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## Race, Rhetoric, and Emancipation: The Election of 1862 in Illinois

Bruce Tap

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### In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Race, Rhetoric, and Emancipation: The Election of 1862 in Illinois Bruce Tap The Republican party fared poorly in the fall elections of 1862, especially in the lower North and Midwest. Not only did the Democratic party gain thirty-four seats in the House of Representatives, but Democrats also triumphed in the gubernatorial races in New York and New Jersey as well as in capturing the state houses of Illinois, Indiana, and New Jersey. Historians have offered a number of reasons for these electoral reverses, including the Lincoln administration's violation of civil liberties, culminating in the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus; the pervasive economic depression that resulted from the closing of the Mississippi River; the negative effects of the preliminary emancipation proclamation, given the context of negro phobia that characterized much of

the Midwest; and, finally, the general dissatisfaction with Lincoln's handling of the war.<sup>1</sup> The election of 1862 in Illinois represented a bitter defeat for the Republican party. Not only did the Republicans lose nine of fourteen congressional seats, they also lost control of a number of state offices and of both houses of the legislature, guaranteeing that a Democrat would replace Orville H. Browning to finish out the Senate term of Stephen A. Douglas.<sup>2</sup> The author wishes to thank Dr. Robert W. Johannsen for critically reading this manuscript and making a number of helpful suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988), 561. On the interpretations of historians see: Allan Nevins, *The War for the Union: War Becomes Revolution 1862-1863* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), 318-22; Hans Trefousse, *The Radical Republicans: Lincoln's Vanguard for Racial Justice* (New York: Knopf, 1969), 259-61; Frank L. Klement, "Economic Aspects of Middle Western Copperheadism," *Historian* 14 (Autumn 1951): 27-44; V. Jacque Voegeli, *Free But Not Equal: The Midwest and the Negro During the Civil War* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1967), 62-67. Much of my research was inspired by my desire to explore Voegeli's basic premise more thoroughly for the election in Illinois.

<sup>2</sup> D. W. Lutz, *Politics and Politicians of Illinois, Anecdotes and Incidents: A Succinct History of the State, 1809-1886*. 2d ed. (Springfield, 1886), 145-47. *Civil War History*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 2, © 1993 by The Kent State University Press 102 CIVIL WAR HISTORY

While all of the above reasons played a role in the Democratic victory, negrophobia was the most obvious reason for Republican defeat in Illinois and was connected with a blunder committed by Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton. On September 18, 1862, Stanton ordered the northward shipment of ex-slaves, "contrabands," who were temporarily being held at Cairo, Illinois. Stanton hoped that the contrabands might be resettled throughout Illinois and the Midwest so that they could assist farmers in harvesting the fall crop. The timing of Stanton's order was most unfortunate. Issued just a few days prior to Lincoln's Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, Illinois voters connected the two events, regarding the northward migration of free blacks as the inevitable result of the proclamation. Democratic newspapers throughout the state charged that the policy of the Republican party was to "Africanize" Illinois, changing the character of the war from one waged for the Union to one waged for the establishment of black equality. For the Democratic party, the contraband issue symbolized everything that it despised in Lincoln's war policy. Not only did Democrats object to the presence of "inferior" blacks in Illinois, but the movement of contrabands heightened economic fears in a region already under stress due to the closing of the Mississippi River. In addition, Democrats claimed that these actions displayed a flagrant disregard for the Constitution. Despite Republican efforts to portray their opponents as disloyal, the contraband issue caused the Republicans to go down to defeat in the fall election. There was little charitable sentiment towards African Americans in Illinois and, for that matter, throughout the Midwest. Although Illinois had significant antislavery and Free-Soil opinions, it would be a mistake to identify these feelings with a positive attitude toward blacks. In fact, Free-Soil determination to keep the western territories closed to slavery was...

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