodist Episcopal Church records show that black Cincinnatians formed a local peacetime

¹ Gallagher, *The Union War*, 124, 132

² Samito, *Becoming American under Fire*, 5.

militia. An examination of the list of participants reveals that of the ninety-two members of the organization, a substantial number had prior military service and were willing to participate even after citizenship rights had been granted by the Constitution. This underscores that black Americans continued to claim martial volunteerism as a demonstration of citizenship after the war and not just as a means of acquiring it. By cross-comparing the list of militia members with just the fragmented records of the Black Brigade alone, it becomes apparent that at least 36 percent of the officers and 18 percent of the enlisted men in the black militia had prior military service in the Civil War on the entrenchments of Cincinnati.³

As for the other members of the Black Brigade, little is known about the latter years of their lives. One of those about whom we know the most is Powhatan Beaty. After the war, he returned to the stage, receiving recognition for his dramatic performances of Shakespeare, for which he was lauded by the *New York Globe* on May 3,

³ Arnett, *Proceedings of the Semi-Centenary Celebration*, 132; William Dickson's Report to Gov. John Brough, quoted in Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 22-30. The listing of the Black Brigade members only includes those who served in the second week of its enlistment as attached troops: those companies and individuals who were detached on other duties prior to that time are not included in the total roll of 706 men and twelve officers. Men whose names appear identically in both the records of the black Cincinnati regiment of militia and the Black Brigade are Jesse Oliver, Isaac Smith, James Morris, Henry Johnson, William Wilson, William Parker, Charles Henry, Henry Johnson, William Thomas, William Brown, and Alonzo Anderson. In addition, militia records indicate a further eight men whose names match those given in the Black Brigade records, but which appear with either abbreviations or potential misspellings. Those men are listed in the militia and Black Brigade rosters as: Henry Ellis (Henry Allis), W. Shelton (either Wallace Shelton or Washington Shelton), Durand Curtis (D. Curtis), Henry Brown (H. Brown), Charles Williams (C. W. Williams), H. Wilson (Harvey Wilson), Thomas Johnson (Thomas Johnston), Joseph Lewis (J. Lewis). I am more confident in the militia records' accuracy of names, as they were compiled for a small organization with an institutional core and personal knowledge of the individuals involved, while the Black Brigade's larger roster was organized quickly and is more likely to include mistakes (Powhatan Beaty, for example, is misspelled as Beatty in the Black Brigade's roster). In addition, it should be noted that the matching of names has a higher degree of accuracy within a more limited community, such as that found in the black community of Cincinnati during this time. The Allen Temple information was compiled by Rev. B. W. Arnett, a leading black Republican in the state of Ohio at the time. Arnett, *Proceedings of the Semi-Centenary Celebration*, 132; William Dickson's Report to Gov. John Brough, quoted in Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 22-30; Nikki Taylor, *America's First Black Socialist*, 117.

1884, as “The Western Garrick.”⁴ He also wrote, directed, and performed in Cincinnati a well-received play entitled *Delmar; or Scenes in Southland* that saw Beaty in the role of an aristocratic Southern planter.⁵ His performances in Cincinnati earned him a role opposite Henrietta Vinton Davis (the “premier actor of all nineteenth-century black performers on the dramatic stage”) in a production at Ford’s Opera House in Washington on May 7, 1884. That night, Ford’s 1,100-seat capacity was tested by the crowd, which included Frederick Douglass and other well-known Americans. The performances were well-received by the critical press, with special credit given to both Davis and Beaty.⁶ Beaty, though still a public performer on occasion, continued to retain his main employment at the Cincinnati waterworks, where he had been promoted to assistant engineer in 1884. He passed away on December 6, 1918, and was buried in Union Baptist Cemetery (the resting place of nearly 150 other members of the United States Colored Troops).⁷

Thanks to extensive research by Nikki Taylor, more is known about Peter H. Clark, the unit’s historian. After the war, Clark maintained his activity in the Equal Rights League and was active in a push for equal educational rights, seeking to abolish school segregation in Cincinnati. His arguments, just as they had in *The Black Brigade*, focused on convincing whites in the name of basic fairness, patriotism, and republican

⁴ Hill, *Shakespeare in Sable*, 34, 61. David Garrick was a well-known English actor, playwright, and producer from the eighteenth century who was famous for his Shakespearean performances.

⁵ Errol G. Hill and James V. Hatch, *A History of African American Theatre* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 82-83, 88.

⁶ Hill, *Shakespeare in Sable*, 67-68; Hill and Hatch, *A History of African American Theatre*, 87.

⁷ Hill, *Shakespeare in Sable*, 62-63; Ohio Historical Society Historical Marker at Union Baptist Cemetery, quoted in Grace and White, *Cincinnati Cemeteries*, 50.

principles. Clark's efforts were eventually successful, and the city resumed control for all schools in its district in 1873.⁸

Clark also became more involved in party politics after the Civil War. With the exception of a brief embrace of socialist party membership, he would actively serve in the Republican Party until 1882. In that year, Clark and other African-American leaders of Cincinnati agreed that dividing the black vote in the next election would increase their political clout in the future, as both major parties would have to work harder to earn their vote. However, most black citizens considered anyone who joined the Democratic Party as a "creature of such depravity that hell was far too good for him." Seeing that nobody else was willing to make the switch, Clark offered to take the risk himself; but instead of being applauded for his action, Clark was roundly criticized and ostracized by black community leaders.⁹ Biographer Nikki Taylor has tied this ostracism to Clark's constant pursuit of collective and individual political power. At or around the same time, he adopted the conservative racial politics of the Democratic Party, pursuing personal political advancement at the cost of his moral and representative capital. In subsequent years, he embraced unsavory tactics, including disenfranchisement by false imprisonment and even bribery, eventually losing almost all credibility with the local black community.¹⁰ Discredited in his hometown, Clark moved to St. Louis in 1888 and retreated from the political scene. This break from politics seems to have done his image

⁸ Nikki Taylor, *America's First Black Socialist*, 104-105; Davis, "We Will Be Satisfied With Nothing Less," 82-84.

⁹ Dabney, *Cincinnati's Colored Citizens*, 114; Nikki Taylor, *America's First Black Socialist*, 149.

¹⁰ Nikki Taylor, *America's First Black Socialist*, 6, 159. Coveting an appointment to be the U.S. Minister of Haiti after John Mercer Langston's retirement in 1885, Clark even stooped so low as to conduct a full-scale character assassination campaign against fellow black Ohioan George Washington Williams. His efforts were ultimately unsuccessful. *Ibid.*, 183-85.

some good: in 1890, a poll commissioned by the *Indianapolis Freeman* ended up awarding him a place among “the ten greatest Negroes who ever lived”—alongside such recognizable names as Frederick Douglass, George Washington Williams, and Toussaint L’Overture.¹¹ Reemerging from political retirement in 1892, he launched a national campaign against lynching, regaining some moral capital in the process. Clark spent his last few years seeking to establish African-American historiography by submitting the *Black Brigade of Cincinnati* to the State Historical Society of Missouri and applying for membership therein. He eventually passed away on June 21, 1925, at the age of 96.¹²

William Martin Dickson, the Black Brigade’s colonel, continued to be involved in the Republican Party during the 1870s, but his own party loyalty was beginning to be tested as the moral fiber of the Republican Party began to slip. In 1884, Dickson publicly and privately opposed James G. Blaine’s nomination for the Republican Party, arguing in the *Indianapolis Sentinel* on June 2 that the acceptance of such a candidate who had used his position in office for his own material gain would drive Republicans from the party, as “honest men” could not vote for him. But when the Democratic Party put forward Cleveland as their candidate, Dickson ultimately worked against Cleveland’s election, arguing in the *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette* on September 21, 1884, that Cleveland was sexually promiscuous and had therefore compromised his integrity. Frustrated by the lack of attention from the nation’s Christian press on Cleveland’s indiscretions, Dickson published an article on August 26 in the *Christian Union*, declaring that “if there be one sin more offensive to Christianity than another, it is the sin of unchastity.” In the same

¹¹ Ibid., 12, 213.

¹² Ibid., 216-23, 232.

letter, he submitted the cancellation of his subscription, bluntly asking if the editor of the paper valued women's purity less than the money in the Treasury. In the lead-up to the election, Dickson's efforts made an impact as far away as London, where the English cultural critic and poet Matthew Arnold contacted him to notify him that he had seen Dickson's article.¹³

As the 1880s came to a close, William Dickson began to converse even more frequently with George William Curtis, a proponent of black equality and political editor for *Harper's Weekly* who had broken from the Republican Party in 1884 and who frequently published Dickson's work. Curtis shared Dickson's concerns that the Republican Party had changed, declaring that: "Its leadership and spirit and tendency are not such as we knew in its great and humane day. It has become the bulwark off paternalism, of corporate power, and of class government." Curtis admitted that the Democratic Party did not offer much better, but extolled Cleveland's personal honesty.¹⁴ Despite his strident opposition to Cleveland four years earlier, Dickson came to the same conclusion. Helped along by a visit to the Southern states and won over by Cleveland's policies, he resigned from the Lincoln Club in a letter that publicly denounced the high Republican tariff. Both President Cleveland and Democratic Speaker of the House John Griffin Carlisle personally reached out to Dickson to thank him, and Carlisle promised to

¹³ Matthew Arnold to William M. Dickson, 10 October 1884, Folder 33, Dickson Papers. In the midst of this already trying period for Dickson, Annie Dickson passed away on March 6, 1885. William Dickson was heartbroken, but letters of friendly commiseration, such as those from renowned Presbyterian Judge William A. Porter of Philadelphia and Supreme Court Justice Stanley Matthews were of some comfort. Reed, Randall, and Greve, *Bench and Bar of Ohio*, 1:146; Stanley Matthews to William M. Dickson, 15 March 1885, Folder 17, Dickson Papers; William A. Porter to William M. Dickson, 12 March 1885, Folder 36, Dickson Papers.

¹⁴ George Curtis William to William M. Dickson, 26 September 1888, Folder 57, Dickson Papers.

have his letter to the Lincoln Club circulated in the Ohio press.¹⁵ Dickson also wrote to Senator Allen G. Thurman, a Democrat from Ohio, proposing that the Democratic Party adopt uniform tariff reform at their next convention and thereby win over other Republicans to the support of the Democratic ticket.¹⁶

While Dickson was in the midst of this personal tectonic shift of politics, tragedy struck. Stretching above the City of Cincinnati was the Mount Auburn Incline, which ran 900 feet from the valley to the top of Mt. Auburn, 312 feet above. The incline railway had been operating for seventeen years, easing transportation from the residential districts on the hills with the city below. On October 15, 1889, the *Daily Gazette* of Xenia, Ohio reported that one of the railway cars, containing nine passengers, had accelerated out of control up the hill, where it broke the machinery, causing the car to become untethered and releasing it back down the hill into the station beneath. Six passengers were killed, including Judge Dickson, who had been returning to his home at 196 Auburn Avenue for lunch. He was buried in Spring Grove Cemetery, Cincinnati.¹⁷

Beatty, Clark, and Dickson all had lived to see the triumph of their quest for black citizenship come to pass through martial volunteerism, writings on citizenship, and abolitionism. But through no fault of their own, their descendants still faced hurdles in

¹⁵ George Curtis William, "William M. Dickson," *Harper's Weekly*, November 2, 1880; Grover Cleveland to William M. Dickson, 12 October 1888, Folder 60, Dickson Papers; John Griffin Carlisle to William M. Dickson, 16 October 1888, Folder 61, Dickson Papers; Hugh McCullough to William M. Dickson, 26 October 1888, Folder 63, Dickson Papers.

¹⁶ William M. Dickson to Allen G. Thomas, 14 June 1889, Folder 69, Dickson Papers.

¹⁷ Greve, *Centennial History of Cincinnati*, 1007-8; Melissa Kramer, *The Inclines of Cincinnati* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2009), 7, 101; John H. White, "The Cincinnati Inclined Plane Railway Company: the Mount Auburn Incline and the Lookout House," *Bulletin of the Cincinnati Historical Society* 27, no. 1 (1969), 17; Spring Grove Cemetery. "William M. Dickson." <http://www.springgrove.org/stats/47868.tif.pdf> (accessed February 19, 2018).

implementing the full benefits of this citizenship. After the war, Cincinnati tried to recast itself fully in the Northern mold, disguising the fact that it was a city with a long and complicated history regarding race. As a result, shifting understandings of the border region converted the Ohio River from the primary artery of a culturally unified region into an absolute dividing line between North and South.¹⁸ Despite this cultural re-writing of history, tell-tale signs of discrimination remained. Former Confederate generals travelling through Cincinnati—including General Henry Heth—were “captured” on June 1, 1895, and welcomed as honored guests to a city that continued to hold “love and sympathy for the southland.”¹⁹ Meanwhile, in stark contrast, Grand Army of the Republic posts for the gathering of veterans remained segregated in Cincinnati. In like manner, though the hard-fought struggle for black suffrage had ostensibly been won in Ohio, the state quietly continued to include “white” in its Constitutional description of eligible voters until 1911. Death itself was no effective deterrent from segregation: as late as 1890, the larger cemeteries of Cincinnati refused outright to bury black Americans—a major regression even in comparison to the troubled days of the 1820s.²⁰

However, these setbacks and enduring challenges could not fully erase the work that the women and men who strove for equality had already completed. Their accomplishments were already inscribed in enduring legal documents or—even more indelibly—in the hearts of their ideological descendants. When Judge Dickson passed away, George William Curtis eulogized him in *Harper’s Weekly*, declaring that his death

¹⁸ Stanley, *The Loyal West*, 10, 17, 38; Phillips, *The Rivers Ran Backward*, 13.

¹⁹ Gerber, *Black Ohio and the Color Line*, 56; J. M. Glenn, “Address of Welcome,” quoted in John C. Underwood, *Report of Proceeding Incidental to the Erection and Dedication of the Confederate Monument* (Chicago: Johnston, 1896), 171.

²⁰ Sherman, “Ohio and Amendment Thirteen,” vi; Gerber, *Black Ohio and the Color Line*, 58.

was a “distinct loss to the forces of the best American citizenship. His name will not pass into our history, but it is such qualities as his that make it.”²¹ Curtis, in a broader sense, was right that Dickson’s name has not passed into our American history textbooks. Nor, for that matter, have those of Peter Clark, Powhatan Beaty, or the other one thousand members of the Black Brigade. But the value of the American abolitionists who secured citizenship for unborn millions was that their ideals lived on when their names were all but forgotten.

Some, however, did not forget, or were inspired anew by the writings of Clark and Dickson. The Honorable William Mallory, Sr., was one of the latter. Having read the story of the Black Brigade, the retired legislator (who had served in the Ohio State House from 1966 to 1994) was surprised to discover that the contributions of the unit had been forgotten, despite their clear efforts to preserve their history and their long-standing cultural impact on the Cincinnati African-American community. After a long campaign, Mallory helped secure funding for a monument to the brigade at Cincinnati’s Smale Riverfront Park, which was completed in 2009. Situated within two hundred feet of where the pontoon bridge used by the Black Brigade was anchored on the northern shore of the Ohio, the memorial tells the story of the Black Brigade through narrative, epigraphs, reliefs, and free-standing sculptures.²²

As a testament of the “first organization of the colored people of the North actually employed for military purposes,” the monument to the Black Brigade and their

²¹ George William Curtis, *Harper’s Weekly*, November 2, 1880.

²² Randy A. Simes, “William Mallory, Sr.’s Legacy Will Live on Through Family, Record, and Monument,” *UrbanCincy*, December 12, 2013, <http://www.urbancincy.com/2013/12/william-mallory-sr-s-legacy-will-live-on-through-family-record-and-monument/> (accessed February 19, 2018); Tyrone Williams, *Between Red and Green: Narrative of the Black Brigade* (Loveland, OH: Dos Madres Press, 2016), vii.

written histories will continue to serve as demonstrative proof that African Americans believed that their efforts would secure the “blessings of liberty” for all citizens of the United States—even before the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation.²³ By demanding the expansion of citizenship beyond adult white males, the black and white abolitionists who made the Black Brigade possible helped definitively settle the question about citizenship for minority Americans and, in so doing, presaged America as a multi-racial society.²⁴ Poet Tyrone Williams, the primary writer for the project, captured the Black Brigade’s purpose in these words:

“We left as men
Returned as heroes
To the doffed hats
Waving hands
Hurrahs and cheers
Of the festooned crowd
At Fifth and Broadway
Citizens knighted
By the sword of citizenship”²⁵

This “sword of citizenship” is the centerpiece of the park, showcased in a prominent statue of Dickson receiving a sword from Marshall Jones—displaying, in a public manner, the best qualities of American citizenship: selfless volunteerism and full equality under the law.²⁶

²³ Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati*, 3.

²⁴ Young, *Antebellum Black Activists*, 186.

²⁵ Tyrone Williams, *Between Red and Green*, 18.

²⁶ William J. Bechmann III, “Cincinnati, Ohio: The Black Brigade Monument at Smale Riverfront Park,” http://www.civilwaralbum.com/misc20/black_brigade1.htm (accessed February 19, 2018).

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