

Shaping the Contours of Federalism: The American Civil War and the Negotiation of Nation-State Power

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Scholars continue to examine how and why the states that remained loyal to the Union won the American Civil War, confirming its centrality to the subsequent trajectory of American federalism. The evolution of our democratic republic's political culture continues to fascinate Americans because it reveals the ongoing development of both the shared legal and constitutional authority between the states and the federal government and of self-governance. Certainly, the war was a "turning point in the history of American federalism," as Michael Les Benedict asserted 30 years ago, largely because it redefined the relationship between government and its citizenry in more definitive, national terms.¹ If government was designed to be truly effective when it was hidden from plain sight, the war unmasked the multifaceted interplay between the national and the local. The Union victory reinforced an understanding that the national government was not merely an agent for the states. Rather, it became the dominant political entity, while at the same time it recognized the divided nature of sovereignty, the diffusion of power, and the shared governance of citizenship that bound Americans in a new national identity.



Governor John A. Andrew of Massachusetts

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¹ Michael Les Benedict, "Abraham Lincoln and Federalism," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 10 (1988): 1–46.

The reconstruction of federalism commenced in April 1861 when the firing on Fort Sumter and Southern secession unified the remaining loyal states and challenged them to preserve the Union through what would become a bloody and transformative conflict. The extraordinary venture to save the republic gave rise to nationalism. Not simply defined by the preservation of a common experience, language, and culture, nationalism in 1861 emerged from a social contract among citizens who chose to repudiate secession, shoulder a musket, and fight for the Union. No better example exists than the repatriation of western Virginians into the Union via the creation of West Virginia in 1863, which ironically represented the only successful secession in United States history. War created the conditions and divisions by which the new state came into existence, and the framework of cooperative federalism enabled that unconstitutional, yet uniquely justified act of creating a new state out of an existing state. Thus, we can argue that reconstruction began not in 1865 in the Southern states, but rather with the loyal states in 1861, where in response to secession, inspired political leaders at the state and federal levels asserted their most basic powers to preserve the Union and the guarantee of liberty that federalism protected. Open rebellion to the United States precipitated the repudiation of the antebellum doctrine of states' rights in an effort to strengthen constitutional nationalism, which compelled citizens to settle their political disputes on the battlefield.

The formula for preserving the Union in the years 1861–65, however, was no more mysterious than state governors joining together to work with the federal government so that the functional and constitutional bond between national and state governments could remain intact. In fact, the Union grew stronger as the contest wore on—a testament to strength in the face of adversity—and national authority became more prominent because of the federal-state partnerships. Before commanders, before battles, and before Congress declared war, state governors resolved to stand together with the federal government to preserve and protect the Constitution, overcome rebellion, and along the way, reassert the nation's foundational, core principles that inspired the founders. Yet questions remain about how and why the nature of the war defined, limited, and intensified the partnership between the governors and Abraham Lincoln. Even before the outbreak of hostilities, chief executives worked independently in responding to secession and the Confederacy's formation. Prewar cooperation among the governors carried into the mobilization that followed the firing on Fort Sumter, and it laid a foundation of cooperation that strengthened as the conflict expanded. The experience of war gave birth to a new understanding of

the political foundations of the United States by 1865, one that the governors and Lincoln forged beginning in 1861.

Yet we know so little about this enormous subject. We need an integrated approach in extracting from the governors' extensive and varied perspectives how this relationship prevailed during the conflict. In *Writing the Civil War: The Quest to Understand*, editors James M. McPherson and William J. Cooper, Jr., provide a wonderful collection of essays that assess several key works on wartime politics but also suggest new points of departure for investigating Civil War governance. Michael Holt, for example, argues in his essay "An Elusive Synthesis" that considerable work must be done in the growth of the federal government and the balance of federal and state politics and power during the military conflict, beginning at the state level. Because the war witnessed a dramatic expansion of presidential and gubernatorial power, examination of the working relations between Abraham Lincoln and his wartime governors promises new insights into their negotiated governance and the formation of national wartime strategy.²

William B. Hesseltine provided some groundwork on this relationship with his classic work *Lincoln and the War Governors*, published in 1948. Arguing that during the war Lincoln had "triumphed over the governors, and the nation had emerged victorious over the states," Hesseltine essentially dismissed the view that the president succeeded because governors generally cooperated with, rather than contested his power. Yet, the evidence reveals that when they challenged or opposed Lincoln, they remained committed to the Union's preservation. That negotiation of power not only served to influence national policy and to some degree military policy, but also highlighted how the states contributed to a revisualization of

² James M. McPherson and William J. Cooper, Jr., eds., *Writing the Civil War: The Quest to Understand* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), see Gary Gallagher's essay, 31–32, and in particular Michael F. Holt's essay, "An Elusive Synthesis: Northern Policies During the Civil War," 128–34; Benedict, "Abraham Lincoln and Federalism," 1–46; Carl Brent Swisher, *The Growth of Federal Power in American History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946); Morton Grodzins, *The American System: A New View of the Government of the United States* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1966), 17–57; James A. Rawley, "The Nationalism of Abraham Lincoln," *Civil War History* 9 (Sept. 1963): 283–98; Laura Edwards, *A Legal History of the Civil War and Reconstruction: A Nation of Rights* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 2–8; Brian Balogh, *A Government Out of Sight: The Mystery of National Authority in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 2–17; Richard Franklin Bensel, *Yankee Leviathan: The Origins of Central State Authority in America, 1859–1877* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 95–98; Morton Keller, *Affairs of State: Public Life in Late 19th Century America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 2–17; Mark R. Wilson, *The Business of the Civil War: Military Mobilization and the State, 1861–1865* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2006).

the Union and its reinvention as a nation. Without diminishing Lincoln's genius, Northern governors' collective initiative should not be overlooked when considering the nature of Civil War governance. Politically, the negotiation of power was as important as the exercise of power in establishing a more perfect Union that recognized national sovereignty over state sovereignty. William C. Harris revised this thesis in 2013 with his work titled *Lincoln and the Union Governors*, which argued that governors were much more prominent in shaping the contours of federalism than Hesseltine allowed.³

Considering the American republic's evolution from a state-driven conglomeration into a union in the Civil War era, it is important to recognize that the power that the federal government exercised during every war prior to 1861 was as much the result of the negotiation of power with state governors and their willingness to cooperate with the vision of a centralized Union as it was the application of national power against the enemy. Lincoln capitalized on that relationship, and scholars have been quick to point out that Lincoln used the exigencies of war to centralize the authority in Washington and take command of the Republican Party. Along the way, however, governors subordinated state sovereignty to the national government in order to mobilize and sustain a war effort to preserve the Union, which they believed recognized shared sovereignty. A closer examination of the 23 state executives suggests that the locus of power evolved upward from the states to deepen the national resolve. Leonard Curry astutely argues that the Republicans' legislative vigor during the war forced Americans "to think of the war's problems in national terms." But solving these problems forced Lincoln to lean on the states, negotiate with governors, and strike a governmental balance that recognized the power that Union governors held in the war effort.⁴

If secession provided Unionists with an alarming example of just how fragile the federal system was in the mid-19th century, it also inspired loyal political leaders to demonstrate that they had more rights inside the Union than outside of it. This

³ William B. Hesseltine, *Lincoln and the War Governors* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1948), 389; William C. Harris, *Lincoln and the Union Governors* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013).

⁴ Leonard P. Curry, *Blueprint for Modern America: Non-Military Legislation of the First Civil War Congress* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1968), 148–50. Holt observes the contrast between Hesseltine's view, which argued that it was Lincoln's genius behind nonmilitary legislation that brought about Union victory, and Curry's idea that congressional leadership was more consequential. A closer look at the role of governors reveals that they held considerable power during the war and were instrumental in shaping wartime mobilization and national policy. Stephen D. Engle, *Gathering to Save a Nation: Lincoln and the Union's War Governors* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 1–8.

revelation motivated loyal state leaders to unite in hopes of vindicating democracy and forge a powerful federal-state alliance that ultimately produced a Northern army powerful enough to defeat the Confederates. This article explores that relationship. It contends that a cooperative spirit continued throughout the war and that, consequently, governors consistently influenced national policy in numerous ways. Thus, the American Civil War was as much a story of cooperative federalism as it was of conflict to destroy the Union.

Toward a Cooperative Federalism

Although Unionists repudiated secession, many of them did not lessen their commitment to states' rights. On the contrary, the struggle between eastern conservatism and western liberalism kept the popular belief of popular sovereignty alive and pitted agrarian and industrial interests against one another.⁵ Supporting the national government and vindicating democracy, many Northerners believed, would preserve state and local autonomy. Lincoln understood the fusion of state politics and nationalist ideology and the fact that his armies were comprised of state regiments organized by governors. Union governance derived from the mutually dependent relationship between national and state leaders who navigated the political shoals of mobilization, emancipation, and conscription. However, when Lincoln expanded his war aims and his national power to assist governors in maintaining support for the war, it tested the limits of states' rights.

Northerners who remained in the Union believed that advancing the bond between nation and state was essential to achieve military victory. That cooperation took shape, most critically, as citizens mobilized for war. Through their willingness to coordinate military organization, loyal governors exercised important powers, and citizens looked to them for leadership. The governors' partnerships with Lincoln offer impressive examples of federal-state cooperation that not only resulted in Union victory, but also ultimately registered a triumph for the federal Union. Antebellum governance was legislatively centered and regionally driven, and both Lincoln and Jefferson Davis at first administered decentralized federal systems. While many Northerners accepted and even supported states'

⁵ The concept of "popular sovereignty" is somewhat different than states' rights, as the former related primarily to decision-making on slavery in the territories, and the latter shaped pre-war southern politics that drove secessionist attitudes. See, for example, Christopher Childers, *The Failure of Popular Sovereignty: Slavery, Manifest Destiny and the Radicalization of Southern Politics* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012).

rights, however, they rejected the presumption of state sovereignty over national sovereignty and emphasized the United States as a single nation. Preserving the Union was based on nationalism and required governors to play a crucial role in the war effort. In doing so, citizens now placed nation above state and relied on the Union's strengths to support a national authority.⁶

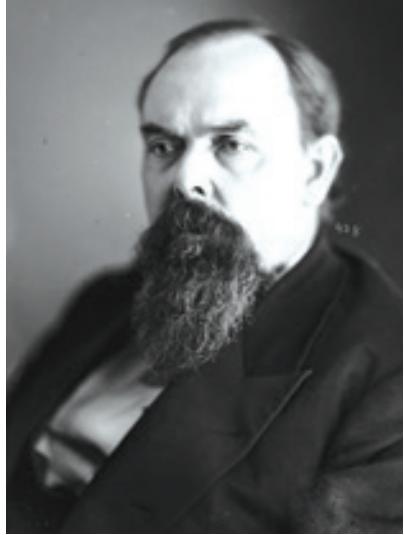
Scholars have given minimal attention to the often vehement wartime relationships between the federal government and the loyal states. Americans had for decades empowered the states as guardians of liberty against the federal government, and as they volunteered through their states, citizens remained committed to protecting those liberties. The resulting internal struggles gained importance as both state and federal governments faced increased pressures to sustain the war effort. "I saw the constitution born," remarked the aging Lewis Cass of Michigan, "and I fear I may see it die." The federal government entered into a critical phase of not only maintaining the welfare of the Union but also the welfare of citizen-soldier and civilian who belonged to the states.⁷

⁶ In 1989, Maris Vinovskis asked, "Have Social Historians Lost the Civil War? Some Preliminary Demographic Speculations," *Journal of American History* 76 (June 1989): 34–58; Paul A. Cimbala and Randall Miller, eds., *An Uncommon Time: The Civil War and the Northern Home Front* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 347; Engle, *Gathering to Save a Nation*, 1–8; Paul A. Cimbala and Randall Miller, *Union Soldiers and the Northern Home Front: Wartime Experiences, Postwar Adjustments* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002). See also Phillip Shaw Paludan, "A People's Contest": *The Union and the Civil War, 1861–1865* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988); J. Matthew Gallman's excellent works, *Mastering Wartime: A Social History of Philadelphia during the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), and *The North Fights the Civil War: The Home Front* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1994); Carl R. Fish, "Social Relief in the Northwest during the Civil War," *American Historical Review* 22 (January 1917): 309–24; and Fish, "The Raising of the Wisconsin Volunteers, 1861," *The Military Historian and Economist* 1 (1916): 258–73.

⁷ George S. May, *Michigan and the Civil War Years, 1860–66: A Wartime Chronicle* (Lansing: Michigan Civil War Centennial Observance Commission, 1964), 3; Fish, "The Raising of the Wisconsin Volunteers, 1861," 258; Hesselstine, *Lincoln and the War Governors*, 166–70; Although Fred A. Shannon's article "States' Rights and the Union Army," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 12 (June 1925): 51–71, held wide currency and is still cited occasionally, Hesselstine contributed numerous articles to the field, including "Lincoln, the Governors and States' Rights," *Social Studies* 39 (December 1948): 350–55; "Lincoln's War Governors," *Abraham Lincoln Association Quarterly* 4 (1946): 153–200; and "Abraham and the Politicians," *Civil War History* 6 (March 1960): 43–54; with Hazel B. Wolf, Hesselstine contributed "The Cleveland Conference of 1861," *Ohio Archeological and Historical Quarterly* 56 (1947): 258–65; "New England Governors vs. Lincoln: The Providence Conference," *Rhode Island History* 5 (1946): 105–13; and "The Altoona Conference and the Emancipation Proclamation," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 71 (1947): 195–205. See also Susan-Mary Grant and Peter J. Parish, *Legacy of Disunion: The Enduring Significance of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2003), 81; William Barney, *The Passage of the Republic: An Interdisciplinary History of Nineteenth-Century America* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath, 1987).

Among the Civil War's ironies was that the very power, privileges, and cooperative spirit of loyal governors and state legislatures arose from the desire to suppress the Confederacy. The 23 loyal states proved to be every much as influential in shaping the contours of war as the seceded states had been in commencing it. Indeed, as Hesselstine argued, "governors were the jealous guardians of the rights of the states."⁸ But the war heightened rather than stifled their gubernatorial sensibilities. Exercising cooperation and conceding power to the federal government was just as much a state's right, as was exercising opposition and withholding power, as secessionists had done. It would be hard to imagine, therefore, that during this great crisis, Lincoln could have empowered the federal government without the cooperation of his loyal governors.⁹

The Civil War forced federal and state political leaders to build new structures of government that redefined federalism. Loyal governors shook off their complacency and became more than figureheads as they executed their political duties. The demands on loyalty, the politics of allegiance, and the obligations of civic responsibility tied them closer to the national state than ever before. Many Union governors saw the conflict as an opportunity to strengthen their states (and their respective political parties) and the governor's role, particularly in their relationship to the federal government. "In this contest,"



Governor Oliver P. Morton of Indiana

declared Indiana Governor Oliver P. Morton, "the Government is compelled to lean upon the States for its armies, and in my opinion the hands of men who labor without ceasing to sustain the Government should be held up and not deposed by indifference to their recommendations and demands." When

⁸ Hesselstine, *Lincoln and the War Governors*, 5. For an excellent study of issues of divided sovereignty before and during the Civil War, see Forrest McDonald, *States' Rights and the Union, Imperium in Imperio, 1776–1876* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000).

⁹ Hesselstine, *Lincoln and the War Governors*, 92–125. Hesselstine stresses the cooperative spirit of the governors and how their work with the administration allowed the federal government considerable strength in the beginning of the war. I contend that this cooperative spirit continued throughout the war and that governors continued to influence national policy. Engle, *Gathering to Save a Nation*, 1–8.

Lincoln thought he needed to reconcile state and federal priorities and powers for the benefit of the Union, he frequently wrote to governors, even those who opposed him, to enlist their advice and counsel. In writing to Democratic New York Governor Horatio Seymour, for example, the president remarked that while he and Seymour were “substantially strangers,” he wanted to “become better acquainted.” “I for the time being, am at the head of a nation which is in great peril,” he declared, “and you are at the head of the greatest State of that Nation. . . . In the performance of my duty, the co-operation of your State, as that as [*sic*] others, is needed—in fact is indispensable.”¹⁰

Many governors recognized that the war’s extent and military requirements necessitated some centralization of agencies, and they allowed the locus of authority to shift to the federal level. “This is to be no-six weeks campaign,” Michigan Governor Austin Blair declared to the legislature, which conferred upon the executive office broad powers in handling war issues. While governors agreed that the Union must be preserved, the process of how that was to be accomplished necessitated a cooperative federalism. Hesseltine argued that in the beginning of the war governors had considerable power and used it, and that while the “struggle was long, sometimes confused, often awkward,” the “exigencies of war permitted a concentration of authority in the national government.”¹¹

Historians have emphasized that states’ rights remained just as important in the Union as nationalism. In the absence of any real unifying features such as a national currency, national church, or a national citizenship, state governors and state legislatures were the interpreters and dispensers of power to the local people and provided regional cohesion in administering the war effort.¹²

¹⁰ Oliver P. Morton to Abraham Lincoln, Oct. 7, 1861, Morton Letterbooks, Indiana State Archives, Indianapolis, Indiana; Lorna L. Sylvester, “Oliver P. Morton and Hoosier Politics during the Civil War,” (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1968), 141; Lincoln to Horatio Seymour, Mar. 23, 1863, Roy B. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953), vol. 6, 145–46; Hesseltine, *Lincoln and the War Governors*, 5–6; Erik Mathisen, *The Loyal Republic: Traitors, Slaves, and the Remaking of Citizenship in Civil War America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 1–7.

¹¹ Hesseltine, *Lincoln and the War Governors*, 5–6; McDonald, *States’ Rights and the Union*, 197–98; Leslie Lipson, *The American Governor from Figurehead to Leader* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1939), 18–27; May, *Michigan and the Civil War Years*, 6–7; Robert C. Harris, “Austin Blair of Michigan: A Political Biography” (Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 1960), 112.

¹² Grant and Parish, *Legacy of Disunion*, 81–99, 116–133; Engle, *Gathering to Save a Nation*, passim; James A. Rawley, *The Politics of Union: Northern Politics during the Civil War* (Hinsdale, IL: Dryden, 1974); Mark Neely, Jr., *The Union Divided: Party Conflict in the Civil War North* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Holt, “An Elusive Synthesis: Northern Politics during the Civil War,” 112–34.

Yet, during the war, Northern states found it difficult to maintain full state autonomy. In reality, policies on fiscal matters, land, slavery, social welfare, and a variety of administrative and regulatory matters revealed that there was considerable citizen interaction with the national government. Democrats proved over and over during the war that they had not shaken off their conservative attitudes in wanting to reduce the federal government's role in economic and internal development, even at the risk of losing the war. The war naturally produced tensions between local, state, and regional interests in conflict with federal attempts to wage effective war. "Most Americans," contended Melinda Lawson, "remained concerned to protect the rights of the states against those of the Union and located their primary identities in Massachusetts and Virginia, not in 'these United States.'" ¹³

At the same time, the new emphasis on loyalty to the Union redefined the relationship between the individual and government. Peter Parish argues in *Legacy of Disunion: The Enduring Significance of the American Civil War* that the "construction of American nationhood faced its deepest crisis in the middle decades of the nineteenth century."¹⁴ Many citizens came to believe that the state governor played the central role in channeling this nationalism through the state and then onto the federal level. On a smaller, but no less significant scale, the states became microcosms of the federal government. Their bureaucratic and administrative expansion mirrored the national government's expansion and cultivated a revisualization of federal and state governments through a series of negotiations of power. With no formal federal office to rally citizens, the job of defining and promoting the war fell to governors and to private individuals, whose associations with political parties and whose methods created a sense of patriotism, by local-

¹³ Melinda Lawson, *Patriot Fires: Forging a New American Nationalism in the Civil War North* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 2–13; Scholars who speak to the active use of government in the lives of citizens include Max M. Edling, *A Hercules in the Cradle: War, Money, and the American State, 1763–1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), on fiscal matters; David F. Ericson, *Slavery in the American Republic: Developing the Federal Government, 1791–1861* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011), on slavery; John Van Atta, *Securing the West: Public Lands and the Fate of the Old Republic, 1785–1850* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), on land policy; Jerry Mashaw, *Reasoned Administration and Democratic Legitimacy: How Administrative Law Supports Democratic Government* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), on a variety of administrative and regulatory matters; Michele Landis Dauber, *The Sympathetic State: Disaster Relief and the Origins of the American Welfare State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), on social policy and relief.

¹⁴ Lawson, *Patriot Fires*, 2–13; Parish, *Legacy of Disunion*, 117; McDonald, *States' Rights and the Union*, 197–98; Donald J. Ratcliffe, "The State of the Union, 1776–1860," in *The American Civil War: Explorations and Reconsiderations*, eds., Susan-Mary Grant and Brian Holden Reid (Harlow, U.K.: Longman, 2000), 3–38.

izing their mission and quelling antagonism to the Lincoln administration and to the Republican Party.¹⁵

The War Governors Muster the Powers of the State

In 19th-century America, political parties traditionally worked to solve national crises through legislative processes. In 1861 Southerners turned to war to resolve the worsening sectional crisis, and the Northern states were forced to follow. The U.S. federal government would wage war for the states. As William Weeden in his seminal work *War Government: Federal and State* argued, even by the time of the Civil War, “the central power of the Union, destined ultimately to reach its imperial hand over every citizen, was being slowly developed.” Americans generally assented to this steadily centralizing power. Provided that most citizens “were in substantial agreement, it made little practical difference how these powers were exercised technically.”¹⁶ Weeden argues, however, that this idea of federal power became highly contentious in an era when the economic and political system was severely strained. As the Civil War progressed and intensified, the functions and duties of state leaders, as well as leaders of local communities, were “extended and amplified.” The Civil War produced the term “War Governor,” as Weeden characterized Northern governors, and the designation indicated that more significance “had been added to the office as it had been known in the ordinary civic routine of the States.”¹⁷

Although scattered across the northern landscape, governors acted as detached but assimilated “War Ministers,” who wielded governmental powers not only in the execution of the law, but also “by mustering all the powers of the States according to the need, and under the requisitions of the national government.”¹⁸ Governors displayed tremendous energy, and their interaction with the president varied according to the traits and personalities of the individuals. Nonetheless, these statesmen had a “certain sovereign quality as direct representatives of the people.” But their “dominions and principalities were portions of the Union” and were “constantly affected by the national movement of all the parts.” As the war progressed, the people of the states as well as

¹⁵ Lawson, *Patriot Fires*, 2–13; Akhil Reed Amar, “The David C. Baum Lecture: Abraham and the American Union,” *University of Illinois Law Review* (2001): 1109–33.

¹⁶ William B. Weeden, *War Government, Federal and State in Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania and Indiana, 1861–1865* (Boston: Mifflin and Company, 1906), xi.

¹⁷ Weeden, *War Government*, xi.

¹⁸ Weeden, *War Government*, xi–xii.

soldiers in the field, placed great faith in their “Fathers Abraham,” and by their expressions and support, advanced significant power to the governor.¹⁹

During the war, governors aroused and maintained the patriotic nucleus, and helped to nationalize the concept of the Union, which in Lincoln’s words was “older than any of the States, and in fact it created them as States.”²⁰ The war’s exigencies turned governors into powerful politicians, and voters closely monitored their efficiency in not only attending to soldier welfare, but also in maintaining a balance between local and national priorities. Governors relied on financiers and merchants to advise them in mobilizing the resources to raise and maintain the armies and worked with legislators to accommodate the changes wrought by war. They made use of advances in weaponry, refrigeration, camp accouterments, and medicine, and relied on agents to procure items essential to soldiering. As governors assumed such vast power so quickly, citizens kept them accountable for their decisions. That most gubernatorial terms were short made war governance all the more accountable to the electorate. Many chief executives came into office having won popularity and credibility because of their practical business experience, legal acumen, or previous political service. They had been farmers, merchants, journalists, lawyers, doctors, and bankers. Some were lifelong Democrats, some had been Whigs, while others rode the tide of a political movement over Kansas statehood that formed the Republican Party. They helped engineer victories that tied them across state lines and established a sectional identity comprised of a vast new political assemblage dedicated to preserving the Union. With the war’s outbreak, they forged a stronger relationship between the government and its citizens by infusing a patriotic spirit among locals that tied them to a national cause. Along the way, governors politicized the regiments that went off to war to mobilize voters and maintain alliances at home. Thus, most of the Northern states remained strongly Republican throughout the war. The most prominent Republican governors included John A. Andrew (Massachusetts), Austin Blair (Michigan), William A. Buckingham (Connecticut), Andrew Curtin (Pennsylvania), Samuel Kirkwood (Iowa), Edwin D. Morgan (New York), Oliver P. Morton (Indiana), Israel Washburn, Jr. (Maine), and Richard Yates (Illinois).

¹⁹ William C. Davis’s fine study *Lincoln’s Men: How President Lincoln Became Father to an Army and a Nation* (New York: Free Press, 1999) examines the relationship between Abraham Lincoln and the Union army soldiers and how this relationship forged an identity for the president that cast him in the role of the father of the nation, the states, and the American people. Yet, soldiers and civilians alike also drew upon Northern governors for support and came to see them as “Fathers Abraham,” Engle, *Gathering to Save a Nation*, passim.

²⁰ U.S. War Department, *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Wash., DC: Government Printing Office [GPO], 1880–1901), Series 3, vol. 1, 318, cited hereinafter as *OR*.



Governor Andrew Curtin of Pennsylvania

The task of preserving the Union also fell on loyal Democratic governors, who while championing their party's causes, including states' rights and slavery, nonetheless supported the Union war effort. Notable Democrats (as well as those who joined the Union ticket in 1864) included Thomas Bramlette (Kentucky), John Brough (Ohio), William Burton (Delaware), John Downey (California), Joel Parker (New Jersey), Horatio Seymour (New York), David Tod (Ohio), and John Whiteaker (Oregon). The choice to remain loyal and direct their states' resources to support

Lincoln at first revealed the complex interplay of loyalty and locality. The war forced these political leaders to choose between their states' economic ties to vast Northern wage-based markets and their conservatism that associated them with small government and hostility toward fugitive slaves. Those states that elected Democratic governors and legislatures in 1862 did so primarily because of Union military defeat and the increasing radicalization of an administration that employed confiscation, emancipation, and conscription to win the war. In 1863–64, however, the military situation turned in the Union's favor, and Republicans regained much of the political ground they had lost.

As the war escalated and mobilization difficulties increased, Northern governors became more aggressive in establishing state agencies to handle problems that were handled inefficiently by the federal administration. They saw to it that such agencies played a more vital role in the soldiers' lives. Indeed, some governors who remained in the gubernatorial seat throughout the war, such as Michigan's Austin Blair, Pennsylvania's Andrew Curtin, Indiana's Oliver P. Morton, Connecticut's William Buckingham, Illinois's Richard Yates, and Massachusetts's John Andrew, practically ran their states single-handedly. George Julian, radical Republican from the Hoosier state, characterized Indiana's patriotism during the war as derived

solely from the “Reign of Oliver P. Morton.” Until Lincoln appointed Edwin M. Stanton as secretary of war in January 1862, it appeared that governors started and kept the war engine running.²¹

Beyond performing their routine management duties, governors established organizational structures where the national authority had not fully recognized its powers. Midwestern governors thought first of river commerce and the seizure of war munitions passing up and down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. Recognizing that these rivers were now military as well as economic highways, governors meddled with national politics by influencing state senators and congressmen regarding maritime policy issues. Although Lincoln declared commercial intercourse with the Confederacy unlawful under congressional authority, governors were tasked with the act’s enforcement. In his address to the Illinois Senate, Governor Yates declared that the “people of the West would never permit the Mississippi River to fall into foreign hands.” Wisconsin Governor Alexander Randall was emphatic in his letter to Lincoln on behalf of several governors whose states bordered the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. “It is a matter of absolute necessity,” he declared, “not only for the Northern Border States, but for all the North-western States . . . to control the business and commerce of the Ohio River, and the Upper Mississippi, in order to reach a vital part of this rebellion.”²²

²¹ Hesseltine, *Lincoln and the War Governors*, 166–80; Weeden, *War Government*, 71, 347; Stephen D. Engle, “Under Full Sail: John, Abraham Lincoln, and Standing by the Union,” *Massachusetts Historical Review* 19 (2017): 43–81; Engle, *Gathering to Save a Nation*, 1–10; A. James Fuller, *Oliver P. Morton and the Politics of the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2017); Cimbala and Miller, *Union Soldiers and the Northern Home Front*, see “Volunteer While You May: Manpower and Mobilization in Dubuque, Iowa,” 30–67; Dan Clark, *Samuel Jordan Kirkwood* (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1917); McDonald, *States’ Rights and the Union*, 197–99; Benjamin P. Thomas and Harold M. Hyman, *Stanton: The Life and Times of Lincoln’s Secretary of War* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1962), 143–91; David Donald, *Lincoln* (London: Random House, 1995), 328–34; Richard D. Guentzel, “Alexander Ramsey: First Territorial and Second State Governor of Minnesota” (Ph.D. diss., University of Nebraska, 1976); Fish, “The Raising of Wisconsin Volunteers, 1861,” 262–63; May, *Michigan and the Civil War Years*, 17; Richard H. Sewell, “Michigan Farmers and the Civil War,” *Michigan History Magazine* 44 (December 1960): 353–74; Frank Klement, “Milwaukee Women and the Civil War,” *Historical Messenger of the Milwaukee County Historical Society* 21 (March 1965): 9–14. The letterbooks of the governors are replete with letters detailing their activities and correspondence.

²² Alexander Randall to Lincoln, May 6, 1861, quoted in Quiner, *The Military History of Wisconsin in the War for the Union* (Chicago: Clarke & Co., 1866), 64–66; Hesseltine, *Lincoln and the War Governors*, 120–22; Richard Yates Address, Jan. 14, 1861, *Illinois Senate Journal*, 70–75; Thomas C. Mulligan, “Lest the Rebels Come to Power: The Life of William Dennison, 1815–1882” (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1994), 197–98.

Governors frequently involved themselves in military affairs. Naturally, this was the crux of internal struggles between federal and state sovereignty. Governors routinely complained, for example, that the well-intentioned War Department created problems for them by permitting and even encouraging independent recruiting. Morton protested for many governors when he wrote Secretary of War Simon Cameron: “I hope the War Department will accept of [*sic*] regiments only through me.” Continued interference caused Michigan’s Blair to declare that “I will furnish all the troops you call for much sooner and in better order than these independent regiments can.” Even so, once governors raised the troops, the federal government generally failed to supply the men adequately and was chronically delinquent in supplying and paying the men. This, of course, caused frustration not only for the soldiers, but also for families at home dependent on such pay, and it naturally discouraged enlistment. Some governors, such as Andrew, Tod, and Harvey, directed state agents to collect portions of soldier pay to be disbursed to families in need of help as well as to assist furloughed troops with funds to travel to home.²³

More frustrating to governors than the federal government’s inefficiency in managing the affairs of the troops, however, were military commanders who abused their authority by disregarding state power. Generals Benjamin Butler, Henry W. Halleck, Daniel Sickles, and Don Carlos Buell were notorious for subordinating gubernatorial authority. Buell complained that soldiers and officers in his Army of the Ohio routinely appealed to the governor for supplies, pay, and appointments, and he spent his tenure as commander in Kentucky and Tennessee negotiating power with governors. In November 1861, Butler maintained that the United States should override the states when it came to raising troops and commissioning officers. Having been authorized to raise six regiments in New England, Butler met with and received the support of the governors of Maine, Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Vermont. These governors recognized the utility of consulting with Butler and allowing the commander to proceed in raising troops. When he attempted to recruit in Massachusetts, however, he fell into conflict with John

²³ OR, series 3, vol. 1, 350–59, 465; Austin Blair to Simon Cameron, Aug. 19, 1861, in Robert C. Harris, “Austin Blair of Michigan: A Political Biography” (Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 1969), 110–18; Allan Nevins, *The War for the Union: The Improvised War, 1861–1862* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1959), 231–37; Governor Harvey to Halleck, Feb. 17, 1862, vol. 1, Governor’s Letterbooks, and Governor Salomon to Edwin M. Stanton, Jan. 29, Feb. 17, Mar. 27, 1863, vols. 1, 2, 8, Governor’s Letterbooks State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin (SHSW); for an example from the ranks as the war endured, see Henry Clemons to Wife, Jan. 15, 18, 1863, Nov. 23, 1863, Henry Clemons Papers, SHSW; Reuben Farnum to Wife, July 9, 1864, Reuben Farnum Papers. Minnesota Historical Society (MHS), St. Paul, Minnesota; Delmer J. Treaster, “The Political Career of David Tod” (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1951), 124–25.

Andrew.²⁴ When Butler began recruiting a regiment for himself, Andrew protested and, in Butler's words, declared that the "President of the United States had no right to recruit in Massachusetts men for volunteer service of the United States without his leave." Butler remarked that this "doctrine of secession did not seem to me any more sound uttered by a Governor north of Mason and Dixon's line than if proclaimed by Governor Magoffin, south," and he refused to heed the protest and went about his recruiting. Butler posed this critical question to Lincoln: "Will you recruit your own men under your authority, or will you allow the authority to be wrested from you by the States?" Although these problems continued in some Northern states, and Lincoln continued to consider the situation, in early 1862, the president issued General Orders No. 18, which clarified governors' powers, declaring emphatically that the "Governors of States are legally the authorities for raising volunteer regiments and commissioning their officers." Stanton agreed and vigorously enforced this sentiment throughout the war.²⁵

Governors became particularly alarmed when the conflict approached their soil or when major offensives reduced the military force in a particular region. When it looked like the Union command might pull troops from west of the Mississippi to strengthen Tennessee and Kentucky in early 1862, Missouri Governor Hamilton Gamble warned the president that it would be "irretrievable ruin to remove troops from Missouri." Such sentiments could also be found later in the year when the Confederate army seemed poised to campaign into the Union states of Pennsylvania

²⁴ William Schouler, *A History of Massachusetts in the Civil War* (Boston: E. P. Dutton, 1868), 252, 280–82; Stephen D. Engle, *Don Carlos Buell: Most Promising of All* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 96–98; Hesseltine, *Lincoln and the War Governors*, 189–92; Benjamin F. Butler, *Butler's Book* (Boston: A.M. Thayer, 1892), 306–14; see also Thomas J. Goss, *The War Within the Union High Command: Politics and Generalship During the Civil War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003).

²⁵ OR, series, 3, vol. 2, 898, vol. 1, 204–6, 652–55, 951–53; Weeden, *War Government*, 180–87, 206–12, 217–18; Hesseltine, *Lincoln and the War Governors*, 189–92; Schouler, *A History of Massachusetts in the Civil War*, 252, 280–82; Butler, *Butler's Book*, 306–14; Henry Greenleaf Pearson, *The Life of John A. Andrew* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1904), vol. 1, 283–310; Engle, *Gathering to Save a Nation*, 60–105; Rebecca G. Albright, "The Civil War Career of Andrew Gregg Curtin," *The Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 48 (April 1965): 151–74; Engle, *Don Carlos Buell: Most Promising of All*, 94–98; Henry Halleck to Governor Ramsey, Jan. 8, 1862, Governor's Papers, Governor's Records, Ramsey Collection, MHS. Ramsey complained that Gen. John C. Fremont had allowed some Minnesota soldiers to wind up in Illinois and Missouri regiments and wanted it straightened out. In his letter to the adjutant general, November 18, 1861, Butler outlined his procedure for recruiting in the New England area. It also raised the issue of state and federal interaction in recruiting. Weeden argues that as president Lincoln was the supreme military authority in a state, but that his "authority could not be delegated to affect the people of that State." Because "the people of the State were under the control of their own elected civic officials," soldiers were to be enlisted by state officials and "commanded by the President as commander-in-chief, or by his subordinate officers."

and New Jersey. “The people of New Jersey are apprehensive that the invasion of the enemy may extend to her soil,” wrote Gov. Joel Parker, and the “people of New Jersey want George B. McClellan at the head of the Army of the Potomac.” “If that cannot be done,” he declared, “then we ask that he may be put at the head of the New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania troops now in Pennsylvania.”²⁶

Governors also assumed a role in helping define the Union’s war aims. At times, this took the form of protesting or rather obstructing the federal government’s assumption of power, and at other times it required governors to accede to Lincoln’s desires to allow him to centralize various political and military aspects to carry on the war successfully. In the initial phases of the war, governors as a whole were able to mobilize their states and wield power across their communities more effectively than Lincoln and the federal government. In some cases, this effectiveness was due to the governors’ sheer assertiveness and energy. Despite many of the state executives being newly elected and saddled with state deficits, they were remarkably resourceful in meeting the War Department’s demands.²⁷

Throughout the war, governors provided the mechanisms by which civilians could become soldiers and maintain their state and communal loyalties even while military commanders attempted to nationalize the armies by dispersing state regiments across various divisions and armies. State executives fostered ways to keep soldiers connected to their families at home by encouraging the press and local civic groups to create social organizations designed to support the soldiers in the field and in hospitals. While troops came under national control and served in national armies and came to believe they were fighting for a national cause, “Billy Yanks” were still raised by their governors, wrote their governors, represented their states, carried state flags into battle, and deposited them in the state capitals after the war.²⁸

²⁶ OR, series 3, vol. 1, 897–98, 920–21, 953, series 1, vol. 27, pt. 2, 409; Basler, *Collected Works of Lincoln*, vol. 6, 311–12; Weeden, *War Government*, 177; Albright, “The Civil War Career of Andrew Gregg Curtin,” 160–63; see also William J. Jackson, *New Jerseyans in the Civil War* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000).

²⁷ Engle, *Gathering to Save a Nation*, 60–135; Hesseltine, *Lincoln and the War Governors*, 102–3, 147–55; OR, series 3, vol. 1, 67; Basler, *Collected Works of Lincoln*, vol. 4, 332; McDonald, *States’ Rights and the Union*, 199; Sylvester, “Oliver P. Morton and Hoosier Politics during the Civil War,” 74–78; Harris, “Austin Blair of Michigan,” 110–18.

²⁸ Engle, *Gathering to Save a Nation*, 60–210; Hesseltine, *Lincoln and the War Governors*, 161–65; Ruth Wetmore, “The Life of Louis Powell Harvey” (M.A. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1918), 21–23; *Wisconsin State Journal*, Apr. 24, 1862; *Madison State Journal*, Apr. 29, 1862. After the Battle of Shiloh, April 6–7, 1862, Wisconsin Governor Louis Harvey gathered 90 boxes of supplies and headed for Pittsburg Landing. Along the way, he visited the camps and hospitals of his men, and when he arrived at Pittsburg Landing “it caused a thrill of joy in all.”

As the war dragged on, governors found themselves at the receiving end of hundreds of letters penned by soldiers and civilians eager to voice their opinions about the war's direction, hoping that receptive governors could bring about necessary changes to end it. It was the number and content of these letters that created a kinship between governors and their constituents both at home and in the field. Governors believed themselves better positioned than Lincoln or even military commanders to handle the affairs of their citizen-soldiers. Lamenting the deplorable conditions at Cairo, Illinois, in the winter of 1863, Lt. Col. C.C. Andrews wrote to Minnesota Governor Alexander Ramsey, "I hope you will immediately stir up the authorities in Washington."²⁹

Soldiers complained about a range of issues from lack of pay to poor hospital conditions and encouraged or discouraged emancipation. Civilians hoped to use the governors' influence to ease tensions at home in issues ranging from protection from Indians and Copperheads to maintaining peace amidst internal political strife. All encouraged more vigorous war aims. As a whole, governors listened and used their influence to improve battlefield and home front conditions for their citizen-soldiers. They eliminated officers whom they believed were incompetent or abusive to troops or unsympathetic to the Union's expansion of war aims. They were instrumental in bringing about Secretary of War Cameron's termination in 1861, and in 1862 governors clearly influenced Lincoln in shelving Don Carlos Buell and George B. McClellan.³⁰

On a larger scale, however, Northern governors possessed significant influence considering Lincoln's leadership of the Republican Party. When the war broke out and newly elected governors gave their inaugural speeches to their various legisla-

²⁹ Lt. Col. C.C. Andrews to Ramsey, Jan. 27, 1863, Governor's Papers, Governor's Records, Ramsey Collection, MHS; see also Eli Southworth to Mother, July 7, 1862, Southworth Newton Family Papers, MHS, who remarked that the governor's recent visit to Corinth, Mississippi, made the soldiers out to be "superior beings," and solicited their opinions about politics; Montague Ferry to Jeanette Ferry, May 25, 1862, Ferry Collections, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan; J.B. White to Governor Blair, Aug. 1, 1861, Records of the Executive Office, 1810–1910, RG 44, Michigan State Archives, Lansing, Michigan.

³⁰ Governor Salomon to Stanton, Aug. 15, 1863, Governor's Letterbooks, vol. 10, and Governor Salomon to Lincoln, Feb. 25, June 18, 1863, Governor's Letterbooks, vols. 8, 9, SHSW; Michael Shoemaker, "The Michigan Thirteenth," *Pioneer Collection* 4 (1881), 139–40, Shoemaker wrote to his wife July 29, 1862, about the mismanagement of Buell's army and directed his wife to show Governor Blair his letter; Hesseltine, *Lincoln and the War Governors*, 162–65; Weeden, *War Government*, 171; McDonald, *States' Rights and the Union*, 199; Harris, "Austin Blair of Michigan," 116–18; Engle, *Don Carlos Buell: Most Promising of All*, 314–16.

tures, they hoped to influence the president-elect by helping to set the tone for the Union's reaction to secession. Wisconsin Governor Randall declared in his inaugural address to the legislature in Madison: "Secession is revolution; revolution is war; war against the Government of the United States is treason." "It is time, now, to know whether we have any Government, and if so, whether it has any strength," he declared, "... the nation must be lost or preserved by its own strength." Similar messages could be heard throughout the state houses of the Union during the first months of 1861. According to one well-placed observer, "with a unanimity unknown in the history of the nation, the people of the North, almost as one man, arose and gave assurances to the National Executive that the Government should be preserved at all hazards."³¹

In an attempt to influence federal war policy, some governors held a convention in Cleveland shortly after the firing on Fort Sumter and made recommendations to Lincoln about how to prosecute the war. That the governors themselves organized a meeting for this purpose confirms that they fully understood their power and that winning the war would necessitate a negotiation of nation-state power. Randall composed a letter that contained the governors' vision for how Lincoln should conduct the war. The statesmen made it clear that they demanded to know "now to what extent the Government expects aid from the States, so that States can be preparing that aid." Ironically, they would argue that "if the Government *authorizes* the States to act efficiently, in organizing military forces, and in arming them, it can then both hold the control of those forces, and by distributing arms to the States, or authorizing their purchase by the States, for the use of the Government, it would have the right, as well as power, of ultimate direction and control, without the confusion that otherwise might arise between the States and the Government."³²

As the Northern public soon settled into the conviction that the war would not be short, the military stalemate of the 1861–62 winter turned the war more political as Congress and the war governors sought new directions to end the conflict quickly. Although the Union army and navy managed to produce victories at Fort Henry, Fort Donelson, and Shiloh between February and April 1862, military setbacks forced Lincoln's hand in seeking more support from the states. Volunteering had all but ceased, and abolitionists were calling for a change in war aims by pushing for the

³¹ Quiner, *The Military History of Wisconsin in the War for the Union*, 36–38, 43; Sylvester, "Oliver P. Morton and Hoosier Politics during the Civil War," 74–78.

³² Quiner, *The Military History of Wisconsin in the War for the Union*, 64–66; Hesselstine and Wolf, "The Cleveland Conference of 1861," 258–65.

emancipation of Confederate slaves. Washington's organizational and administrative inefficiency dissatisfied governors, and they prodded the federal government to broaden enemy targets, even while raising additional men for the armies.³³ Letters from soldiers and civilians regarding the war's progression persuaded governors to advocate more radical measures against the federal government to inspire more vigorous war initiatives. "The almost universal feeling of the farmers of this part of the state," wrote Robert M. Cameron of Fillmore County, Minnesota, to Ramsey, "is that they will not enlist nor advise anyone else to enlist, unless the administration will immediately assume an active anti-slavery policy for conducting the war, enlist blacks as well as whites, and remove from command those two *arch traitors* McClellan and Halleck." A disheartened Illinois soldier inquired of Yates, "Could not the governors of the loyal states act in common on the means to influence the president to drive his generals to a speedy termination of the war?"³⁴

Indeed, some abolitionist governors, such as John Andrew, did just that. Dissatisfied with Lincoln's failure to free the slaves thus far in the war, in late summer 1862, he joined New England governors, who considered bypassing the president, in their meeting at Providence, Rhode Island. Radical governors devised a scheme to raise black troops and place them under the command of Gen. John C. Fremont. Lincoln faced political pressure more broadly as the enlistment of volunteers was slow and several governors responded that they could not meet their July quotas. Lincoln needed to move toward emancipation to excite their energies or find some other way to induce governors to raise more troops. Indeed, Austin Blair boldly exclaimed at a Michigan political gathering that he was "unable to see why it is not proper to use a rebel's sacred nigger [*sic*]" in the war effort against the enemy.³⁵

³³ Stephen D. Engle, *Struggle for the Heartland: The Campaigns from Fort Henry to Corinth* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001); Engle, *Gathering to Save a Nation*, 140–255; Hesselstine, *Lincoln and the War Governors*, 166–201; Richard J. Carwardine, *Lincoln: Profiles in Power* (London: Pearson, 2003), 191–96.

³⁴ Robert M. Cameron to Governor Ramsey, July 22, 1862, and Gov. Augustus Bradford to Ramsey, May 20, 1862, Governor's Papers, Governor's Records, Ramsey Collection, MHS; O.T. Maxon to Governor Salomon, July 29, 1863, and Reverend J.A. Hawley to Governor Salomon, Oct. 19, 1863, Executive Department, Military Correspondence, Series 49, SHSW, relative to raising black troops to fight; Anton B. Schaeffer to Yates, Sept. 8, 1862, Richard Yates Papers, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, Illinois; Engle, *Gathering to Save a Nation*, 223.

³⁵ Harris, "Austin Blair of Michigan," 131; *Detroit Daily Advertiser* Aug. 7, 1862; Paludan, "A People's Contest," 99–100; OR, series 3, vol. 2, 543–44; William A. Klingaman, *Abraham Lincoln and the Road to Emancipation, 1861–1865* (New York: Viking, 2001), 178.



Governor Austin Blair of Michigan

To bring more governors on board, Andrew and his radical gubernatorial supporters agreed to meet again at Altoona, Pennsylvania, in hopes of securing the necessary support to carry the measure forward, which they believed Lincoln would accept. “Next to the Proclamation of Emancipation,” remarked Philadelphia journalist John Russell Young, the Altoona conference was “the most decisive civil event of the war.”³⁶ Well aware of the governors’ power, Stanton was impressed that they had initiated such a meeting, and he wired Ohio Governor Tod that he hoped the counsels of the governors would be “wise and produc-

tive of good.”³⁷ Lincoln understood that his statesmen were pressing for an expansion of war aims in what the *New York Herald* labeled a “Second Hartford Convention,” and he would need to react. Ironically, it was on the train ride to Altoona that many governors read that Lincoln had upstaged them by issuing the preliminary emancipation proclamation on September 22. Reaching Altoona, the 12 governors simply pledged their support in an “Address” saying “the decision of the President to strike at the root of the rebellion will lend new vigor to the efforts and new life and hope to the hearts of the people.”³⁸ Lincoln came to believe that gubernatorial support would make issuing the emancipation proclamation easier for citizens to digest.

³⁶ Weeden, *War Government*, 228–32; Austin Blair’s Report of Altoona Conference, Sept. 6–24, 1862, Austin Blair Papers, Bentley Historical Library; Hesseltine and Wolf, “The Altoona Conference and the Emancipation Proclamation,” 195–205; Engle, *Gathering to Save a Nation*, 189–239.

³⁷ OR, series 3, vol. 2, 583; Michael Burlingame, ed., *Dispatches from Lincoln’s White House: The Anonymous Civil War Journalism of Presidential Secretary William O. Stoddard* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 108; Hesseltine, *The Tragic Conflict* (New York: George Braziller, 1962), 279–83; Klingaman, *Abraham Lincoln and the Road to Emancipation, 1861–1865*, 196; Engle, *Gathering to Save a Nation*, 189–239.

³⁸ The Governors’ “Address” is published in OR, series 3, vol. 2, 582–84, 543–44; Hesseltine, *Lincoln and the War Governors*, 254–62; Alexander K. McClure, *Abraham Lincoln and Men of War-Times* (Philadelphia: The Times Publishing Company, 1892), 270–71; *New York Herald*, Sept. 25, 1862; Austin Blair’s Report of Altoona Conference, Sept. 6–24, 1862, Bentley Historical Library. Those governors who signed the address include Curtin, Andrew, Yates, Washburn, Salomon, Kirkwood, Morton, Rose, Sprague, Pierpont, Tod, Berry, Blair, Holbrook, Buckingham, Ramsey, Robinson, Gibbs, and Stanford. Those who did not sign the Address represented the following states: Kentucky, Missouri, Delaware, New Jersey, New York, and Maryland. See also Carwardine, *Lincoln: Profiles in Power*, 192–95.

Though the abolitionist governors were not completely satisfied with the proclamation, many state leaders reasoned that it signaled a radical departure from limited war and would significantly weaken the Confederate war effort. Andrew privately remarked that although the proclamation was “a poor document, it was a mighty act.” Still, as much as governors believed they had an accurate read on their citizens, many had no idea what lay ahead. As the number of Democratic opponents swelled to resist the measure, some governors had difficulty convincing their legislatures that it was an appropriate wartime measure and that they would suffer from the political fallout in the coming elections.³⁹

Equal in significance to the Emancipation Proclamation, in terms of negotiating power and altering nation-state relations, was conscription. Perhaps more than any other wartime congressional resolution, the July 17, 1862, Militia Act, which authorized black enlistments in the Union army and empowered the president to order governors to draft citizens into state militias to meet federal manpower quotas, caused governors the greatest problems. Designed to incentivize volunteerism and distribute the war’s burden among those less eager to fight, conscription tested the governors’ ability to hold their states together and keep their citizens aware of their civic duties. Although many governors supported the measure expecting it to produce more soldiers, and were adept in managing the changes necessary to effect a state draft, the measure severely inhibited the relationship between Lincoln and his governors.⁴⁰

Since the war’s inception, the federal government’s poor organization in paying, equipping, and caring for soldiers already in the field had discouraged state executives. As the volunteer system proved unproductive, particularly in the way departmental officials handled affairs, governors increasingly took matters into their own hands. Not only did governors lament organizational and administra-

³⁹ Weeden, *War Government*, 228–32; McDonald, *States’ Rights and the Union*, 199; David, *Lincoln*, 373–74; John Niven, ed., *The Salmon P. Chase Papers* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1993), vol. 1, 402–3; Klingaman, *Abraham Lincoln and the Road to Emancipation, 1861–1865*, 196; *Journal of the Minnesota House and Senate*, Mar. 6, 1862, 448–49. Although Governor Ramsey and the legislature were in favor of a vigorous prosecution of the war, Ramsey declared that “she [*sic*] is opposed to our Senators and Representatives in Congress advocating the abolition of slavery; the emancipation of slavery, or any other unconstitutional measures.” See also Larry A. Greene, “The Emancipation in New Jersey and the Paranoid Style,” *New Jersey History* 91 (Summer 1973), 113–15; *Legislative Documents* (Trenton, 1864), 29–30. New Jersey Governor Joel Parker opposed the Emancipation Proclamation on constitutional grounds. Parker argued that slavery was “recognized as a state institution, and left by the framers of the Constitution to the people of the several states to manage for themselves.”

⁴⁰ OR, series 3, vol. 2, 3; Thomas and Hyman, *Stanton*, 198–202; Weeden, *War Government*, 170–74.

tive inefficiency, but some challenged Lincoln to expand the war aims before they committed themselves to the daunting task of raising troops. Governor Andrew, for example, presented an ultimatum that combined conscription with emancipation. Thus, when Lincoln called for 300,000 men in August 1862 and ordered the governors to draft from the militia to replenish the ranks, it was clear that Lincoln needed the governors' support in executing the draft. As Stanton assigned quotas to the states, governors found themselves with problems for which they had no easy solutions.⁴¹

Governors protested the limited time to carry out the draft. Hoping a change might come about, they proceeded slowly and cautiously. As the draft date neared and the opposition newspapers increased their biting criticism, governors found themselves in a contest to balance home front and battlefield morale, while keeping party patronage in check. Lincoln and Stanton came to believe that while governors possessed considerable mobilizing prowess as state commanders-in-chief, conscription in any form complicated replenishing the ranks. Declining enlistments confirmed that new measures were in order. On March 3, 1863, Lincoln signed the Enrollment Act, and created a national draft, which proved to be just as inefficient, corrupt, and divisive as the state draft. It divided the Union into enrollment districts that coincided with political districts and was to be administered by federal provost marshals. As Benjamin Thomas and Harold Hyman aptly put it, "the long arm of the War department moved close to every fireside; military provost marshals were now in control of conscription and internal security, and Stanton was their chief." Most importantly, in the attempt to nationalize the system, governors were apparently so impressed by the measure that they were willing to give up perhaps the most important power they had in bargaining with the federal government and allowed themselves to be reduced to "mere recruiting agents for a national army." Still, despite the administrative and political difficulties, compliance among the majority of governors was evidence of cooperative federalism. In the end, however, national conscrip-

⁴¹ Engle, *Gathering to Save a Nation*, 175–210; Basler, *Collected Works of Lincoln*, vol. 5, 293–94, 296–97; *OR*, series 3, vol. 2, 180–88; Weeden, *War Government*, 221; James D. Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents* (Wash., DC: GPO, 1897), vol. 6, 114; Thomas and Hyman, *Stanton*, 206–7; Hesseltine, *Lincoln and the War Governors*, 198–200; McDonald, *States' Rights and the Union*, 199; Richardson, *Messages*, vol. 6, 114; *OR*, series 3, vol. 2, 180–88; Basler, *Collected Works of Lincoln*, vol. 5, 293–94, 296–97; Cimbala and Miller, *Union Soldiers and the Northern Home Front*, 69–115; and James W. Geary, *We Need Men: The Union Draft in the Civil War* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1991); Governors Curtin and Morgan to Ramsey, June 30, 1862, Governor's Papers, Executive Journals, MHS; see also Robert E. Mitchell, "The Organizational Performance of Michigan's Adjutant General and the Federal Provost Marshal General in Recruiting Michigan's Boys in Blue," *Michigan Historical Review* 28 (Fall 2002): 124–26.

tion failed to produce a groundswell of volunteers, and governors once again found themselves in charge of replenishing the ranks.⁴²

Although conscription alone provoked a storm for governors, combined with emancipation, these changes gave the opposition more ammunition. Governors faced anti-administration critics on numerous levels; perhaps the most notorious were the “Copperheads,” a “synonym of hidden danger and secret hostility.” Democrats found it difficult to maintain a loyal opposition position during the war, and many simply remained committed to a moderate course and chose to support a war that kept the Union as it was. Still, the anti-Lincoln critics scattered across the states came in many forms. Hostility to the president’s Emancipation Proclamation and conscription order, military arrests, taxes, and the army’s inability to end the conflict all combined to spur the conservative Democratic Party’s resurgence and caused great problems for governors. According to Frank Klement, anti-Lincoln Democrats “prided themselves upon allegiance to the principle of strict construction of the Constitution; they protested that the wheel of revolution turned too fast and too far; they were conservatives who feared that America was undergoing change in the crucible of war” and believed that only the Democratic party “could restore the Union and heal the nation’s wounds.”⁴³

⁴² Thomas and Hyman, *Stanton*, 280; Hesseltine, *The Tragic Conflict*, 21; and Hesseltine, *Lincoln and the War Governors*, 200–1; Paludan, “A Peoples’ Contest,” 189–95; Weeden, *War Government*, 280–98; Harold Holzer, ed., *State of the Union: New York and the Civil War* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 23–33; Grant and Parish, *Legacy of Disunion*, 86–87, 235; see also Iver Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots: Their Significance for American Society and Politics in the Age of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); *OR*, series 3, vol. 2, 588–89, 935; Weeden, *War Government*, 280–98; May, *Michigan and the Civil War Years*, 29, 44; John C. Schneider, “Detroit and the Problem of Disorder,” *Michigan History Magazine* 58 (Spring 1974): 4–24; relative to rioting in Minnesota, see Col. Stephen Miller to Ramsey, July 26, 1863, and Sam McLaughlin to Gov. Henry Swift, Dec. 22, 1863, Governor’s Papers, Governor’s Record, Ramsey and Swift Collections, MHS; Engle, *Gathering to Save a Nation*, 190–260; David Donald, *Liberty and Union: A Compelling Analysis of the Crisis of Popular Government During the Civil War and Reconstruction Era* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath, 1978), 100–1; Mitchell, “The Organizational Performance of Michigan’s Adjutant General,” 127–30; Engle, *Gathering to Save a Nation*, 202–76; Albright, “The Civil War Career of Andrew Gregg Curtin,” 156–58; William Watts Folwell, *A History of Minnesota* (St. Paul: The Minnesota Historical Society, 1961), 102–90; John W. Oliver, “Draft Riots in Wisconsin During the Civil War,” *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 2 (1919): 334–37; Hesseltine, “Lincoln’s Problems in Wisconsin,” *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 45 (Spring 1965): 194–94.

⁴³ Frank Klement, “Copperheads and Copperheadism in Wisconsin: Democratic Opposition to the Lincoln Administration,” *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 42 (Spring 1959): 182–92; see also Frank Klement, *Lincoln’s Critics: The Copperheads of the North*, edited by Steven K. Rogstad (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Books, 1999), 3–24, 109–118; Robert Abzug, “The Copperheads: Historical Approaches to Civil War Dissent in the Midwest,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 66 (1970): 40–55; McDonald, *States’ Rights and the Union*, 199–200; Donald, *Liberty and Union*, 155; Lawson, *Patriot Fires*, 68; Joanna D. Cowden, “The Politics of Dissent: Civil War Democrats in Connecticut,” *New England Quarterly* 56 (December 1953): 538–54; *OR*, series 3, vol. 2, 176; Weeden, *War Government*, 224–25, 238–47. For a recent work on the Copperheads, see Jennifer L. Weber, *Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln’s Opponents in the North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).



Governor Horatio Seymour of New York

lawmakers.”⁴⁵ The situation was so bad in Indiana that Stanton loaned Morton \$250,000 from a War Department slush fund to run the state and hopefully bypass the state legislature. “If the course fails,” Stanton warned Morton, “you and I will be covered with prosecutors, imprisoned, [and] driven from the country.”⁴⁶

The pressures of war left governors vehemently divided in their opinions on Lincoln and Republicans. In the opposition, New York Governor Seymour, for example, chimed repeatedly, “The Constitution as it is, the Union as it was.” Other governors were just as strident in their hatred of anti-Lincoln governors. Michigan’s Blair, for example, allegedly suggested that the government import a guillotine from France to handle such critics.⁴⁷ In time, however, Copperheadism’s radicalism proved more destructive than productive to the movement. Still, their presence proved influential. Whether Copperheads opposed the war’s direction, the Emancipation Proclamation,

Facing severe criticism, however, governors maintained steady composure and directed support for Lincoln and the war effort. Connecticut’s Governor William Buckingham expressed to Lincoln that “our confidence in the patriotism and integrity of the President remains unshaken.”⁴⁴ In Indiana and Illinois, however, Governors Morton and Yates were supportive, but their state legislatures “proved so obstreperous to Republican war efforts,” remarked historian Philip Paludan, that the governors essentially ran the states “without the benefit of fundraising by

⁴⁴ Basler, *Collected Works of Lincoln*, vol. 6, 54; Letter of Governors John Brough (Ohio), Morton (Indiana), Yates (Illinois), Stone (Iowa), and Lewis (Wisconsin) to Lincoln, Apr. 21, 1864, Executive Department, Military Correspondence, Series 49, SHSW, detailing an offer of more troops for the upcoming campaign.

⁴⁵ Paludan, “A Peoples’ Contest,” 232.

⁴⁶ Joseph E. Stevens, *1863: The Rebirth of a Nation* (New York: Bantam Books, 1999), 72–74.

⁴⁷ *Detroit Free Press*, Oct. 1, 1862; Klement, “Copperheads and Copperheadism in Wisconsin,” 186; Harry J. Maihafer, *War of Words: Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War Press* (Wash., DC: Brassey’s, 2001), 99–112; William C. Harris, *Two Against Lincoln: Reverdy Johnson and Horatio Seymour, Champions of the Loyal Opposition* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2017).

or the Republican Party's mishandling of the Constitution, they kept governors, as well as the president, focused on the larger issues of maintaining the wartime economic and political structure, as well as maintaining the morale both at home and in the ranks.⁴⁸

Conclusion

In the Civil War's master narrative, Lincoln towers over all political leaders. Hesselstine concluded as much in the 1940s by arguing that the victory of "nationalism over localism, of centralization over states' rights, was, in the last analysis, a victory of a keener intellect over men of lesser minds." "The new nation that emerged from the Civil War," he contended, "was not solely the result of the military defeat of the armies of Robert E. Lee," but also "the result of the political victory that Abraham Lincoln's mind and personality won over the governors of the Northern states." Some contemporaries and scholars, however, have pointed out that "Lincoln's greatness grew with the occasion," a sentiment popularized by William Weeden more than 100 years ago.⁴⁹ Prominent New England abolitionist Wendell Phillips said that if Lincoln was able to grow it was because "we have watered him," and that he advanced "because the nation pushed him on." Richard Hofstadter remarked that "like a delicate barometer, he recorded the trend of pressures, and as the Radical pressure increased he moved toward the left." Yet, however much Lincoln grew during the war, he surely would have acknowledged that his ability to bring about the Union victory came as much from the partnership he and the governors forged as from Washington and his ability to grow.⁵⁰

The American people had established a federal government in 1787 that reflected their composite national character in a republic that had sovereign power over all citizens within its jurisdiction. The Civil War and its unprecedented emergencies required

⁴⁸ Klement, "Copperheads and Copperheadism in Wisconsin," 186; Harris, *Two Against Lincoln*, passim.

⁴⁹ Wisconsin Governor John T. Lewis, writing in his autobiography in October 1863 remarked that Lincoln was a "mastermind" and one "particularly fitted for the time in which he lives and the place he occupies." Lewis Autobiographical Journal, Executive Department, Military Correspondence, John T. Lewis, Series 49, SHSW; Hesselstine, *Lincoln and the War Governors*, 193. Although Hesselstine argues that Lincoln had quietly assumed command of the war by 1863, "the political leaders in the states were appealing to Lincoln to aid them in their campaigns." In late 1863, for example, Lincoln sent enough Ohio Republicans home to vote John Brough into the governorship and according to Hesselstine, "thereafter, the state parties realized that their success depended on the President." Hesselstine went on to declare that by the summer of 1864 Lincoln "was the undisputed master of his party and its only acknowledged spokesman."

⁵⁰ Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1948, repr. New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 165; *The Liberator*, Jan. 1, 1864; Horace Greeley, *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 42 (May 1891–Oct. 1891): 382; Harold Holzer, ed., *Lincoln as I Knew Him: Gossip, Tributes, and Revelations from His Best Friends and Worst Enemies* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 2009), 111.

Republicans to define and assume implied powers based on broad constitutional interpretation, which tested the limits of governmental expansion and the authority and the power that came with it. Yet, unexpressed in the delegated powers assigned to the national government was just how the federal partnership would function during war. Lincoln entered into a series of negotiations with his governors that gave shape and solidity to a federal partnership and a direction to the Union's war aims for ending the conflict.

By war's end, state executives had schooled Lincoln and the citizenry about nation-state mobilization and protected their citizens while remaining attentive to national demands. They gave birth to volunteer regiments, and ensured that soldiers were paid, adequately equipped, and sufficiently inspired about the cause. Some governors were idealists who championed radical measures early on, such as the enlistment of black soldiers and the emancipation of Confederate slaves. Some were pragmatists who were committed to more practical and conservative measures, such as holding on to the Border States and preserving the Union as it was. Yet, all came to see themselves as essential participants in the struggle to save the Union and were persistent in contributing to the war effort by cooperating with the national government. Along the way, their partnership with the federal government strengthened the nation-state alliance formed some 70 years before and re-federalized the Union by first fighting off dissolution and eventually abolishing slavery. In a war that tested society's core values, leaders of the loyal states recognized their power and duty and undertook the bold and critical work of defending the Union and destroying the powers of dissolution. The seceded states had committed treason, and by war's end, Congress would determine how to restore them to the United States. Legislators proposed the 13th Amendment to the Constitution in 1864 to end slavery and redefine the social and constitutional basis for a more cohesive political union. Yet, the general preconditions for freedom in postwar reconstruction—at least those guaranteeing freedom for whites—were basic principles in the nation-state partnership forged in 1861. It was an alliance that sought to reaffirm the notion that citizens had more rights *in* the Union rather than *out* of the Union—thereby preserving American federalism.⁵¹

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⁵¹ McDonald, *States' Rights and the Union*, 197.