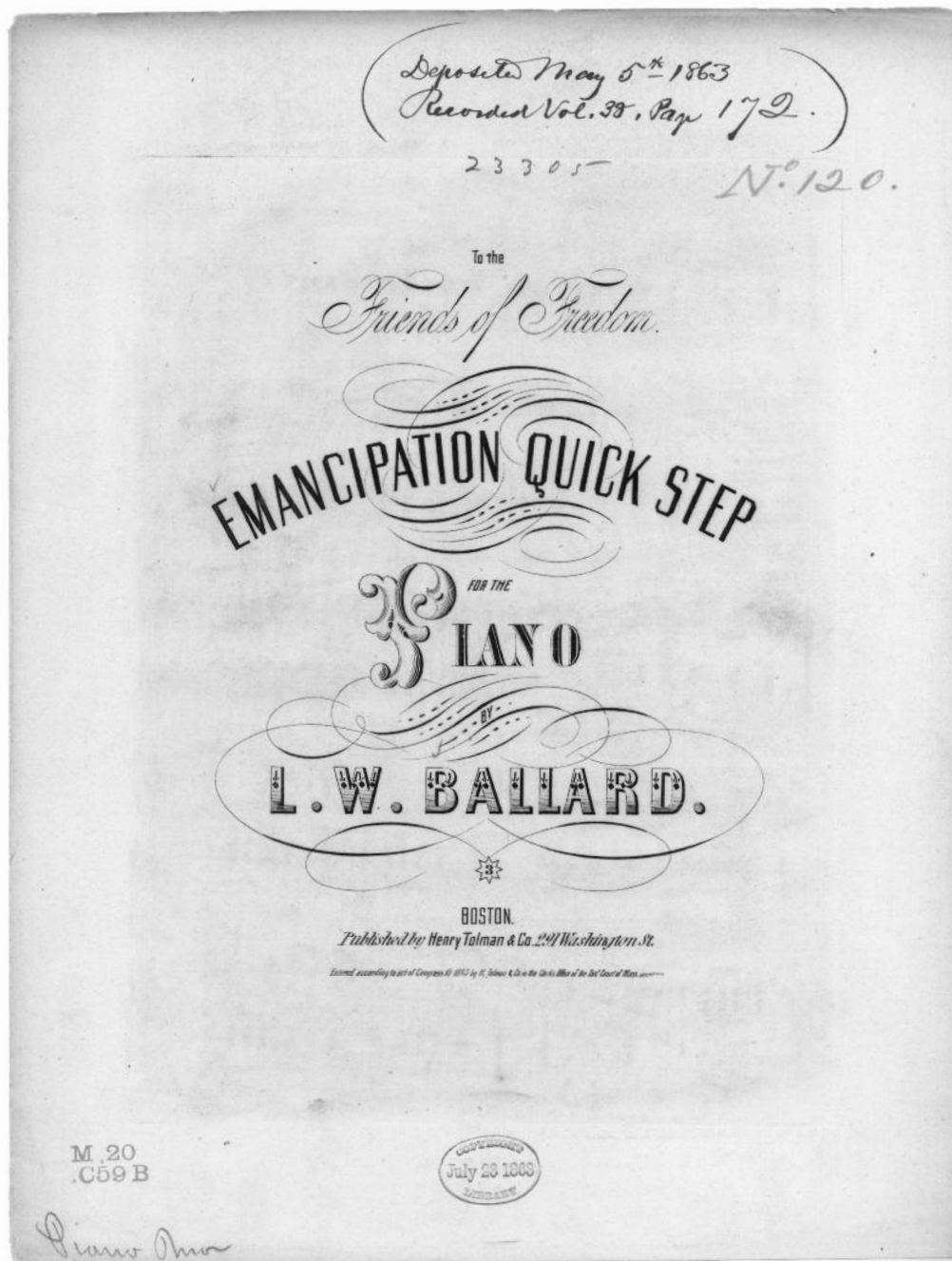




"Emancipation Quick Step," printed by Henry Tolman and Company (Boston), 1863. Celebrations of the Emancipation Proclamation came in many forms, including this composition for piano by L. W. Ballard of Lewiston, Maine. *Civil War Sheet Music Collection*, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC. <https://www.loc.gov/resource/ihms.200006022.0?st=gallery>

"BEYOND BEING A WAR FOR THE UNION, THIS IS A WAR FOR CIVILIZATION": NELSON DINGLEY JR.'S EMANCIPATIONIST WAR ON SLAVERY, 1861–1863

By Eben Miller

When the Civil War began in April 1861, the Union entered the conflict committed to suppressing secession and securing the republic. On the Maine home front, Nelson Dingley Jr., editor of the *Lewiston Daily Evening Journal* and Republican member of the state legislature, contended that this would require the adoption of measures to weaken slavery, from protecting and even arming runaway slaves to the emancipation of enslaved peoples. This article examines how Dingley championed emancipationist measures in the *Journal* during the early stages of the Civil War, situating his voice among fellow Mainers—clergy members, soldiers, elected officials—who likewise espoused the necessity of undermining slavery to preserve the Union. Eben Miller is a professor of history at Southern Maine Community College, where he has taught since 2004. He is the author of *Born along the Color Line: The 1933 Amenia Conference and the Rise of a National Civil Rights Movement* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

In Lewiston, Maine, in 1863 one could dance to the tune of slavery's destruction. Following the announcement of the Emancipation Proclamation that January, L. W. Ballard, a composer and musician in the city who taught at the Maine State Seminary, fashioned a dance piece for piano—"Emancipation Quickstep"—that he dedicated to "the Friends of Freedom." This sheet music soon found its way into the hands of Nelson Dingley Jr., the thirty-one-year-old editor and owner of the *Lewiston Daily Evening Journal*, a leading Republican newspaper in the state. In Ballard's bright composition, Dingley could perceive a jubilant, commonly held hope: the restoration of the Union as a truly independent nation free from the scourge of slavery, that moral travesty and cause of the Civil War.¹

Nelson Dingley Jr. was among those steadfast friends of freedom. As a Republican member of the Maine legislature, he backed measures announcing the state's support for federal policies to cripple slavery, including emancipation. To this influence in the state house, Dingley added his role as *Journal* editor. Like the *Bangor Daily Whig and Courier* and *Kennebec Journal*, the *Lewiston Daily Evening Journal* served as a Republican tribune on the Maine Civil War home front. Through 1862, Dingley advocated an emancipationist war in the pages of the *Journal*. In the parlance of the day, emancipationists emphasized the practicality of ending slavery above

any moral imperative. Despite the divisiveness of the issue, the emancipationist position enjoyed backing across a spectrum from avowed foes of slavery to even some Democrats, who acknowledged emancipation would undermine the secessionist rebellion. Dingley advanced this perspective in the pages of the *Journal*, hoping to preserve the Union by eliminating slavery. “Beyond being a war for the Union,” as he argued in a September 1862 editorial, “this war is a war for Civilization”—a fight for nation that required ending slavery.²

This article examines how Nelson Dingley Jr. framed the issue of emancipation in the *Lewiston Daily Evening Journal* through the first twenty months of the war, from the fall of Fort Sumter in April 1861 to the presidential proclamation in January 1863. Granular focus on Dingley’s editorship of the *Journal* contributes to the historiography of emancipation, the Union home front, and the role of newspapers during the Civil War. While scholarship on emancipation is seemingly exhaustive, explanation of the development of popular support for emancipation in the Union during the early stages of the Civil War is largely incidental. Appropriately enough, volumes are devoted to the Lincoln administration’s eventual turn toward emancipation, as well as to efforts of enslaved people to forge their freedom.³

Scholars have also detailed the calculated war that congressional Republicans waged on slavery and identified an antislavery impulse among Union troops. Still, scant analysis accounts for the popular demands for emancipation that arose among Union states through 1862. A recent historiography of emancipation, for instance, does not broach the topic, nor does the issue feature significantly in work on the Union home front. Neither of the two major surveys of the North during the Civil War elaborate on the subject; studies of local communities include mainly cursory references to support for emancipation. By contrast, historians tend to highlight popular opposition to emancipation, particularly among northern Democrats. Without discounting dissent, it is striking that during a period Richard S. Newman argues featured unprecedented debate over emancipation, its advocates remain relatively muted in accounts of the North during the Civil War. They were certainly not silent at the time. To choose one example, the populace Iowa senator James

Grimes returned to during the summer of 1862 demanded, as he recorded, a “vigorous prosecution of the war” that treated the freeing of enslaved people as a vital war measure. Those Iowans exemplified support for emancipation through Union states during 1862 that even found Maine’s staunchly moderate Republican senator, William Pitt Fessenden, accepting heretofore radical proposals.⁴

As editor of the *Lewiston Daily Evening Journal*, Nelson Dingley Jr., himself a vociferous Fessenden constituent, encouraged this groundswell among his fellow Mainers. A primary medium of the period, scholars have relied on extant newsprint to recount a range of wartime experiences from battlefield to home front. Roughly three out of every four newspapers published during the Civil War era were partisan, small-scale affairs—much like the *Journal*. Dependent on subscriptions, such newspapers tended to give voice to the communities they served; historian Andrew Coopersmith suggests they thus offer a fair gauge of public opinion. Yet how local editors generally responded to the gradual adoption of emancipation as a Union war aim—and, by extension, how their respective communities reacted to this shift—is mostly a matter of surmise.⁵

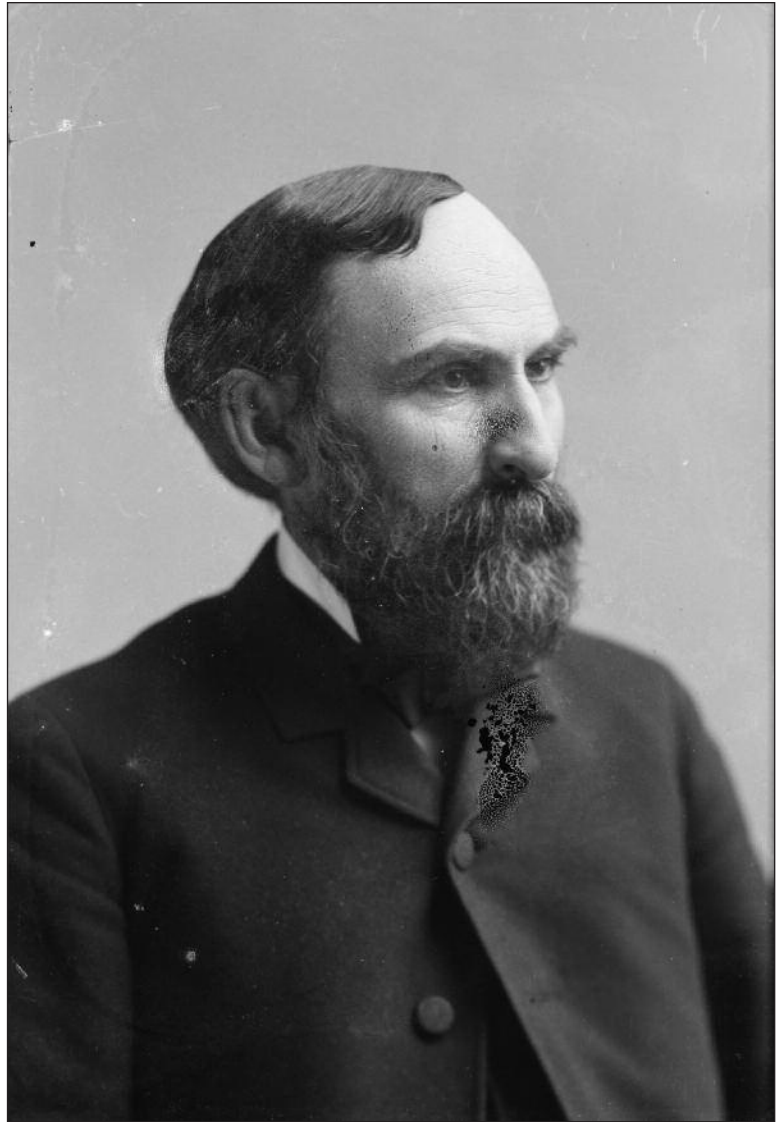
What is clear is that Dingley belonged to a legion of editors who argued over the entwined fates of the nation and slavery during the Civil War. A devout Republican, he shared an outlook expressed in newsprint across the Union states including, in Maine, the *Bangor Daily Whig and Courier*. Just how widely such perspective was shared is open to educated speculation. The collection of northern editorials composed in response to the secession crisis that Howard Cecil Perkins published in 1942, along with scholarship on the development of emancipatory policies, suggests Dingley’s editorial voice belonged to a capacious camp of advocates of emancipation.⁶

Tracing Dingley’s response to the wartime fate of slavery in the *Lewiston Daily Evening Journal*, this article offers an indicative, if not definitive, case study of a Republican editor on the Maine home front advancing the emancipationist cause through the initial stages of the Civil War. Framing the conflict as a struggle between liberty and slavery, Dingley supplemented his own editorial commentary with the contributions of local citizens and soldier and civilian

correspondents. Aware that a portion of the population bitterly opposed antislavery policies of any stripe—especially so-called Peace Democrats, one of two major Democratic factions in Maine during the Civil War years—Dingley validated emancipatory measures by printing examples of Democratic support. While he treated the practicality of emancipation as paramount, he also eventually emphasized the morality of ending the enslavement of fellow humans. In his editorship of the *Journal*, Dingley reveals that many on the Maine home front came to welcome the opportunity to strike a blow at slavery—if not in the spirit of abolitionism, then in the name of safeguarding the nation. Though the Union war was not explicitly abolitionist from the outset, it became indisputably and increasingly emancipationist, culminating with an Emancipation Proclamation demanding an end to slavery in Confederate-held territory. Dingley personifies those who trumpeted these developments, cheered the prospect of dispelling from the nation the unholy practice of enslavement, and cherished the role his fellow citizens played in securing the victory of liberty over slavery.⁷

“To save our home from slavery”

When Fort Sumter fell in April 1861, twenty-nine-year-old Nelson Dingley Jr. possessed a degree from Dartmouth College and a newspaper, the *Lewiston Falls Journal*, which was a source of prosperity for the future governor of Maine and member of the House of Representatives. The paper, a weekly founded in 1847, mainly featured prosaic offerings before Dingley claimed proprietorship during the 1850s. He soon infused it with an unabashed partisan voice that reflected his own stalwart Republicanism. With the outbreak of war, Dingley established a four-page edition to capitalize on the demand for war news. Like many small newspapers, which constituted the dominant form of media during the Civil War era, the *Journal* was the product of few hands. During the early 1860s, Dingley employed assistants but remained responsible for filling its columns. Associated Press dispatches, purchased at no little expense and delivered by the latest telegraph, supplied much of the daily content in addition to the submissions he encouraged from soldiers and citizen correspondents. To this Dingley added his



Portrait of Nelson Dingley Jr., by C. M. Bell, taken between 1873 and 1890. C.M. Bell Studio Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC. <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2016688239/>

own editorial commentary, news from around the state, and local items.⁸

The communities along the Androscoggin River that the *Journal* served heartily supported the Union war, raising every manner of patriotic bunting after Fort Sumter fell to South Carolinian cannon fire. Though the textile-producing factories in Lewiston relied on southern cotton, the rapidly growing mill town—its population doubled to roughly fourteen thousand during the 1860s—was not predisposed to cater to Confederate interests. Home to the Maine State

Seminary, Lewiston was a hub of antislavery sentiment, if not of organized abolitionism. Local members of the Protestant clergy, as well as seminary president Oren Cheney, were among those who joined Dingley in despising the so-called “peculiar institution.” The flags that festooned Lewiston and Auburn flew above a citizenry who, from the outset of the war, considered the crux of the crisis as between liberty and slavery. Lewiston physician Alonzo Garcelon expressed the sentiment succinctly in a letter to the governor of Maine that April: “May our Rulers not falter for the people are with them in this great struggle of Liberty against Slavery.”⁹

In the first several weeks of the war, Dingley published numerous contributions from local citizens who voiced this argument. He gave prominent space, for instance, to sermons from local clergy that collectively described the conflict as a contest, in the words of Congregationalist minister Uriah Balkam, between “freedom and slavery,” which necessitated the eradication of enslavement. Dingley underscored the

breadth of this conviction by publishing local citizens’ sentimental writings. The poem “Soldier’s Farewell to Home,” published that April, featured a soldier determined “to meet dear freedom’s foe.” Imbuing “home” with both domestic and national meaning, the anonymous Auburn author identified slavery as the threat that local men were volunteering to combat. As the departing soldier proclaimed:

Adieu to thee, my own true wife—
To thee my children—’tis for thee
Thus cheerfully I give my life
To save our home from slavery.

In this same vein, Dingley also printed letters from female operatives in the local mills commending the enlistment of local men in the effort to put down the Confederate rebellion as contributing to “the final triumph of *Justice and Liberty*” over slavery.¹⁰

Such expressions reflected an abiding opposition to slavery, especially among northern Republicans, which increased in prominence now that the nation was riven with war. A growing number of northerners, Dingley contended in an editorial that May, detested the “avowed object of secession”: the establishment of slavery as the cornerstone of the country. He observed a “burning determination to root out once and forever, and that by the most speedy methods, the disease which is sapping the foundations of freedom and liberty and law.” Many, Dingley agreed, were adopting heretofore radical sentiments. “Two short weeks ago,” he wrote, “hardly a man could be found who would acknowledge himself an abolitionist. Now all has changed.” He predicted slavery would “ultimately be crushed in the death grapple.”¹¹

In this editorial Dingley echoed a broader northern commentary. From the 1850s, Republicans had predicted the collapse of slavery should sectional tensions erupt in warfare. Some perceived its end as nigh, even during the first weeks of the war. James Blaine, a fellow editor and friend of Dingley, was a Republican state legislator in 1861. “Many wise and far-seeing men,” he wrote, recalling the early moments of the war, “were convinced from the first that the Rebellion would result in the destruction of slavery.” For months, northern commentators had predicted that secession would encourage enslaved people to escape amid the turmoil. Such cracks in the cornerstone of the Confederacy,



Uriah Balkam, a Congregationalist minister in Lewiston, is pictured here as a chaplain with the 16th Maine. From the outset of the Civil War, Balkam contended in his sermons that it was necessary to eliminate slavery, because it was the cause of the conflict. Courtesy of the Maine State Archives. http://digitalmaine.com/arc_civilwarportraits/437/

they believed, would result in its demise. Dingley was swift to identify such fault lines.¹²

"I will make tracks for freedom"

That spring, as members of his community interpreted the Union cause as a clash between liberty and slavery, Dingley published indications that the war was indeed already weakening slavery—that enslaved people had begun to escape amid the tumult and confusion of the conflict. From the outset, the effect of the war on slavery was apparent. The presence of northern troops in Virginia precipitated numerous escapes, pressing Union officials to consider the creation of a comprehensive policy regarding runaways. When enslaved people escaped and made their way to Fortress Monroe at the southern tip of the Virginia peninsula, Union general Benjamin Butler initiated a new precedent. Deciding the Union army had no obligation to return fugitive slaves to owners in rebellion, he declared the runaways "contraband of war" and provided them security behind Union lines. In a matter of weeks, many more "contrabands"—a term that northerners quickly adopted to refer to fleeing slaves—sought such refuge. "It seems that fugitive slaves in Virginia, when on their way to Fortress Monroe," commented Dingley with palpable satisfaction, now "make inquiry for the 'Fort of Freedom.'"¹³

An interview Dingley conducted that June with an Auburn man recently returned from Georgia indicated that even slaves distant from Union camps were intent on securing their freedom. After interacting with enslaved Georgians, the Auburn resident had "not the slightest doubt that 9 negroes out of 10 will fight against their masters," he explained to Dingley, "when the opportunity of rebellion offers itself." Having inquired directly of a person he referred to as a "good honest nigger" in the debasing vernacular of the period, he related the following response: "I would not fight FOR HIM [the slavemaster]; and I will make tracks for freedom as soon as I get the chance." For Dingley, this insight controverted the belief that enslaved people, contented with their condition, would remain loyal to their masters. It conveyed to the readers of the *Journal*, rather, the role slaves who perceived the possibility of freedom could play in disrupting the rebellion.¹⁴



"Contraband Foreground," by E. and H. T. Anthony and Company, American and Foreign Steroscopic Emporium (New York), between 1861 and 1865. Pictured are two African American men and one boy in Union uniforms with Rhode Island Volunteer Infantry officers at Camp Brightwood, Washington, DC. No. 2062, War Views. Army of the Potomac, *Civil War Photograph Collection*, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Contraband_foreground.jpg



"A Group of Contrabands," by War Photograph & Exhibition Company (Hartford, CT), taken between 1861 and 1865 and printed at a later date. This image depicts African American men in old Union uniforms after escaping slavery. No. 2594, The War for the Union, *Photographic War History, 1861–1865*, *Civil War Photograph Collection*, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A_Group_of_Contrabands_1865.jpg

"The Rebellion's Heel of Achilles"

Despite initial optimism, the mobilization of Union troops did not immediately end the Confederate rebellion. Northerners contemplating the possibility of a long war began to consider the efficacy of purposely disturbing slavery as a wartime measure. Through the summer and fall of 1861, a period when, as historian Louis Masur writes, "discussions of emancipation saturated newspaper columns, lecture halls, and Congress," Dingley revealed himself as a fierce advocate for emancipation. He considered slavery a critical Confederate weakness for the Union to exploit. It was "The Rebellion's Heel of Achilles," as he titled one editorial, and he used the *Journal* to champion emancipationist arguments, even as he entered the electoral fray. As a Republican member of the Maine state legislature, Dingley intended to serve as a bulwark for the Union—a cause he considered lost without directly attacking slavery.¹⁵

When Congress convened in special session in July, it passed the Confiscation Act of 1861, an emancipatory measure intended to undercut the slaveholders' rebellion. This legislation authorized the seizure of slaves employed in action against the United States. Following the rout of Union troops that month at Manassas, Virginia—the first Bull Run—many northerners considered the confiscation bill a necessary military measure, including William Pitt Fessenden, who voted for the legislation in the Senate. His fierier father, Samuel Fessenden, was among those who inferred from the Union loss a divine message to not equivocate about emancipation. From the *Journal* office in Lewiston, Dingley pronounced the decision "in every respect satisfactory."¹⁶

When Union general John Frémont expanded the terms of confiscation at the end of August, Dingley was even more fulsome. Serving as military commander in Missouri, Frémont declared all rebel-owned slaves in that border state to be free, regardless of whether they had ever aided the Confederate military—a marked step beyond the terms of the Confiscation Act. Though the Frémont Proclamation earned swift rebuke from Lincoln, who rescinded the law, the measure proved popular with many in the North. Among them was an Auburn resident whose poem, "Fremont and Liberty," which Dingley printed in the *Journal*, hailed the proclamation:

All honor to Fremont! His banner unfurled,
Is proudly displayed to the gaze of the world!
Let his brave declaration by nations be heard!
Let the heart of the people re-echo the word!

Dingley ensured the sentiment echoed from the pages of the *Journal*, publishing a letter from a soldier in Frémont's division expressing frustration that some northerners did not appreciate the practical wisdom of emancipation.¹⁷

Joining citizens and soldiers, Dingley lauded the Frémont Proclamation, which prompted his first extended editorial on emancipation, claiming it was not "at all in advance of popular opinion." The nation wished for a speedy conclusion to the war and would not long "stand splitting hairs" with the fate of the republic in the balance. "Whether slavery is or is not abolished in any particular instance," he argued, "is in the minds of the majority of the people entirely subordinate to another question, *whether the government shall be abolished*." If preserving the nation necessitated the weakening of slavery, so be it. There was no practical way to avoid it. "Owners run away from their slaves and slaves run away from their owners in the presence of an invading army," Dingley wrote. It was "impossible" to expect "that the march of armies, whether friendly or inimical, over the Southern States" could ever be "reconciled with the safety of the 'peculiar institution.'" For this the Confederacy was itself responsible. "The South, in taking up arms to extend the area of slavery," he posited, "has resorted to the process most of all calculated to ultimately destroy it, and the longer the rebellion continues the less will be its power to resist its ultimate effects."¹⁸

Prior to this point, there had been a passive quality to Dingley's description of the impact of the war on slavery. No matter the Union's intent, the argument went, war would inevitably undermine slavery. Following the rejection of the Frémont Proclamation, however, he endorsed plans to challenge slavery directly. In this shift, Dingley joined a broader movement agitating for emancipation during the fall of 1861. Likely emboldened by the growing acceptance of emancipationist arguments, he may also have been prompted by an abolitionist campaign conducted by the newly formed Emancipation League of Boston to distribute propaganda to northern newspapers to sway public opinion.¹⁹

Whatever the influence, the sentiments Din-

gley expressed that fall were those of a newly elected member of the Maine state legislature. The September elections saw Israel Washburn reelected as governor along with a bevy of fellow Republicans, among them Nelson Dingley Jr., chosen to serve in the state house of representatives. Surveying the results of the statewide vote, Dingley emphasized the state's commitment to upholding the Union cause. "Maine," he observed, "come weal or come woe, she is for the Union as it was bequeathed by our fathers"—free, that is, from the permanent protections of slavery that secessionists had demanded.²⁰

Dingley's devotion to state and nation led him to advocate for more aggressive policies after the September elections, even asserting that enslaved people could play a vital role in the Union war. One of Dingley's strategies to this end was to complement his own editorial commentary with correspondence from such figures as George Magoun, a resident of Iowa but a native of Bath, Maine, and a Bowdoin College graduate, who considered emancipation only so much common sense. "The *policy*," Magoun contended in a typical letter, of "removing at one stroke the chief wealth and the personal force of the leading traitors from that side to ours, needs not a word." Freed slaves could have an immediate impact "in trenching, cooking, serving and fighting" for the Union. The practice would swiftly shift the terms of the war as former slaves helped "to paralyze the rebels." The southerner "who has been boasting that he could fight us 'at advantage' because his 'servile class' at home earn his bread for him and carry on his affairs," Magoun predicted, "will have small stomach for the fight" once he understood that his slaves had left for Union lines.²¹

Dingley concurred, as he explained across several editorials through October. Without enacting emancipation measures, he contended, the rebellion could be expected to continue indefinitely. Although enslaved people had not "taken up arms for rebellion," he wrote, adopting the degrading terminology of the period, "Sambu just as effectually fights for the rebels in the corn-field, raising bread for his master and his master's sons in the army, as though he shouldered a musket." Dubious that peace was attainable "without changing our tactics and striking the rebels at their weakest point," he insisted on aiming at slavery. "Let every negro un-

derstand" that the moment his master takes up arms against the nation is the moment that "his chains fall from his limbs and he will be protected and treated as a freeman by the Union Army." Enslaved people would not fail to then seek Union lines. Slavery, Dingley believed, was the rebellion's "heel of Achilles."²²

That weak point was evident as thousands of slaves reached Union lines during the fall of 1861. "It was a fact of no small significance," Dingley opined, that "when our fleet arrived at Port Royal" along the South Carolina coast "the negroes received our troops in some sort as liberators, and gladly flocked within our lines." The mere presence of northern troops was "a cutting blow" to the Confederacy. For instance, he published reports indicating the vital intelligence African Americans were already providing to Union forces, including "the position and nature of the surrounding country, creeks, bayous," a boon to troops encamped in a distant and hostile topography. Dingley likewise printed a letter from a member of the 8th Maine relating what was becoming an ordinary encounter—an escaped slave offering northern troops intelligence of military significance. "A slave came into camp last night," explained C. F. Monroe, "and told how a 'right smart' of rifles were concealed in his master's hay loft." With this insight, a thirteen-year-old slave spoiled a surreptitious secessionist. Information had also led to the seizure of barns full of cotton. That cotton—a resource the South needed to fund the war and that northern communities like Lewiston relied upon for textile manufacturing—had become federal property. Slaves had economic value, too, and runaways denied the Confederacy that value each time they fled for Union lines. Dingley thus saluted the intrepidity of forty-five slaves who escaped their bondage by boating across Chesapeake Bay, absconding with \$75,000 of property: themselves.²³

While the Union's initial efforts to employ the refugees as laborers for the Union army were underway in Virginia and South Carolina, Dingley thought it further prudent to arm the runaways. Enlistment of former slaves would spare northern white men from the hardships of disease and exposure to which so many had succumbed. And if the promise of military service enticed slaves to escape to the Union, then it would put even greater strain on southern resources. Dingley also gave credence to rumors

that the rebels were arming slaves, contending that if the Confederacy used black troops it was outrageous for the Union to refuse them. As further precedent for a black soldiery, he reprinted an 1814 order from Andrew Jackson authorizing the use of African Americans in his celebrated defense of New Orleans.²⁴

That Jackson had been an original Democrat underscored Dingley's contention that emancipatory measures enjoyed wide support, such as from Shepard Cary, a former Democratic congressman from Houlton, who pronounced himself in "favor of striking the enemy where the strongest blow could be dealt him, *hesitating not to confiscate and emancipate the slaves of the rebels.*" Ephraim Smart, a Democratic state legislator from Camden, Dingley reported, explicitly welcomed the prospect of black troops. "Slaves belonging to rebels should not only be confiscated," Smart contended, "but *armed.*" Having failed to suppress the rebellion, Smart considered it "the duty of Congress" to look to the enslaved population. Taking stock of these perspectives, Dingley asserted that a new point in the war had arrived by the end of 1861. Consensus was strengthening, he wrote, that "the war power of the Government should be fully exerted by snapping the chains which bind the slaves to the rebels, and thus putting an end to this war."²⁵

"The feeling among the people is universal"

As the war extended into the winter, once radical notions, including the seizure of Confederates' human property and the arming of African Americans, gained wider acceptance. As Charles Hamlin of Bangor observed in December 1861, "I find everybody is an abolitionist in the war sense of the term." Dingley noticed this when, that same month, the abolitionist Hutchinson Family Singers performed in Lewiston. "The Hutchinson element of love of Freedom and hate of slavery is now more generally popular than ever before," he remarked, "and there is a happy gratification in memorizing the songs they have sent down the past twenty years, as they swell year by year from prophecy to realization." With soldiers leaving the local train depot singing "John Brown's knapsack is strapped upon his back" for a South where enslaved people "received our troops as liberators,

and gladly flocked within our lines," Dingley optimistically perceived the dimming of "the Hopes of Secession." Such signs, he hoped, augured an advance toward emancipation and Union victory.²⁶

While volunteers left for the war front through early 1862, Dingley prepared to serve his first term in the Maine legislature. Entering the state house that January, he was named to the committee on federal relations, an appointment he would use to endorse resolves to declare the state's support of policies to liberate slaves and employ them to put down the rebellion. He maintained the practicality of such a plan, especially as Maine troops suffered through their first winter at war.²⁷

Republicans and Union Democrats convening for the legislative session that winter arrived in Augusta committed to supporting emancipatory policies as necessary wartime measures. Governor Israel Washburn enunciated their emancipationist commitment in his address to the state, which Dingley published in full. One



In January 1862, Governor Israel Washburn took an emancipationist stance in his annual address to the state. He argued that any successful Union war strategy would of necessity incorporate the confiscation of rebel property—including enslaved people. Washburn described those who disagreed with confiscation as traitors to the Union. Courtesy of the Maine State Archives, Augusta, Maine.
http://digitalmaine.com/arc_govportraits/28/

of the founders of the Republican Party in Maine, Washburn framed the debate in a manner that damned opponents as treasonous. From his perspective, the citizen who objected to confiscation placed the sanctity of slavery above the preservation of the Union. If preserving the Union required eradicating slavery, such steps should be swiftly enacted. For, Washburn explained, “if by striking the chains from the slaves of rebels, and destroying property claims of traitors in black men, the war may be ended sooner than it can be if such claims are treated as sacred and inviolable,” then practical and patriotic citizens would demand exactly that.²⁸

Observing the address, Dingley reported in the *Journal* that those filling Representatives’ Hall especially cheered this part of Washburn’s speech, Democrats among them. It was notable that those belonging to a party, in Dingley’s words, “long accustomed to bow at the Baal of slavery” did not “now fear to strike in the direction which duty and country call.” Such sentiment portended the passage of a resolution on “the relation of the negroes to the rebellion.” In the senate, Ephraim Smart proposed that the Maine government endorse confiscation as a wartime measure. “It was a duty loyal men owed to themselves and to the country which they defended,” Smart declared, “to weaken the rebels by confiscating their property, and by receiving and using the negroes in crushing the rebellion, in whatever direction they may be found useful.”²⁹

Dingley sought to convince those who questioned this duty by emphasizing how such policies would relieve white soldiers. In January 1862, he published accounts from several men who had been stationed near Port Royal, South Carolina, which communicated this need for relief. Members of their regiments were overburdened with manual labor and vulnerable to illness, despite the presence of former slaves within Union lines who could be usefully employed. To make soldiers’ distress manifest, Dingley published a stark list in the *Journal* enumerating deaths among the 8th and 9th Maine regiments. Stationed along the South Carolina and Georgia coast, they had not suffered recent battle casualties; variola (small pox), pneumonia, typhoid, cholera, and bronchitis, among other ailments, were their bane. Rather than sending “our unacclimated men” to “miasmatic forts,” Dingley argued that they ought to be

“garrisoned by colored men well adapted to the climate.”³⁰

As the state legislature convened for the winter session, Dingley believed the body had to express an emphatic mandate for just such federal action, that an upswelling of support would free President Lincoln to address the rebellion without constraint. “We doubt not,” he wrote, “that the President is ready to adopt such a policy when the country shall unmistakably call for it.” To this end, in January 1862 he introduced a resolve to the legislature declaring that “the people of Maine are in favor of confiscating, liberating and employing the negroes of rebels in crushing the rebellion.” When the resolution passed with bipartisan backing that winter, Dingley considered it representative of the wishes of Maine citizens. “The feeling among the people is universal,” he contended, “that nothing should stand between them and the crushing out of rebellion. They demand that the slaves of rebels shall be set free and employed in the most effective manner against the men who are in arms against the Government.” Support for the legislation was not actually unanimous, but it was telling that Democrats, such as George F. Shepley, a colonel with the 12th Maine, backed emancipationist measures. “I want everybody to understand,” Shepley explained during the legislature’s debate on the national resolves, “that I go forth to aid in crushing this unholy rebellion, and whatever may be in the way of this work, whether it be men or institutions, must get out of the way.”³¹

“The kid-glove is a thing of the past”

As the national resolves garnered support across the partisan divide in Maine, Dingley marveled at milestone measures passed in Washington during the spring of 1862, including a law abolishing slavery in the nation’s capital. The Union’s patience with slavery seemed to be waning and its insistence on emancipation strengthening. There was widespread impatience with abolition limited to Washington and a Confiscation Act of 1861, which did not actually guarantee the liberty of former slaves. Northerners, especially Republicans, expressed further consternation when Lincoln countermanded General David Hunter’s May 1862 order emancipating slaves in South Carolina, Georgia, and



"Civil War Contraband," taken between 1862 and 1865. Photographic print. Gladstone Collection of African American Photographs, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress Washington, DC. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2010647919/>

Florida and rejected petitions to issue a declaration of comprehensive emancipation. Dingley shared such frustrations. As the Union army staggered through frustrating months of stalemate and setbacks that spring, he joined an aroused northern citizenry demanding policies to disrupt slavery.³²

Through early 1862, Dingley printed pieces reminding readers of how deeply those held in bondage longed for freedom. He published an account from J. B. Walker, of Turner, for instance, relating the experience of Tom, an escaped slave he had met while stationed at Hilton Head. As Union troops arrived along the South Carolina coast, many slaveholders fled inland, Tom's own master among them, leaving valued possessions behind in their hasty evacuation. In the confusion, Tom offered to return for the goods, but instead made for Union lines along with the owner's property. "On arriving on the

island" northern forces now held, Tom, recalled Walker, "cast his resplendent black face toward Dixie and his master, with a knowing grin, and bid delighted adieu to slavery and Mas'r, we hope, forever." Dingley published an additional white northern witness account of an unnamed enslaved man and described his jubilation during the Union fleet's assault on the Carolina Sea Islands. What had filled his owners with terror was for him salvation. "When I heard the guns," he recounted, "and saw the windows in the house shaking and the dishes on masser's table jumping, and missis and the children running about the streets, and crowds of de women and children wringing their hands and crying, I went out in dat live oak grove, and fell on my knees and pray for five hours, and tank de Lord for that day." These anecdotes affirmed that enslaved people yearned for freedom. As a group of contrabands marching along a road near Manassas in March 1862 told soldiers inquiring of their destination, "Gwin to be free, mass; gwine North, bin waiting long while."³³

Linking these accounts to the Union war, Dingley emphasized that Maine soldiers welcomed slaves' pursuit of freedom. He published the comments of one soldier who explained that the escaped slaves at Port Royal were "delighted with the prospect and reality of freedom, and are fast friends with our men." He printed the observations of others who wrote that their "love and respect" for both free and enslaved black people had grown since their encounters in the South. A member of the 2nd Maine who had been held as a Confederate prisoner for nearly a year, described this sentiment. Enslaved people had provided him succor during his own period of bondage. "The negroes were the best friends of our men," he attested, with language that reflected the racism inherent among even otherwise empathetic white northerners. "Whenever they could get opportunity, they told the news and all the 'contraband' intelligence they had themselves. The niggers thus let in a little light from the outside world." While this soldier described the slaves he encountered as "uneasy in their bond-state" and ready to "strike for themselves," the justice of returning the favor—of soldiers aiding the enslaved people who had supported them—was implied.³⁴

Regardless of the righteousness of a comprehensive confiscation policy, Dingley proposed that practical considerations mandated it. The

many refugees finding Union lines during the early months of 1862 required a decision regarding their status. As a Maine soldier stationed on Ship Island off the Mississippi coast commented in April, "there are now quite a number of contrabands on the Island, and more coming in almost every day." What "shall be done with them," Dingley argued, depended on whether one preferred their potential labor to contribute to the Union or Confederate cause. The Confederacy knew the value of black labor. Dispatches described the "heavy intrenchments" enslaved people had been compelled to help construct along the Rappahannock and on the Mississippi, "under the cover of which," Dingley exclaimed, "the pro-slavery army shall fight the army that is defending the Union!" Slaves, he contended, were doing more to "increase the strength of the rebel lines, and defend the rebellion itself, than the whole rebel army of the Potomac." This warranted new terms of warfare. "The war is to be waged for the Union, and whatsoever stands in the way of it," Dingley avowed, "must fall, and fall forever. Since it is slaves that render the rebels so well able to cope with us, let us have no slavery!"³⁵

Failures on the Union war front only made it more vital to weaken slavery. Earlier in the year, northerners had briefly been buoyed by the Union capture of Fort Donelson in Tennessee, but through the spring of 1862, the Army of the Potomac remained frustratingly inert under George McClellan's command on the Virginia Peninsula. With decisive advances elusive, Dingley advocated for utilizing black volunteers. Beyond fatigue duty, they were potential scouts whose intelligence had already proved of benefit. "There is not a general officer in the Union service," he argued, "who will not testify that his best intelligence of the movements of the enemy, and of the topography of the seceded country, has come from the blacks." When Governor Washburn joined his Massachusetts counterpart, John Andrews, that May in supporting "the use of every legitimate means, negroes not excepted, to crush out the rebellion," Dingley exuded satisfaction: "the loyal men of the North respond 'Amen!'"³⁶

Washburn's sentiment reflected the direction of Union wartime policy during the summer of 1862. In July, Congress, which had already prohibited the military from returning runaway slaves, passed a second Confiscation Act as well

as the Militia Act of 1862. Together these laws authorized the freeing of slaves of rebels in Union-held areas and permitted their service in Union forces. "The time will come," Vice President Hamlin confirmed in a speech in Bangor, expressing support for these measures, "when Federal bayonets shall not protect rebel property and the work of putting down the rebellion will be done in earnest." Such developments were a relief to Benjamin Franklin Tefft, former chaplain of the 1st Maine Cavalry Regiment, who told an audience in that city in September: "We must declare all their property forfeited to the Government they have abused." The adoption of emancipatory policies, though, left some Democrats disgusted. Ahead of the midterm elections, which Maine would hold in September, Peace Democrats were pledged, in their own words, to "resist all measures and efforts to convert this war for the Union into a crusade for negro emancipation" and to ensure "the war be conducted for its legitimate purpose—the restoration of the Union; not to free niggers." Dingley scorned this statement, claiming that most on the Maine home front took heart from the enactment of the most recent federal policies. "The kid-glove is a thing of the past," he was pleased to write.³⁷

"This Union must destroy slavery or slavery will destroy the Union"

With the passage of emancipatory legislation during the summer of 1862, Dingley infused the practical argument for saving American civilization with a new emphasis on the moral dimension of emancipation. "The war assumes a new energy," Dingley wrote in July 1862. "It is waged on right principles," both morally and tactically correct, the one strengthening the other. In this, Dingley may have drawn inspiration from the sentiment expressed among Protestant denominations holding annual conventions across the state that summer. While Fast Day exercises in Lewiston portrayed the war as divine retribution for "the sin of the nation," a Universalist committee declared "slavery to be the cause of the rebellion, the removal of which cause is essential to permanent peace." Free Baptists from across the state asserted that "American Slavery has always been and always will be, while it shall be at all, a 'sin against God

and crime against man.” Believing that the Union and slavery could not coexist, they pledged to stand together as a “sincere, uncompromising, and earnest opposer of slavery.” For their part, Maine’s Congregationalists pledged to support federal antislavery measures, considering “it to be the duty of Christians to pray that God may rule events to weaken the institution of slavery, the principle cause of the rebellion.”³⁸

Dingley also considered it a providential duty to American civilization. In a war being waged, in his words, “for the preservation of democratic institutions and civilization,” he agreed that saving the republic demanded the end of slavery. “This Union must destroy slavery,” Dingley wrote, “or slavery will destroy the Union. Barbarism and Civilization are as the two poles and as mutually repulsive. Beyond being a war for the Union, this war is a war for Civilization.” “The Lesson” to be understood that summer, he argued, was that uniting around the ultimate stakes of the conflict would have more than moral implications. Explicitly defining the war in such terms—as a “war for Civilization”—would reinforce Union confidence and recruitment with the assurance that “if God ever was with our country, he is with it now.”³⁹

In this argument, Dingley joined northern intellectuals who considered the fate of civilization at stake in the war. Dingley believed they could take heart, despite ongoing military frustrations, thanks to federal measures weakening slavery. He printed a letter from a soldier writing from Warrenton, Virginia, some forty-five miles to the southwest of Washington, DC, to whom the consequence of confiscation was apparent in the “thousands of acres of wheat, rye, oats and grass” he saw “going to destruction for want of men to harvest it.” Sitting in camp, one could see “fully ripe” fields of wheat left unharvested because “the husbands, fathers, sons and brothers” had left for the Confederate ranks, and “the slaves have got to the LAND OF THE FREE.” Reports from the South that Dingley published in the *Journal* suggested increasing desperation. As he summarized: “Provisions are scarce and high; supplies come in slowly; the losses in battle have been immense; and the leaders, in spite of their late successes, are despondent.” The newly expansive confiscation policies would only add to the consternation of the Confederacy. They also promised



“Alonzo Garcelon, Lewiston, ca. 1890.” Photographic Print by Stanley Brothers, Lewiston, Maine. During the summer of 1862, Nelson Dingley Jr. argued more strenuously for emancipation as a necessary military measure. Support for this perspective came from Mainers serving on the war front, including Maine Surgeon General Alonzo Garcelon, pictured here in 1890. Collections of Maine Historical Society, MaineMemory.Net #5584.

to alleviate northern frustrations with the tedium and perils of military service. Writing from Waterloo, Virginia, Lewiston’s Alonzo Garcelon, then serving as surgeon general of the Maine troops, was adamant on this point. “It is time people of the North understood,” Garcelon maintained, that “this rebellion is an unholy, an *uncompromising* rebellion.” He denounced the position that Union troops must mollify the enemy. “The men of the North,” he fumed, “were not sent into the field to guard the property of the rebels in arms against the Government—they were not enlisted to eat hard bread and salt junk, and drink muddy water from the gutters while guarding the springs and wells, the pig pens and hen roosts of men who were lying in wait to shoot them

from the first opportunity.” Neither were they sent to protect rebels’ slaves.⁴⁰

To truly consider slavery as “a military question,” Dingley argued, necessitated organizing black troops. Neal Dow, famed temperance crusader and officer in the 13th Maine, began agitating in this direction in June 1862; with the Militia Act, passed the following month, recruitment started on a small scale. During the previous winter, William Pitt Fessenden had stated that he would never wish his three sons serving in the army to be obliged to return fugitive slaves. Now, as Union commanders fitfully initiated recruitment of African Americans, the senator’s son, James Fessenden, was acting colonel of a regiment of black troops at Port Royal. Cognizant of dissent among Peace Democrats, Dingley couched his support for this in terms even those ambivalent towards enslaved people could appreciate, publishing Maine soldiers’ endorsements of the recruitment of African Americans. As a soldier writing from New Orleans explained in a letter Dingley printed, “We have got our hands full and need all the help we can have.” He estimated, “The South can carry on the war for 20 years if we continue to protect slavery, but not one year if we free every slave who is willing to join us. Slavery must die or the Union will perish.” A Maine officer in Louisiana reported that his regiment at Baton Rouge had already employed “three hundred colored men, ARMED, to watch the movements of the enemy.” Confident that black men would “prove themselves among the most brave and efficient soldiers,” as hundreds joined Union lines, he vowed, “if they are with me, they shall have a chance to fight.” As it stood, he wrote, Union forces were “insufficient,” but he believed: “There are negroes enough, and they will fight.” To refuse their contributions would be to doom the Union war. “We can never conquer the South,” he averred, “without arming the negroes—*never*, NEVER, NEVER! I fear it may be too late, even now.”⁴¹

While such letters upheld the pressing military need for a black soldiery, Dingley added a moral dimension to the discourse by offering an account from a local soldier who considered himself abolitionized by the war. A Danville man experienced this conversion while interacting with former slaves in Port Royal. How could one, he wondered, “be here and converse with

the blacks as I have done for hours in their little huts, listen to their tales of wrong, and see their eyes sparkle, when you speak of ‘Freedom,’ to them—see how intelligent and quick of apprehension they are in spite of the oppression they have endured” and not be “altogether persuaded to be such as I am—an Abolitionist!” Though a pejorative in his own family, he now embraced the label and the duty it implied: “I shall be content to stay in the army,” he wrote, “so long as emancipation is the result. So long as the gigantic evil of slavery exists, there can be no permanent peace!”⁴²

Heedful of both practical and moral demands to strike at slavery, Dingley now urged comprehensive emancipation. Recent legislation represented important progress, yet slavery remained in place everywhere unoccupied by Union troops. Without slaves on the home front to raise supplies rebel ranks would be depleted—“a result,” Dingley argued, “which can be accomplished if our government only wills it.” Rumor of a pending proclamation of emancipation gave Dingley heart. The *New York Tribune* even suggested an emancipation proclamation would follow the next Union victory. With the president tilting at “the tremendous pressure at the North and in the West upon him in relation” to the question of emancipation, as Dingley described it, this was no time to remain passive. At a moment when it appeared “every honest hater of slavery in the country has it in his power to aid in making that decision an upright one,” Dingley execrated the many months of conciliation that had prevented any interference with slavery. “The one primary, radical, efficient cause of the rebellion,” he wrote with impassioned invective, “its main material support, its animating genius or demon, without which the revolt would have no motive or impulse, was not to be touched except with furred gloves and nicest delicacy.” He continued, “Slavery, the hideous monster, which is hurling these masses of brothers and fellow-men in wild and sanguinary fury upon each other, was to be allowed to lie concealed in its horrible pit, grinning all the while with a kind of fiendish exultation at the insane folly of its victims.” The time for tolerating such myopic moderation had passed. “What the country has wanted,” he claimed, “and what it now demands, is war in earnest; war on war principles; war against the

causes of the mischief and war with an idea at the heart of it, which is the only excuse for any war." That idea was emancipation.⁴³

"Some bullets are made of proclamations"

On September 22, 1862, Abraham Lincoln announced his intention to issue a proclamation of emancipation. Unless the Confederacy capitulated, it would be put into effect on the first of January 1863. "The Morning Dawns," Dingley hailed in the *Journal*, commending this preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. "The darkness which has so long hung over our national horizon, has been suddenly dispelled, and is succeeded to-day by a glorious sun-light." In the preliminary proclamation he perceived "the death-knell of the hopes of rebellion for Foreign Intervention." With the fate of slavery explicitly at stake, he felt assured that Great Britain would not come to the aid of the Confederacy. Nor would divine providence. "We fight now," he asserted, "with God and humanity clearly on our side."⁴⁴

While Dingley praised the President's announcement, he understood the importance of remaining vigilant over the next one hundred days—through January 1, 1863. He did so by affirming bipartisan support for emancipation, as well as by identifying the positive consequences of the preliminary proclamation was already having, from unnerving the Confederacy to the role of newly-organized black regiments. Even the threat of emancipation had fundamentally altered the terms of the war: the Union was now, he thought, on firmer footing, militarily and morally.

Eschewing claims that emancipation divided the Union, Dingley reported that the announcement of the preliminary proclamation met with approval from both entrenched enemies of slavery as well as more conservative quarters. Predictably, some Maine Democrats carped. But Dingley minimized such malcontents as merely reflective of a mischievous "semi-secessionist" minority, given most prominent voice regionally in the *Eastern Argus* of Portland, a Democratic publication he periodically disparaged. The nation's resolve, he insisted, was palpable and now inured to anti-abolitionist ravings. "There is nerve and union in our councils," he wrote, "the Union cause was never juster, or more God-bid-

den to glorious triumph!" It was instructive, as Dingley noted, that during a recent furlough from New Orleans, Franklin S. Nickerson, a Democratic officer with the 14th Maine, had endorsed the preliminary proclamation. With such examples, Dingley depicted a Union home front satisfied with the preliminary proclamation and impatient for its full effects to be felt, an accounting that purposefully downplayed Democratic discontent with emancipation.⁴⁵

While even Democratic officers approved of the President's message, Dingley pointed out that southern leaders denounced it—proof of the potency of emancipation. Characterizing Confederate reactions as "a great deal of bluster, brag and froth," Dingley interpreted their "frantic and fearful" fulminations as evidence that the announcement had "struck at the heart of the rebellion." It would have been more troubling had southerners simply ignored the proclamation. "Let the rebels rave on!" he jeered. "The more they strike the empty air in retaliation," the more they confirmed the importance of emancipation. Reactions to the preliminary proclamation, he argued, indicated widespread tensions within the Confederacy. "The rebels quake with apprehension," Dingley assured his *Journal* readers, "and express fears that it will be the means of producing a counter revolution in the States, and the soldiers desire to return to their homes to protect their families." Fear of slave insurrection pulsed from Virginia through the Carolinas—"one of the multiplying signs," he quipped, that "some bullets are made out of proclamations."⁴⁶

Next was to enjoy the fruits of African American troops bearing rifles and firing bullets of their own. Anticipating the advantage black troops would provide, Dingley relished reports from South Carolina and Louisiana where brigades would soon be "ready to bear the brunt of an action, or do the hard work of intrenching." The many pieces he published on black soldiers that autumn portrayed positive reports of troop recruitment and expressed optimism about their potential to turn the war in favor of the Union. In the words of a *Journal* correspondent writing from Missouri, the three thousand contrabands encamped nearby represented new hope for the Union: "These men will fight, and no man in the army of Missouri who has seen their eyes lighted with the new idea of Freedom, for a moment doubts them." Accounts extolled

the effectiveness of the newly organized 1st South Carolina Volunteers, comprised mainly of former slaves. During an early expedition into Georgia, the troops reportedly fought in three skirmishes, captured prisoners, destroyed “several extensive salt works,” a commodity in great demand in the South, and returned to Port Royal with twenty former slaves. Another mission to Doboy Sound, between Savannah and Jacksonville, witnessed three black soldiers wounded and the confiscation of “200,000 feet of sawed lumber.” Dispatched to Darien, on the Georgia coast, the men faced fire, but “not a negro flinched.” They returned fusillade “so effectively,” it was reported, “as to kill from thirty or forty rebels.” The black troops’ successes impressed Maine soldiers, including a member of the 8th Maine stationed in South Carolina who was especially pleased at the amount of Confederate property seized.⁴⁷

Dingley suggested the contributions of black soldiers reassured the northern home front during the latter weeks of 1862. “We are again returning to our old confidence that cause of the Union will prevail, and wondering why we ever doubted,” he remarked. “We have an Apocalypse. It is the Proclamation of Emancipation.” While soldiers appreciated the replenished ranks, others on the Maine home front took comfort in the righteousness of emancipation. The Thanksgiving service held at Pine Street Chapel in Lewiston that November reinforced the belief that the Union would be “preserved and perpetuated” because it was in the process of purging its sin. “Now that we are boldly arraying ourselves against the despotism of slavery,” Lewiston minister Uriah Balkam intoned, there was “no doubt of the final success of our cause.” With January 1, 1863, approaching, Dingley also described the moral imperative of emancipation as an expression of God’s will. That day, he predicted, “will be thereafter the holy of holies.” Although 1862 began in gloom, hope reigned for 1863. “To-morrow the President will declare Freedom to the Oppressed, and put the government unmistakably on the side of Justice and right,” Dingley wrote on the final day of 1862. “There are certain great landmarks of Progress in history. One of these will be the day on which the President returns to the black race the rights that never ought to have been taken away.” On this auspicious day, he believed, “we shall begin to see a true national



In 1862, Franklin S. Nickerson served as an officer rising in the ranks of the 14th Maine. Nickerson, a Democrat, was outspoken that fall in support of the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. Nelson Dingley Jr. considered this an important perspective to highlight in the *Lewiston Daily Evening Journal*, because it demonstrated both bipartisan and military support for emancipation as a war measure. Courtesy of the Maine State Archives, Augusta, Maine. https://digitalmaine.com/arc_civilwarportraits/1557/

life—founded on the realization of the Declaration of Independence.”⁴⁸

“The Day of Jubilee”

Awaiting word of the Emancipation Proclamation, students at the Maine State Seminary rang the bell for an hour on New Year’s Day in “grateful testimony to the great expected proclamation of Freedom.” Dingley considered it appropriate that “the day was given up to the Students as a holiday,” an occasion he predicted would be long remembered for delivering “the Nation from the curse of slavery.” When word of its announcement flashed across telegraph

wires during the afternoon, loyal citizens, as the reports Dingley published indicated, were prepared. One hundred guns were fired in salute at Pittsburgh and Haverhill, Massachusetts. The chapel bell rang at Dartmouth College for three hours. African Americans held jubilee celebrations in Boston, San Francisco, and Portland, Maine. In Lewiston, Charles Coffin, the famed *Boston Journal* correspondent known to readers as “Carleton,” esteemed the proclamation in a special lecture on the progress of the war. Elsewhere in the state, rousing commemorations demonstrated, in Dingley’s words, “how the heart of the North beats.”⁴⁹

Declaring it “The Day of Jubilee,” Dingley equated January 1, 1863, with July 4, 1776, as epochal moments establishing both “Nation and liberty.” The Emancipation Proclamation citizens cheered that afternoon declared the military need of freeing all slaves in Confederate-held territory and enlisting African Americans in the Union war. Dingley also heralded the moral rectitude evident in the president’s description of the proclamation as a just measure. “This nation,” Dingley wrote, “from this time henceforth recognizes the hand of God of justice in the affairs of nations.”⁵⁰

The Emancipation Proclamation merited all manner of praise, because it finally recast the Union war as the fight for freedom—for civilization—for which Dingley and likeminded Mainers had longed. Newly elected Republican governor Abner Coburn was among those who shared the *Journal* editor’s faith in the proclamation, predicting progress now that emancipation was official Union policy. “If, as a people, we stand by” the President’s proclamation, Coburn assured Mainers in his inaugural message in January 1863, “we shall conquer and the nation will come through the fiery ordeal through which we are passing, purified, strengthened, invincible.” Publishing soldiers’ laudatory letters, Dingley highlighted celebra-

tions of emancipation among Maine’s enlisted men. “January 1st—This is a day whose remembrance can never die,” wrote a soldier with the 23rd Maine encamped in Great Falls, Maryland. “It is one which will ever stand out in bold relief on the pages of history as the turning point of this great rebellion and the birth-day of four million souls to liberty.” Writing from Coosaw Island, on the low and marshy South Carolina coast, a soldier in the 8th Maine rejoiced that “‘Yankee’ has become a word synonymous with Freedom,” pledging that he would “not sheath the sword till it has severed the shackles of every slave and pierced the vitals of oppression.” While one member of the 14th Maine considered slavery “the sum of all villainies,” General O. O. Howard admitted having once been “able to apologize for slavery.” But he was no longer willing to sacrifice his country for the Confederacy’s “darling little institution.” By this stage, he explained in a letter Dingley reprinted, “we have no alternative; we must destroy slavery root and branch.”⁵¹

The Maine general’s affirmation of the proclamation accorded with the emancipationist Union war Dingley endorsed from the outset. Over the first twenty months of war, he expounded in the *Journal* on the practicality of emancipation, emphasized its broad-based support, and ultimately espoused its moral imperative. Orchestrating the publication of hundreds of such items, Dingley employed the *Journal* to legitimize emancipationist war aims from 1861 through the President’s proclamation. This record reveals a less heralded dimension of the Union war. It suggests the significance of emancipationist sentiment on the Maine home front and a determination to embrace measures weakening slavery as practical means to preserve the Union that found favor across party lines. To the likes of Nelson Dingley Jr., the Union war was of necessity an emancipationist war, and they hailed the day Abraham Lincoln declared it so.

NOTES

1. *Lewiston Daily Evening Journal* (hereafter *LDEJ*), 29 August 1863.

2. On the origins of the term emancipationist see John Stauffer, “The Union of Abolitionists and Emancipationists in Civil War-Era Massachusetts,” in Matthew Mason, et al., eds., *Massachusetts and the Civil War: The Commonwealth and National Disunion* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015), 9–46; *Lewiston Falls Journal* (hereafter *LFJ*), 18 September 1862 (quotation).

3. Representative examples include Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010), Louis Masur, *Lincoln's Hundred Days: The Emancipation Proclamation and the War for Union* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), and David S. Cecelski, *The Fire of Freedom: Abraham Galloway and the Slaves' Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); James Oakes, *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2013); Chandra Manning, *What this Cruel War Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 2007); Douglas R. Egerton, "'A Measure Alike Military and Philanthropic': Historians and the Emancipation Proclamation," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (January 2013); 137, no. 1, 95–114; Phillip Shaw Paludan, *"A People's Contest": The Union and the Civil War, 1861–1865* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988); J. Matthew Gallman, *The North Fights the Civil War: The Home Front* (Chicago: Ivan Dee, 1994); Three local studies of northern communities that briefly describe how citizens in Franklin County, Pennsylvania; Putnam County, Indiana; and New Bedford, Massachusetts, respectively, reacted to the prospect of emancipation are Edward L. Ayers, *In the Presence of Mine Enemies: The Civil War in the Heart of America, 1859–1863* (New York: Norton, 2003), 216–219; Nicole Etcheson, *A Generation at War: The Civil War in a Northern Community* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2011), 152–154; Earl F. Mulderink III, *New Bedford's Civil War* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 100.
4. For example, see Jennifer L. Weber, *Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln's Opponents in the North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 76–77; For an emphasis on dissent on the Maine Civil War home front, see Crompton Burton, "'Another Copperhead Lie': Marcellus Emery and the Bangor Union and Democrat," in David B. Sachman, S. Kittrell Rushing, and Roy Morris Jr., eds., *Words at War: The Civil War and American Journalism* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2008), 179–187; Timothy Garrity, "'We Respect the Flag But . . .': Opposition to the Civil War in Down East Maine," *Maine History* 48, no. 1 (January 2014), 23–55; Richard S. Newman, "The Age of Emancipating Proclamations: Early Civil War Abolitionism and Its Discontents," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (January 2013); 137, no. 1, 33–55; William Slater, *The Life of James W. Grimes* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1876), 215 (quotation); Foner, *Fiery Trial*, 215.
5. Andrew S. Coopersmith, *Fighting Words: An Illustrated History of Newspaper Accounts of the Civil War* (New York: New Press, 2004), xv–xvi, 301, n. 6; For the evolution of newspapers into a dominant form of popular media during the nineteenth century, see Gerald J. Baldatsy, *The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992); The role of newspapers during the Civil War era is detailed in David B. Sachman, S. Kittrell Rushing, Debra Reddin van Tuyl, eds., *The Civil War and the Press* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2000); Lorman A. Ratner and Dwight L. Teeter Jr., *Fanatics and Fire-eaters: Newspapers and the Coming of the Civil War* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Sachman, Rushing, and Morris, eds., *Words at War*; Ford Risley, *Civil War Journalism* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praegar, 2012); David B. Sachman, ed., *The Press Divided: Newspaper Coverage of the Civil War* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2014).
6. On the *Bangor Whig's* treatment of emancipation, see John E. Dimeglio, "Civil War Bangor" (MA thesis, University of Maine, 1967), 29, 66–67; The most thorough overview of Maine politics and developments on the home front during the Civil War era remains Louis Clinton Hatch, *Maine: A History* (New York: The American Historical Society, 1919), 435–469; This work affirms the representative nature of Dingley's editorial outlook among Republicans and Union Democrats in Maine; Howard Cecil Perkins, ed., *Northern Editorials on Secession*, vols. 1 and 2 (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1942); Silvana R. Siddali, *From Property to Person: Slavery and the Confiscation Acts, 1861–1862* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005); Foner, *Fiery Trial*, 227.
7. Letters collected in *Yankee Correspondence*, to offer an example, indicate that a swath of New Englanders espoused support for emancipation in 1861 and 1862; Nina Silber and Mary Beth Sievens, eds., *Yankee Correspondence: Civil War Letters between New England Soldiers and the Home Front* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996), 56, 59, 61–62, 69–70, 90–92; For Democratic politics in Maine during the Civil War era, see Richard W. Judd, Edwin A. Churchill, and Joel W. Eastman, *Maine: The Pine Tree State from Prehistory to Present* (Orono, ME: University of Maine Press, 1995), 353–354.
8. When copies of *LEDJ* are not available, I cite *LFJ*, a weekly publication that contained much of the content from the daily editions; Nelson Dingley, *An Autobiography of Nelson Dingley, Jr.* (Lewiston, ME: Lewiston Journal, 1874), 19–41; Edward Nelson Dingley, *The Life and Times of Nelson Dingley, Jr.* (Kalamazoo: Ihling Brothers and Everard, 1902), 31–33, 37, 39–60; Multiple newspapers were published in Lewiston during the early 1860s, including the *Democratic Advocate* and the *Lewiston Republican*. Of these, only the *Journal* survived through the Civil War, becoming among the most influential and widely read in the state; Joseph Griffin, *History of the Press of Maine* (Brunswick, ME: The Press, 1872), 201–205.
9. *LDEJ*, 20, 22, and 25 April 1861; For the early development of Lewiston, see Douglas Hodgkin, *Frontier to Industrial City: Lewiston Town Politics, 1768–1863* (Topsham, ME: Just Write Books, 2008); Historian Edward

Schrivver found no active antislavery societies in Androscoggin County on the eve of the Civil War; Edward Schriver, *Go Free: The Antislavery Impulse in Maine, 1833–1855* (Orono, ME: University of Maine Press, 1970); The Maine State Seminary was renamed Bates College in 1863; On the early history of the college, including the antislavery sentiment of its founders, see Emeline Cheney, *The Story of the Life and Work of Oren B. Cheney: Founder and the First President of Bates College* (Boston: Morning Star, 1907); For northerners' equation of Union with freedom, see Earl J. Hess, *Liberty, Virtue, and Progress: Northerners and Their War for the Union* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 4–5, 26–29; Randall C. Jimerson, *The Private Civil War: Popular Thought During the Sectional Conflict* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994), 30, 35–36; For comparative claims regarding liberty in contemporary northern newspapers, see Coopersmith, *Fighting Words*, 35–40; Alonzo Garcelon to Israel Washburn, 24 April 1861, Series III, Box 2, *Garcelon Family Papers*, Edmund S. Muskie Archives, Bates College, Lewiston, Maine (quotation); Theodore Gerrish, a member of the 20th Maine, likewise depicted the conflict in terms of a fight between slavery and liberty; Theodore Gerrish, *Army Life: A Private's Reminiscences of the Civil War* (Portland, ME: Hoyt, Fogg & Donham, 1882), 177.

10. Example sermons are found in *LDEJ*, 27 (all quotations) and 29 April and 4 May 1861; For northern Christian denominations that sought emancipation as a war aim from 1861, see John R. McKivigan, *The War against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches, 1830–1865* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 188–190; *LDEJ*, 24 and 27 April 1861.

11. *LDEJ*, 9 May 1861.

12. James G. Blaine, *Twenty Years of Congress*, vol. 1 (Norwich, CT: Henry Bill, 1886), 341 (quotation); Blaine edited two Maine newspapers during the 1850s and early 1860s, the *Kennebec Journal*, of Augusta, and the *Portland Advertiser*; On Republicans' anticipation that war would weaken slavery, see Hans L. Trefousse, *The Radical Republicans: Lincoln's Vanguard for Racial Justice* (Knopf, 1969), 203–208; Oakes, *Freedom National*, 79–85; Both Republican and Democratic newspapers tied the outbreak of war to the destruction of slavery, confirming Dingley's assertion. A sampling includes Perkins, ed., *Northern Editorials*, vol. 1, 339–441, 463–464, and vol. 2, 811–812, 820–824, 835–836.

13. *LDEJ*, 25 and 30 April, 27 May, and 25 June 1861 (quotation); On the new use of the term “contraband,” see Kate Masur, “‘A Rare Phenomenon of Philological Vegetation’: The Word ‘Contraband’ and the Meanings of Emancipation in the United States,” *Journal of American History* 93 (March 2007), 1050–1084.

14. *LDEJ*, 10, 11, and 12 June 1861.

15. Louis Masur, *Lincoln's Hundred Days*, 26; *LDEJ* 22 October 1861.

16. *LDEJ*, 12 August 1861 (quotation); Robert J. Cook, *Civil War Senator: William Pitt Fessenden and the Fight to Save the American Republic* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011), 137; Historians have argued that Bull Run influenced the rise of emancipationist perspectives during the summer of 1861, an outlook that James Blaine and Vice President Hannibal Hamlin, of Paris, Maine, shared; James M. McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 70–72; Oakes, *Freedom National*, 123–128; Blaine, *Twenty Years*, vol. 1, 342–343; Charles Eugene Hamlin, *Life and Times of Hannibal Hamlin* (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1899), 423; On the popular response to the Confiscation Act of 1861, see Siddali, *Property to Person*, 61–62, 66, 85.

17. *LDEJ*, 3 and 15 (quotation) October 1861; For similar responses to the Frémont Proclamation among Union soldiers, see James McPherson, *What They Fought For, 1861–1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994), 56.

18. *LDEJ*, 13 September 1861.

19. Hatch, *Maine*, 443; McPherson, *Struggle for Equality*, 72–76.

20. *LDEJ*, 7 and 11 September 1861 (quotation); Dingley, *Life and Times*, 59–60.

21. *LDEJ*, 16 October 1861; For a Mainer who expressed this outlook, see Blaine, *Twenty Years*, vol. 1, 342.

22. The use of a degrading term such as “Sambu” indicates the debasing racial ideology found among even white northerners who opposed slavery. On white New Englanders' perceptions of African Americans, see David Cecere, “Carrying the Home Front to War: Soldiers, Race, and New England Culture during the Civil War” in Paul Cimbala and Randall Miller, eds., *Union Soldiers and the Northern Home Front* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 293–323; *LDEJ*, 19 and 22 (all quotations) October and 1 November 1861.

23. *LDEJ*, 23 October (third quotation), 5 and 19 (second quotation) November, and 21 December (first quotation) 1861; What C. F. Monroe described was no anomaly. Other Maine soldiers' accounts of receiving aid from African Americans include William Edward Seaver Whitman, *Maine in the War for the Union: A History of the Part Borne by Maine Troops in the Suppression of the American Rebellion* (Lewiston, ME: N. Dingley Jr.

and Company, 1865), 212, 355; Gerrish, *Army Life*, 364–365; Edward Parsons Tobie, *History of the First Maine Cavalry, 1861–1865* (Boston: Emery and Hughes, 1887), 63, 70; Henry Augustus Shorey, *The Story of the Maine Fifteenth* (Bridgeton, ME: Press of the Bridgeton News, 1890), 32; Hannibal Augustus Johnson, *The Sword of Honor: A Story of the Civil War* (Worcester: Blanchard Press, 1906), 27–35; Beverly Hayes Kallgren and James L. Crouthamel, eds., “Dear Friend Anna”: *The Civil War Letters of a Common Soldier from Maine* (Orono: University of Maine Press, 1992), 22–23.

24. LDEJ, 11 November and 6, 7, and 26 December 1861; Dingley was not alone in trafficking in false claims that the Confederacy was arming enslaved people. For the impact rumors of black Confederate troops had on emancipationist arguments, see Glenn David Brasher, *The Peninsula Campaign and the Necessity of Emancipation: African Americans and the Fight for Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 49–54; Although Dingley cited Jackson’s order to affirm a tradition of relying on black troops, the United States did not actually adopt a full-scale enlistment of black troops; Alan Taylor, *The Internal Enemy: Slavery and the War in Virginia, 1772–1832* (New York: Norton, 2013), 323–324.

25. LDEJ, 2 November (first quotation) and 9 December (second and third quotation) 1861.

26. LDEJ, 12 November (third quotation) and 5 (second quotation) and 21 (fourth quotation) December 1861; H. Draper Hunt, *Hannibal Hamlin of Maine, Lincoln’s First Vice President* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1969), 159 (first quotation).

27. Dingley, *Life and Times*, 60–63.

28. LDEJ, 3 January 1862.

29. LDEJ, 4, 6 (first quotation), 8 (second quotation), and 10 (third quotation) January 1862; “Report on a Resolve on National Affairs and the Preservation of Constitutional Government,” Series 1862 GY, Box 448, Folder 10, Maine Legislative Records, Maine State Archives (hereafter MSA), Augusta, Maine.

30. LDEJ, 9, 11 (quotation), 14, 16, and 25 January 1862; For evidence confirming Maine troops’ distress, see I. Richardson to Alonzo Garcelon, 16 January 1862, Series III, Box 2, *Garcelon Family Papers*; Shorey, *Maine Fifteenth*, 27; Gerrish, *Army Life*, 48.

31. LDEJ, 17 (first quotation) and 29 (second quotation) January, 7, 10 (third quotation), and 13 (fourth quotation) February, and 18 March 1862; “Report on the Resolve Relating to the National Administration and the Conduct of the War,” Series 1862 GY, Box 451, Folder 5, Maine Legislative Records, MSA; For the published law, see “Resolves Relating to National Affairs,” *Acts and Resolves Passed by the Forty-First Legislature of the State of Maine* (Augusta, ME: Stevens and Sayward, 1862), 182–183; On the faction of Democrats who opposed the legislation, see Hatch, *Maine*, 446.

32. LDEJ, 1, 11, 20, 24, and 25 March 1862; LFJ, 10 and 24 April, 15 May, and 5 June 1862; On the abolition of slavery in Washington, DC, see Kate Masur, *An Example for All the Land: Emancipation and the Struggle over Equality in Washington, D.C.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

33. LDEJ, 14 January (first and second quotation) and 25 March (third quotation) 1862; LFJ, 17 April 1862.

34. LDEJ, 14 January (first quotation), 5 February (second quotation), and 12 June (third quotation) 1862; LFJ, 12 June 1862.

35. LDEJ, 11 January, 28 February (second quotation), 1 and 18 (third–fifth quotations) March, and 29 May (first quotation) 1862; LFJ, 29 May 1862.

36. LDEJ, 1, 8, and 29 May 1862; LFJ, 8 (first quotation) and 29 (second and third quotation) May 1862; On northern states pressing the Lincoln administration on emancipationist war aims in 1862, see Stephen Engle, “It is Time for the States to Speak to the Federal Government’: The Altoona Conference and Emancipation,” *Civil War History* 58 (December 2012), 416–450.

37. LFJ, 3 (third quotation) and 24 (fourth quotation) July and 25 September (second quotation) 1862; Hunt, *Hannibal Hamlin*, 161 (first quotation); Hatch, *Maine*, 446–447.

38. LFJ, 17 (third quotation [first half]) April and 3 (third [second half]–sixth quotations) and 24 (first and second quotations) July 1862.

39. LFJ, 31 July (first quotation), 7 August (third–fifth quotations), and 18 September (second quotation) 1862.

40. LFJ, 31 July (first and second quotations) and 14 August (third–fifth quotations) 1862; On northern intellectuals’ response to the Union war, see George Frederickson, *The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965).

41. LDEJ, 15 January 1862; LFJ, 31 July, 14 August, 18 September (fourth–seventh quotations), and 16 October (first–third quotations) 1862; Neal Dow, *The Reminiscences of Neal Dow: Recollections of Eighty Years* (Portland,

ME: Evening Express, 1898), 671–672; On the recruitment of black soldiers in 1862, see Joseph T. Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1990), 6–9.

42. *LFJ*, 14 August 1862; This correspondent was not singular. For another Maine soldier moved to condemn slavery, see Peter H. Buckingham, ed., *All's for the Best: The Civil War Reminiscences of Daniel W. Sawtelle, Eighth Maine Volunteer Infantry* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 211, 213.

43. *LFJ*, 7 (first quotation), 14, 21, and 28 (second and third quotations) August and 18 September (fourth and fifth quotations) 1862.

44. *LFJ*, 25 September 1862.

45. *LFJ*, 2 October 1862.

46. *LDEJ*, 4 (first and second quotations) and 9 (third quotation) October and 4 December (fourth quotation) 1862; On the tensions within the Confederacy that the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation exacerbated, see Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 195, 268.

47. *LDEJ*, 4 (first quotation), 18, and 29 October and 4 (second quotation), 8, 14, 18, 26 (fifth and sixth quotations), and 29 (third and fourth quotations) November and 3, 5, and 12 December 1862; The record of the South Carolina Volunteers convinced many northerners to accept the contributions of black soldiers; Stephen V. Ash, *Firebrand of Liberty: The Story of Two Black Regiments that Changed the Course of the Civil War* (New York: Norton, 2008).

48. *LDEJ*, 28 November (second and third quotations) and 8 (first quotation), 30 (fourth quotation), and 31 (fifth and sixth quotations) December 1862.

49. *LDEJ*, 1 (first and second quotation), 3, 5, 6, 7 (third quotation), 12, and 15 January 1863.

50. *LDEJ*, 2 January 1863.

51. *LDEJ*, 9 (first quotation), 14 (second and third quotations), 22 (sixth and seventh quotations), 23 (fourth quotation), and 29 (fifth quotation) January 1863; The memoirs of William Berry Lapham and Theodore Gerrish offer additional examples of Maine soldiers who considered the eradication of slavery a paramount outcome of the Civil War. “There is no act of my life that I look back upon with so much satisfaction and pride,” wrote Lapham, “as to the humble part I bore in the war necessary to emancipate the slave”; William Berry Lapham, *My Recollections of the War of the Rebellion* (Augusta, ME: Burleigh and Flynt, 1892), 8; Of emancipation, Gerrish wrote that “were this the only result derived from the war, all freemen would say that it was not in vain”; Gerrish, *Army Life*, 362.