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Pro-Confederate Sympathy and Its Results in Northern Kentucky

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Abstract

During the Civil War, Kentucky was deeply divided in sentiment between Union and Confederate sympathies. Although these divides could be found anywhere, even within the smallest of towns, the population of some regions numerically favored one side or the other. Even so, there was always a vocal and active minority present, leading to political and even violent contention. This thesis seeks to understand the role that pro-Confederate sentiment played in northern Kentucky during the war. It will investigate how the region influenced the war and public sentiment statewide, and the nature of the conflict within. It will investigate geographic, social, and economic factors prior to the outbreak of conflict in hopes of better understanding the local culture these people were a part of, and thereby ascertain their viewpoint on the issues related to the war. Some important sources this study relies on include political results, personal accounts, newspaper articles, and the analysis of other historians.

Pro-Confederate Sympathy and Its Results in Northern Kentucky

The Civil War in northern Kentucky is one often forgotten. Because Kentucky quickly fell into Union hands, large battles were mainly avoided in the state. Those that took place were distant to the northern Kentucky counties. The proximity to Union Ohio and Indiana leads many to believe that northern Kentucky was also solidly pro-Union. While there was a significant pro-Union contingent, the truth is more complex. The Ohio, Kentucky, and Licking Rivers were conducive to travel and economic connection with the northern states, but northern Kentucky retained a unique and diverse culture throughout the war. Settled in large part by southerners, the rugged terrain of steep ridges and rocky creeks, along with the Ohio River's use as a thoroughfare to the Deep South, meant the culture was distinctly southern. In public life, the climate was often cordial and moderate, compared to that found in the New England and Deep South cities. However, there were many vocal and staunch supporters of both the Union and Confederacy. In the western portion of northern Kentucky, pro-Confederate sympathy was widespread, based on numerous factors, and active in its resistance to the Union army and government.

In understanding northern Kentucky's pro-Confederates, one must understand Kentucky's experience in the Civil War and northern Kentucky's relationship to the rest of the Commonwealth. Kentucky, as a border state, was caught between the Confederate and Union strongholds to the north and south. As a southern people, and one heavily invested in the institution of slavery, many Kentuckians were inclined to support the Confederate cause. Although the Union was not yet synonymous with abolition, southerners opposed a northern culture they assumed was determined to free the slaves. Many were alive who remembered a time when Kentucky was simply western Virginia. The Mississippi, Ohio, Cumberland, and

Tennessee Rivers all connected the state to important trade relationships with the Deep South. Early advocates of “states’ rights” doctrine had passed the Kentucky Resolutions in 1798.¹ Yet despite these ties, Kentucky also shared considerable interests with the Union. The Ohio River was a major artery of commerce, connecting Kentucky to northern industry. Early in its history, Pittsburgh, PA had been a staging ground for the frontiersmen who would come to conquer the wilderness and open Kentucky to wider settlement. Many voices were opposed to slavery, and at the very least secession. Kentucky had a tradition of political moderation, exemplified by Henry Clay and John J. Crittenden. Kentuckians were also proud of the service they had provided the Union since statehood. Since prominent service in the War of 1812, Kentuckians proved themselves as competent servants of the country and didn’t wish to risk their relationship within the Union. Many viewed secession as unthinkable, despite sharing most cultural links with the South.

Northern Kentucky was no different, although its proximity to Ohio and Indiana led to more direct contact with the north. The Licking River, which empties into the Ohio River across from Cincinnati, was the location of the major population centers in the region, including Covington and Newport. The surrounding hills were used in 1862 to repel Confederate attacks from the south. Numerous batteries were constructed by Cincinnatians on northern Kentucky soil. In day-to-day life, the connection of northern Kentucky to the north was even more obvious. Cincinnati was the major market for local agriculture, and also set-off point for travelers. Because northern Kentucky is bound on 3 sides by the river, many depended on it as an avenue of commerce. Traveling on the water was far easier than traveling over the ridges and

¹ Kentucky House of Representatives, *Kentucky Resolutions of 1798 and 1799*, Thomas Jefferson (Frankfort, KY: 1798, 1799).

down the valleys, and as a consequence people traveled across the river readily. Ferries were valuable assets, and were more numerous than those today. Thus, northern Kentuckians were well-acquainted with northerners and their culture, and somewhat dependent on them for commerce. Many troops were mustered in Cincinnati, and they and supplies were constantly shipped up and down the river. Northern Kentuckians, such as those in Petersburg and Carrollton, became accustomed to the presence of Union boats and soldiers traveling through. However, while northern Kentuckians were familiar with the north, and dependent upon it, such interactions also caused resentment, particularly as the war wore on.

Although not inherently indicative of position on pro-Confederate sympathy, the results of the 1860 election distinctly display that northern Kentucky at least leaned toward the South politically. John Bell, the Constitutional Unionist candidate for President, carried the state of Kentucky. He recognized southern grievances with the federal government, but opposed secession. Breckenridge, a respected native son, came second. He was a longtime politician, former Vice President, and member of Lexington's slave-holding aristocracy. He was the Deep South's favorite as a staunch states' rights advocate. Stephen Douglas, the northern Democrat, trailed badly, while Abraham Lincoln, born in the Bluegrass, received not even one percent of the popular vote. He represented the anti-slavery Republican party. Northern Kentucky, as with the state, was divided. In Gallatin, Grant, Carroll, Owen, Pendleton, and Trimble counties, Breckenridge won the popular vote. In Boone and Kenton Counties was Bell, while Douglas won Campbell.²

² Kenneth K. Williams and James Russell Harris, "Kentucky in 1860: A Statistical Overview," *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 103, no. 4 (Autumn 2005): 747-8.

This result is predictable with a proper understanding of the geography of the region. Kenton and Campbell Counties sit either side of the Licking River opposite the Ohio from Cincinnati. Boone and Pendleton Counties briefly border Ohio to the north, while the other counties border only Indiana or other Kentucky counties. It seems clear that proximity to Cincinnati helped to shape 1860 voting patterns. In the southern counties, such as Trimble, Carroll, and Owen, the Kentucky River connected them to the inner Bluegrass. The Licking River penetrated through Northeast Kentucky deep into the mountains. However, it quickly became difficult to navigate as one traveled upriver, and there were many limestone riffles, low water levels, and driftwood snags to complicate matters.³ As a result, commerce along the Licking was not significant enough to allow Cincinnati cultural influence to reach south beyond the banks of the Ohio. In Boone, Gallatin, Grant, Carroll, Trimble, Owen, and Pendleton Counties, Lincoln received only 4 votes collectively.⁴ The counties of Indiana and Ohio bordering the region were split between Lincoln and Douglas. Lincoln carried Hamilton County, Ohio (Cincinnati). Boone County was particularly politically important. Outside of Covington and Newport, Boone County was the major population, economic, and slave center of northern Kentucky. As a result, there was much political activity there. For example, many political rallies were held. In a speech in Florence, Breckinridge spoke to a three- to four-thousand person crowd.⁵ Douglas delivered speeches in Cincinnati and southern Indiana, which many Kentuckians attended. However, there were more often “basket-meetings,” or large picnics, barbeques, and other public events, that rallied support and solidarity among constituents. These

³ Moses King, *King's Pocket-Book of Cincinnati* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard College, 1879), 47.

⁴ Williams and Harris, “Kentucky in 1860,” 747-8.

⁵ Lewis Loder, *The Loder Diary, 1857 – 1903*, July 24, 1858, https://bcp.ent.sirsi.net/client/en_US/search/asset/32407/0.

facts do not prove that northern Kentucky was necessarily in favor of secession. However, they demonstrate the profound political differences between Northern Kentucky and the north bank of the river.

Northern Kentuckians were essentially caught between the Union and the Confederacy. Culturally diverse, Newport and Covington were described in 1861 as “Union to a man,” with “American flags” “flying from every housetop.”⁶ This contrasted with Carroll and Trimble Counties, which had Confederate flags proudly displayed on the Ohio River bluffs to taunt boats “descending the Ohio loaded with troops.”⁷ As a result of this great diversity within such close proximity, there was little support for the outbreak of violence. A civil war, then, was not favored, and there were many contingents that sought to mend the rift between the two cultures. Border state conferences were called to develop a course of action for avoiding armed conflict.⁸ Even among those favoring secession, peace was a paramount issue. For example, Mary Beckley Bristow, a pro-Confederate Boone County woman, begged of God to “save our country from a civil war.”⁹ Although she supports the Confederacy if it must go to war, she displays no eagerness at the prospect: “O Lord, if consistent with thy will cause a peaceable separation. I suffer not my country to be desolated by war’s devastating hand.”¹⁰

Although civility diminished as the war went on, there was significant effort by both pro-Union and pro-Confederate sympathizers to maintain cordial relations. A.C. Dicken, from

⁶ Cincinnati *Daily Enquirer*, February 23, 1862.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Loder, *Diary*, May 4, 1861.

⁹ Mary Beckley Bristow, *Records*, March 8, 1861.
<http://freepages.rootsweb.com/~greenwolf/genealogy/mary/06-1861.htm>.

¹⁰ Ibid., February 24, 1861.

Campbell County, records a rather leisurely experience avoiding the Home Guards. He had already joined the Confederates, but enjoyed the company of his neighbors before he left home. Some he identifies as “good Southern people,” but he also records “cut[ting] around a good while among the Union People.”¹¹ Although on different sides of the conflict, they evidently chose to maintain peace within their community. People were also allowed to share their opinions openly without assault. Lewis Loder of Petersburg, Kentucky records many meetings of Union and Secessionist men without any violence. For example, he records “states’ rights” and Union meetings in southern Indiana and northern Boone County. Following word of Virginia’s secession, local residents from both southern Indiana and northern Kentucky convened “a meeting for the purpose of adopting some plan to secure the people of Aurora Lawrenceburg & Petersburg against violence & mobs which now threaten the country in consequence of the now existing war.”¹² Cooperation to limit the effects of war was favored, despite ideological differences. Conservation of the status quo was preferential to war, and therefore most people worked toward that end, rather than risk a conflict whose outcome was far from certain. Yet despite a desire for peace, people still held opinions and organized based on them.

In many ways, Northern Kentuckians expressed support of the Confederate cause. Although no statistics exist to quantify the exact number of people who supported the Confederacy, there are many records that demonstrate its prevalence. One was Mary Beckley Bristow, who eloquently and emphatically demonstrated her disdain of the Union. On February 24th, 1861, she entered in her diary: “I can see no good reason why the South should not

¹¹ A.C. Dicken, *A.C. Dicken Civil War Diary, Vol. 1*, September 20, 1862, and September 29, 1862. <http://www.kyhistory.com/cdm/ref/collection/MS/id/12097>.

¹² Loder, *Diary*, April 20, 1861.

peaceably secede from the Union, which in reality has been no real union for years past. The Senate and congress of the United States have met annually at Washington City to quarrel... Then of course it is far better to separate.”¹³ There were essentially two stripes of pro-Confederate sentiment. One was a cultural identification with the South that meant a person sympathized with the other people of the South, forming a collective mentality that garnered loyalty not closely related to ideology. This form was a less obvious but more prevalent form of support, although it still organized the culture and motivated action. It was comprised of people who faced the same issues as other southerners. Although they didn’t necessarily agree with the Confederacy’s actions ethically, they ultimately supported the Confederacy out of self-interest. The other stripe, which is easier to trace, was one of blatant political support for the rebellious states. While the former may sympathize with the Confederacy because it was made up of fellow southerners, the latter agreed with their actions on an ideological level. In her statement, Ms. Bristow eloquently relates both. Politically, she supports the right of the states to secede from the union, and considers it justified in the defense of liberty. At the same time, she differentiates between the Union and Confederacy on a cultural level, referring to them as the North and South respectively. Thus, a conflation of political support of the Confederacy and cultural membership of the South often took hold, and members of both stripes formed a practical coalition to oppose the Union.

Northern Kentuckians identified with the South, displaying anti-northern prejudices and voicing the same issues that other Southerners had. Bristow demonstrated the connection that many northern Kentuckians had to the South. “My every feeling is with the South. Their

¹³ Bristow, *Records*, February 24, 1861.

interest is ours. With them we should stand and fall.”¹⁴ Sectionalism, and not simply loyalty to Kentucky, is on full display. Her grandparents had come to Kentucky from Virginia. She considered Virginia fondly, remembering it as “Old Virginia, the Mother of Kentucky.”¹⁵ She described the Union armies in Kentucky the same way as those in Virginia, as “Northern invaders of our soil.”¹⁶ Yet despite this, she, along with many Kentuckians, preferred to avoid secession and civil war. The cultural view of the cohesion of the South was evident at that time. For example, Loder in his diary often refers to people who traveled to or arrived from “South,” rather than making any particular note of state or city.¹⁷ He himself received a news publication called *The Spirit of the South* published in Louisville.¹⁸ Bristow, in 1862, described Camp Chase, in Columbus, Ohio, to be a “foreign prison.”¹⁹ Even Union officer Charles Whittlesey wrote in 1861 that “the people on the opposite shores of the Ohio River have peculiarities that are almost national.”²⁰ These examples demonstrate the potency of the southern collective mentality.

People chose sides even if they opposed war in their backyards. Many viewed slavery as a states’ rights issue, and identified any anti-slavery rhetoric as serious policy proposals northern politicians in the Union would like to impose. Bristow, for example, wrote “ambitious demagogues, combined with abolitionism, is to all human appearance about to destroy the finest

¹⁴ Bristow, *Records*, April 22, 1861.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, June 23, 1861.

¹⁶ Bristow, *Records*, March 12, 1862.

¹⁷ Loder, *Diary*, August 31, 1861.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, April 16, 1859.

¹⁹ Bristow, *Records*, January 1, 1862.

²⁰ Charles Whittlesey, “An Episode of the Rebellion,” in *Magazine of Western History*, vol. 1, ed. William W. Williams (Cleveland: 145 St. Clair Street, November 1884 – April 1885), 533.

fabric of government that was ever woven by human hands.”²¹ She firmly places the blame for war at the hands of radical abolitionists who irresponsibly rouse the northern people into an anti-southern fervor. The lack of political support for Lincoln has already been demonstrated. However, the true disdain for his character was far more potent than what casting a vote for another candidate can convey. Bristow referred to Lincoln: “I believe him to be one of those deceitful, hardheaded persons who would overturn a world (if they could do it without personal detriment) to accomplish their fanatical bigotry.”²² As northern (what would become pro-Union) supremacy gained in Washington, pro-southern (what would become pro-Confederate) sympathizers became disillusioned and more combative toward the government, questioning its legitimacy. The South had a long tradition of opposition to a powerful federal government. Appealing to that memory was a simple and powerful way that stirred anti-northern sentiment and justified consequential actions.

Northern Kentucky Slave Society

Without question, the institution of slavery served as a powerful economic and cultural tie to the South that influenced the way northern Kentuckians viewed the war. Slavery was an important part of northern Kentucky society, having been ingrained in the lives of Northern Kentuckians since its settlement. The first instance of slavery in Boone County came as early as 1780.²³ By 1810, one-third of all Boone County families owned slaves.²⁴ In 1840, for example,

²¹ Bristow, *Records*, January 1, 1861.

²² Bristow, *Records*, March 8, 1861.

²³ John Tanner, *The Narrative of John Tanner “The Falcon,”* ed. Edwin James and Charles Daudert (Kalamazoo, MI: Hansa-Hewlett Publishing Company, 2011), 35.

²⁴ Paul Tanner, “Slavery in Boone County, Kentucky (And its Aftermath),” in *Boone County, Kentucky* (Frankfort, KY: Paul Tanner, 1994), 2. https://bcp.ent.sirsi.net/client/en_US/search/asset/33197/0.

over 20% of Boone County residents were enslaved.²⁵ Other counties had lesser numbers of slaves, and the prevalence of slavery in each county corresponds in some way to their 1860 voting patterns. Those with more slaves tended to support Breckenridge or at least Bell, while Campbell, with one of the smallest slave populations in the state, supported Douglas. Although anti-slavery was not synonymous with the Union cause, many in fact believed that slavery would be safest outside the Union, with its influential and vocal detractors. Mary Bristow held just such an opinion: “The Abolitionist portion of the North, seem determined to trample on the rights of the South, and the South are just as determined not to be trampled on. Then of course it is far better to separate.”²⁶ Slavery, then was a tradition that white society had been founded on and maintained by, and pro-Confederate people were determined to preserve. Thus, the issue of slavery was one that affected political opinion in relation to support of the Confederacy.

Although slave labor was widely used in the state, it was in less demand than in the great plantation states of the Deep South. As a result, Northern Kentuckians relied on a very healthy slave trade with those regions along the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. They enabled easy shipment of slaves from Northern Kentucky to the Deep South. Lewis Loder records slaves sold “down the river” or “to the lower country” of Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi.²⁷ In 1850, 48% of Boone County’s slaves were fifteen or younger.²⁸ Among those who owned three to seven slaves, more were under fifteen than over.²⁹ Jane Bristow, who owned nineteen slaves in

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁶ Bristow, *Records*, February 24, 1861.

²⁷ Loder, *Diary*, October 25, 1859.

²⁸ Paul Tanner, *Boone County Slavery*, 8.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

1851, only owned four over the age of twenty.³⁰ These numbers demonstrate the prevalence of raising young slaves to be sold in the intra-national slave trade.

Sometimes the slave trade occurred in the opposite direction, demonstrating the interconnectedness of slavery and the close correspondence northern Kentuckians shared with fellow Southerners. The Emancipation Proclamation, issued January 1, 1863, outlawed slavery in the parts of Confederate states not yet under Union control. After the Proclamation, Loder records, “Norman Sebree brot home a contraband Negro Girl” from the South.³¹ This represents disregard for government authority in favor of upholding slavery, as well as the impressive organization of the slave trade. The prominence of the Underground Railroad through northern Kentucky and proximity to outspoken northern abolitionists led the people there to strongly empathize with people of other slave-holding regions who faced many of the same issues regarding slavery and its preservation.

An example of just such an issue was the significant number of runaway slaves passing through the region. Lewis Loder came into contact with slave hunters from Arkansas, Louisiana, and Tennessee. In general, they were aided in their apprehension of runaways, who were jailed until claimed by their owners. Kentuckians were determined to support the institution of slavery, and were willing to go to great lengths to do so even before the war. For example, in 1847, a group of Boone County residents tracked escaped slaves all the way to Cassopolis, Michigan. Upon locating them, they were met with a group of citizens, led by the sheriff, who apprehended them on kidnapping charges and released the slaves.³² Numerous similar examples involving

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

³¹ Loder, *Diary*, December 11, 1863.

³² “Infamous,” *Licking Valley Register*, September 3, 1847.

northern Kentuckians exist, and serve to demonstrate Kentuckians' determination to uphold slavery, as well as familiarity and willingness to contend with their staunchly anti-slavery counterparts in the north. Many in the southern portions of Indiana and Ohio supported the institution. Sharing close ties to their slave-holding neighbors on the south side of the river, they apprehended runaways. Kentuckians appreciated and rewarded such gestures.³³ The common acceptance of such a relationship created an environment in which violations of this social contract were particularly offensive. Those aiding escaped slaves were given fierce extra-legal punishments. For example, a trio of whites in Lawrenceburg, Indiana, were given a severe whipping for their efforts.³⁴ Lewis Loder recorded, "A Federal Soldier from Lawrenceburg tried to persuade off old John Norrises Negroes," enraging Norris enough that he "was agoin to shoot him."³⁵ Conflict over slavery caused violence when people chose to act on their sentiments.

Union Alienation

As the war wore on, northern Kentuckians became more polarized in their positions. As the Union solidified its control of the state, pro-Confederate sympathizers began to perceive increased abuses of their freedom. Although designed to provide peace and security, the implementation of martial law, which lasted from 1862 until after the war's end, vindicated many Kentuckians' anti-Union leanings. In Boone County, for example, Lewis Loder records that as early as 1862, non-Union men were prevented from political participation: "An election held in the Town of Petersburg – the election was all one side... the men that was considered

³³ Loder, *Diary*, July 2, 1860.

³⁴ Kenneth Lake, "Broken Bits of Old Kentucky," in *The Hesperian Tree*, ed. John Piatt (Cincinnati, OH: George C. Shaw, 1900), 347.

³⁵ Loder, *Diary*, August 2, 1862.

Secesh were not permitted to vote.”³⁶ General Boyle had issued an order in July of 1862 that “no person hostile in opinion to the government and desiring its overthrow, will be allowed to stand for office in the district of Kentucky.”³⁷ Public officials were therefore required to swear an oath of loyalty to the Union. Increased interaction with Union soldiers and increased Union control also led to personal reasons to hold anti-Union sentiment.

Other property, beyond slaves, was also commandeered. Particularly valuable to the military were horses and boats. The river counties of northern Kentucky had both in abundance. Boats were rented or bought and sold back to their owners.³⁸ Sometimes horses were bought, but often they were “pressed” instead. Horses could be taken with the authority of a government voucher, although the owner would receive no immediate financial compensation.³⁹ However, horses were simply confiscated as well. Lewis Loder records, “The federal soldiers took ten horses from Francesville.”⁴⁰ He wrote on August 8, 1862, “the cavalry then went down to Richard Parkers took two horses.”⁴¹ Mary Bristow wrote of news of Union soldiers “stealing their [Confederate sympathizers’] horses or taking them (but it is nothing but theft and robbery at last),” continuing, “I can’t keep my blood from boiling with angry rebellious feelings when I hear of such things...”⁴² Mary Bristow lamented the loss of her property following a draft in

³⁶ Ibid., August 4, 1862.

³⁷ John Boyle, “General Orders, No. 16,” in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Series 1, Volume 52*, ed. George W. Davis, Leslie J. Perry, Joseph W. Kirkley (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1898), 263. HathiTrust Digital Library, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000625514>.

³⁸ Loder, *Diary*, September 8, 1861.

³⁹ Ibid., January 13, 1865.

⁴⁰ Ibid., July 26, 1862.

⁴¹ Ibid., August 8, 1862.

⁴² Bristow, *Records*, March 20, 1862.

1864. One of her slaves, Sim, was drafted and called to Covington. She was upset at the loss of her slave, but it was the fact that he did not return her horse and buggy that bothered her most.⁴³

As Union control increased, Confederate sympathizers began to experience a crack-down on their freedom. Although “sesesh” men were already prevented from voting, others were arrested for their political leanings and jailed. For example, Lewis Loder records the arrest of two Petersburg men who were then taken to Louisville.⁴⁴ As early as 1861, in fact, “Mr. Skiff, of Covington, Ky., is indicted for treason, the overt-act being the shipment of supplies to the South.”⁴⁵ A. S. Piatt was “taken to Indianapolis by Federal officers.”⁴⁶ Loder also records “the Suppression of the Cincinnati Daily Enquirer coming to Kentucky” because it was perceived as too pro-Confederate.⁴⁷ Although such an example seems insignificant, John Hunt Morgan knew which houses belonged to pro-Confederate sympathizers based on the newspaper they read.⁴⁸ Government passes were required for travel to or from other southern states. Leonard Stephens recorded the process involved. His friend was arrested on arriving home from Chattanooga, although he was released upon producing a government travel pass that had been issued to him there.⁴⁹ Even for pro-Union people, such measures were inconvenient and unappreciated.

⁴³ Ibid., October 3, 1864.

⁴⁴ Loder, *Diary*, August 8, 1864.

⁴⁵ *The Christian Recorder* 1, no. 26, Philadelphia, July 6, 1861. Accessible Archives. <https://www.accessible.com/accessible/docButton?AAWhat=builtPage&AAWhere=THECHRISTIANRECORDER.FR1861070673.42474&AABeanName=toc3&AANextPage=/printBrowseBuiltPage.jsp>.

⁴⁶ Loder, *Diary*, July 21, 1862.

⁴⁷ Ibid., June 17, 1864.

⁴⁸ Thomas H. Hines, “III. – The Escape!,” in *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 41 (New York: The Century Co., November 1890 – April 1891), 421. HathiTrust Digital Library. <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/006057380>.

⁴⁹ Leonard Stephens to William Stephens, December 12, 1863. Ed. Neil Allen Bristow. October 10, 2002. freepages.rootsweb.com. <http://freepages.rootsweb.com/~greenwolf/genealogy/stephens/letter11.htm>.

These incidents become more common following declaration of martial law in Kentucky. Although the first instances of such measures date from 1862, General Burbridge's tenure at the end of the war would prove the most unpopular. A Union general from Georgetown, Kentucky, Stephen Burbridge used harsh measures to solidify Union control and reduce the pro-Confederate guerilla problem. However, in doing so, he inadvertently fueled the fire of anti-Union sentiment. In his Order No. 59, he stated, "Whenever an unarmed Union citizen is murdered, four guerillas will be selected from the prison and publicly shot to death at the most convenient place near the scene of the outrages."⁵⁰ Of a group of four executed in 1864, three were from northern Kentucky.⁵¹ Such measures were polarizing, because many guerillas were in fact enlisted in Confederate units and operating, in their minds, as legitimate soldiers. Burbridge issued a ban on travel and commerce between Kentuckians and those on the north side of the Ohio. Loder writes, "The People of Kentucky have to get a permit to take any kind of produce to sell the other side of the River this order issued by Genl Brubage."⁵² For the people of northern Kentucky, especially, who were always in close contact with Indiana and Ohio, this was a major setback. Leonard Stephens wrote his brother, who lived in Missouri, that he was not legally permitted to visit him because of his "feelings of Sympathy for the South." "Times," he added, "are far more precarious here than they have ever been. There have been quite a number of arrests made here recently. Some of them you used to know intimately." He then goes on to describe the arrests, fines, and exiles of several men. They were, Stephens concluded, "banished

⁵⁰ Stephen Burbridge, "General Orders, No. 59," in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Series 1, Volume 39*, ed. George W. Davis, Leslie J. Perry, Joseph W. Kirkley (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1892), 174.

⁵¹ "Guerilla Items in Kentucky," *Sacramento Daily Union*, December 9, 1864.

⁵² Loder, *Diary*, August 26, 1864.

to the North Side of the Ohio River & to remain there three years or after the war.”⁵³ Known Confederate sympathizers who were residents of other southern states were required to leave Kentucky and return home.⁵⁴ Such measures disrupted the daily rhythm of life experienced before the war, and led many to believe their rights were being infringed at the hands of the Union, furthering anti-Union sentiment.

People who had family members fighting for the Confederacy often felt antagonistic toward the Union. Those who would be otherwise ambivalent or moderate hoped that at the least, the Confederacy would succeed for the sake of their loved one. This caused chain sympathy, as it personally connected people who would otherwise be relatively insulated from the politics of the war. Thus, any abuse against their loved ones became personal grievances they had with the Union. Sometimes, Confederate soldiers were captured and punished for treason, even if they had left service and returned home. In 1863, two Confederate soldiers from Campbell County were captured there and executed by firing squad. Even after personally appealing to President Abraham Lincoln, their sentences were carried out.⁵⁵ Bristow records her neighbors’ “son & brother has come home from the army for a visit & tarries too long, and they are fearful he may be arrested as a prisoner. There certainly is some danger...”⁵⁶ She was right. Mary Bristow’s own nephews, Jerome Bristow and Willie Espess, were held as prisoners of war at Camp Chase, Ohio. “When I hear that those I love are taken from their homes and carried off

⁵³ Leonard Stephens to William Stephens, August 16, 1864. Ed. Neil Allen Bristow. October 10, 2002. freepages.rootsweb.com. <http://freepages.rootsweb.com/~greenwolf/genealogy/stephens/letter13.htm>.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ John C. DeMoss, *A Short History of the Soldier-Life, Capture and Death of William Frances Corbin*, 18. Internet Archive. <https://archive.org/details/shorthistoryofso00demo/mode/2up>.

⁵⁶ Bristow, *Records*, February 2, 1863.

to foreign prisons,” Bristow wrote, “let me remember that the Lord is the avenger.”⁵⁷ Lewis Loder recorded the return of several Petersburg men from Camp Douglas, Illinois.⁵⁸ Early in the war, soldiers could expect to be paroled and eventually return to fighting. However, as prison camps formed to prevent such a phenomenon, soldiers had to endure dehumanizing conditions. As a result, many believed the Union was denying their rights, and many legal arguments were made against any punishment carried out by the Union.⁵⁹ In 1862, a group of 93 private Kentucky citizens, mostly from Campbell and Kenton Counties, sent a petition to the Kentucky Governor Beriah Magoffin insisting on the illegitimacy of their arrest and imprisonment at Camp Chase, Ohio.⁶⁰ In these ways, those who fought for the Confederate cause garnered chain Confederate support among family members, thereby increasing those who held and acted on such sentiments.

Another hated institution was the draft. The one most bitterly opposed was in 1864, as Lincoln called for 500,000 men to finalize the outcome of the war.⁶¹ Northern Kentucky was heavily drawn from to fill the Union ranks. Particularly offensive were the large numbers of black troops mustered. However, the fact that many who had refused military service thus far being forced to fight against the Confederacy was also unpopular. According to Lewis Loder, 854 men were drafted in Boone County in September of 1864.⁶² This was a large number for a County comprised of 10,000. Benjamin Helm Bristow, a Union Colonel, believed that the

⁵⁷ Ibid., February 2, 1863., January 1, 1862.

⁵⁸ Loder, *Diary*, April 25, 1864.

⁵⁹ Whittlesey, “An Episode of the Rebellion,” 535.

⁶⁰ Lewis Collins, *History of Kentucky, vol. 1*, ed. Richard H. Collins (Covington, KY: Collins & Co., 1874), 107.

⁶¹ Leonard Stephens to William Stephens, August 16, 1864. Ed. Neil Allen Bristow. October 10, 2002. [freepages.rootsweb.com. http://freepages.rootsweb.com/~greenwolf/genealogy/stephens/letter13.htm](http://freepages.rootsweb.com/~greenwolf/genealogy/stephens/letter13.htm).

⁶² Loder, *Diary*, September 19, 1864.

draft's "effect will most clearly be to make guerillas and greatly increase the dangers which daily threaten the loyal citizens of Kentucky."⁶³ The draft forced people otherwise unwilling to fight to do so. Rather than fight for the Union, against their sympathies, some chose to remain local and fight as a guerilla if they had to fight at all.

Interracial Contention

In addition, the draft helped to stir sentiment against the Union for its role in altering the white-black status quo and undermining slavery. Mary Bristow, for example, displayed hostility to evolving social makeup and toward the Union for facilitating it. When her slave Sim was drafted, she claimed: "he and the balance of the negroes have grown too large in their own self-esteem for one to care about them."⁶⁴ In fact, 1864 saw a sharp rise in Union enlistment by black Kentuckians. This was noteworthy to Kentuckians because it affected the socio-economic status quo. Thus, the use of black troops contributed to anti-Union sentiments. The *Sacramento Daily Union* reported in June of 1864 that "Covington, like Danville and other places, is witnessing an inroad of negroes. It has been made a rendezvous for the country back of it, and large numbers are coming in."⁶⁵ Lewis Loder, meanwhile, recorded on August 30, 1864 that "A lot of Negro Soldiers come to Pete[rsburg] from Burlington and several from near Pete."⁶⁶ Leonard Stephens recorded, "There are now squads of negro Soldiers stationed in Kenton and Boone Counties for the purpose as it is said of recruiting other negroes, & it is thought a great many of what is left

⁶³ Benjamin Bristow, "Letter to George Yeaman" in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Series 3, Volume 4*, ed. Fred Ainsworth, Joseph W. Kirkley (Washington. D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1898), 1097-98.

⁶⁴ Bristow, *Records*, October 3, 1864.

⁶⁵ "Kentucky Items," *Sacramento Daily Union*, June 30, 1864.

⁶⁶ Loder, *Diary*, August 30, 1864.

will be gathered up. A good many have already joined the army.”⁶⁷ He lost three “hands” in eight months to the Union war effort, and in January 1865 he predicted losing several more slaves to the draft. He wrote: “substitutes are now so high as to put it out of the question to hire them, & indeed they are now staying with an expectation of being paid for their services, so that they are no longer slaves but hired servants.”⁶⁸ In 1868, a Boone County man recalled that “in our country the Yankees got by draft and nigger-stealing about nine-hundred men.”⁶⁹ Such examples show the anti-black prejudice and consequential resentment of Union forces because of their role in elevating the status and authority of blacks in northern Kentucky.

Northern Kentuckians and their slaves typically shared intimate relationships due to the nature of the institution there. Because of this, abolition was particularly offensive. It not only deprived people of their livelihoods, but also of close relationships. Bristow wrote: “I have spent a great deal of my life and all of my money raising negroes for old Lincoln to take from me at his pleasure.” She continues, “I and two of my brothers will be left dependent or nearly so if our negroes are taken.”⁷⁰ A Burlington man explained that abolition had reduced his wealth by \$5,000, but that “it wasn’t the pecuniary loss that hurts me. The truth is I had, all my life, been accustomed to have someone call me master, and I can’t get along without it now.”⁷¹ Slavery was important to the people of northern Kentucky, and as the Union became more blatantly associated with abolition, it became more staunchly opposed.

⁶⁷ Leonard Stephens to William Stephens, August 16, 1864. Ed. Neil Allen Bristow. October 10, 2002. freepages.rootsweb.com. <http://freepages.rootsweb.com/~greenwolf/genealogy/stephens/letter13.htm>.

⁶⁸ Leonard Stephens to William Stephens, January 12, 1865. Ed. Neil Allen Bristow. October 10, 2002. freepages.rootsweb.com. <http://freepages.rootsweb.com/~greenwolf/genealogy/stephens/letter14.htm>.

⁶⁹ “Rebels on the Border,” *New York Times*, August 27, 1868.

⁷⁰ Bristow, *Records*, October 3, 1864.

⁷¹ “Rebels on the Border.”

In efforts to maintain the racial status quo, numerous acts of racial violence occurred. Particularly at the hands of pro-Confederate guerilla groups, such as that of Col. George Jessee, northern Kentuckians offered deadly resistance to black troops. Jessee, for example, oversaw the ‘Ghent Atrocity.’ He discovered a group of black Union soldiers near Ghent in Carroll County. A newspaper reports, “the negroes surrendered on the first demand, and, after being deprived of their arms were placed in a row, and shot down like wild beasts. Their crime was in being found dressed in the uniform of a United States soldier.” The article continued, “this place (Warsaw, KY) is garrisoned by negro soldiers, and if captured we presume that an indiscriminate slaughter of the blacks will take place.”⁷² Reports vary from eight to sixteen killed. Although such accounts are very extreme, there was a general anti-black power feeling. An 1868 newspaper interview of several northern Kentuckians shows how widespread and acute such sentiment was. For example, a man from Burlington denounced peace given a “radical nigger government in the Southern states, with a damned nigger bureau fastened upon the country, to be retained there by the nigger senate.”⁷³ A woman in Florence said, referring to a black man, “a nigger is a nigger... and he’s got to keep a nigger’s place while he’s around me.”⁷⁴ Making such sentiments public led to black compliance. The journalist encountered an old black man still living with his former master for nothing but his clothes, board, and room. The old man refused to either go out at night or to vote: “Ole mas’r says when de niggers go to voting, he’s gwine in to kill every one ob them. No, Sir, I don’t want any vote.”⁷⁵ Clearly, the increase of black rights

⁷² “Jesse on a Raid – Capture and Murder of Negro Troops,” *Louisville Daily Journal*, August 31, 1864.

⁷³ “Rebels on the Border.”

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

by Union forces was opposed bitterly in northern Kentucky, and caused people to bitterly oppose the Union itself.

Military Response

Many in northern Kentucky resorted to joining the Confederacy as soldiers. Local guerilla warfare was characteristic of the fighting in northern Kentucky, particularly because the Union quickly repelled Confederate regular-army incursions into the Commonwealth. As a result, those who sought to violently oppose the Union had to do so in secret and apart from standard military discipline. A singular hero in northern Kentucky was John Hunt Morgan. A dashing cavalryman, he led a raid up through Kentucky, traveling nearby the northern Kentucky counties in Indiana and Ohio. Morgan provided one of the most obvious ways for Kentuckians far from the front lines to aid the Confederacy. A significant number of his men were drawn from northern Kentucky.

Mary Beckley Bristow, hearing of John Hunt Morgan's capture, wrote: "we cannot hear that our dear boy is with him, & most sincerely hope he is not, though most of our neighbors' sons are prisoners."⁷⁶ A. Pointer reported an 1883 reunion of Morgan's men, stating "Boone could've sent the youngest, handsomest and most complete remnant of Morgan's once great command, of any county in the state."⁷⁷ During his escape from prison in Ohio, Morgan was aided by several families whose members served in Morgan's command.⁷⁸ Morgan offered soldiers excitement and renown, as his raid was more about embarrassing and aggravating the Union than it was defeating them. Morgan's command enacted several raids that were important

⁷⁶ Bristow, *Records*, July 26, 1863.

⁷⁷ "To Morgan's Men," *Boone County Recorder*, August 8, 1883.

⁷⁸ Hines, "III. – Escape!," 420.

to northern Kentuckians. As part of his long raid through Kentucky, Indiana, and Ohio, John Hunt Morgan raided throughout southern Indiana. Lewis Loder reported that “no mail boat or Packet or any other Steamboat has past by Pete[ersburg] today on acct of the Rebel raid in Indiana.”⁷⁹

Morgan’s reputation aided him in confounding the Union, and this made him effective at inspiring pro-Confederate action in occupied areas, punishing Union loyalists, and disrupting behind-the-lines military functions. Many rumors circled regarding his location and actions. For example, Lewis Loder believed he had fled to Canada after his prison break, unaware that he in fact passed through the county.⁸⁰ Still others thought that he had escaped through Campbell County, to the east of Cincinnati.⁸¹ John M. Dinser, a northern Kentuckian who encountered Morgan, described his impact: “Just the name Morgan was enough to make folks jump out of their skin with fright... Burning bridges, and tearing up railroads, he caused the Union government considerable trouble.”⁸² Thus, Morgan provided a prominent and effective way northern Kentuckians supported the Confederacy.

Being largely cut off from the Confederate lines further south, especially as the war wore on, many northern Kentuckians fought the Union as local guerillas. Guerrilla warfare was effective because it antagonized Union sympathizers and depleted Union resources from deep behind the lines. Northern Kentucky was particularly suitable for pro-Confederate guerilla

⁷⁹ Loder, *Diary*, July 11, 1863.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, November 28, 1863.

⁸¹ “Rebels on the Border.”

⁸² Bud Deters, “Bluecoat Sharpshooters Battle with Morgan,” *Kentucky Progress* 4, no. 1 (September, 1931): 49. Lexington Public Library.
http://rescarta.lexpublib.org/jsp/RcWebImageViewer.jsp;jsessionid=EE1FF807ED6079F205A65F77D3D8615E?doc_id=dd5991ee-18e8-4560-9915-9ba0eb1d69a7/KYLYX0000/20180907/00000001.

operations. In particular, Owen and Henry counties became well-known as “the general rendezvous” for “new victims of rebel sophisms . . . preparing to enter rebel service.”⁸³ Charles Whittlesey described Confederate sympathizers’ motive for turning to guerilla actions. According to him, they believed that “If Kentucky seceded that legalized everything; if she did not, they could secede individually.”⁸⁴ He recalled that recruitment happened openly, Confederates even holding barbecues for that purpose, and that they were sometimes supplied arms by the local government.⁸⁵

Although Col. George Jessee is mentioned as a guerilla as early as 1862, many of his most infamous operations in northern Kentucky came in 1864 and 1865. A native of Henry County commanding local men made Jessee’s force highly mobile and therefore difficult for Union troops and citizens to combat.⁸⁶ He enjoyed wide enrollment in his ranks, boasting forces from Boone, Gallatin, Owen, and Trimble counties able to either overwhelm or deter local Union Home Guard forces.⁸⁷ He boasted numbers of several hundred men, although this fluctuated considerably.⁸⁸ Jessee used these men in versatile roles to harass Union sympathizers from his base in Owen County, whose populace was generally pro-Confederate, especially in the countryside. Although he occasionally fought, Jessee primarily sought to cause turmoil among the residents, proving support of the Union didn’t offer peace. In July 1864, the *Louisville Journal* feared that he would try to gain control of the Ohio River by capturing Union cannon in

⁸³ “Duplicity of the Kentucky Rebels – The People on the Lookout for the Rascals who are Emigrating Southward,” *Daily Alta California*, September 3, 1862.

⁸⁴ “Whittlesey, “An Episode of the Rebellion,” 532.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ “Jesse Marching on the Ohio – He Will Probably Attempt to Capture Vevay,” *Louisville Journal*, July 25, 1864.

⁸⁷ Whittlesey, “An Episode of the Rebellion,” 532.

⁸⁸ *Louisville Journal*, July 20, 1864.

Vevay, Indiana.⁸⁹ In December of 1864, Jesse's force captured Carrollton, preventing boats from stopping there.

Another prominent guerilla leader in Northern Kentucky was Mose Webster, who was active further north than Jesse. Mose Webster led raids as far north as southern Boone and Kenton Counties. He was from Grant County, and his most infamous exploits were there. His troops raided Williamstown, the county seat, pillaging stores, taking cash, and "about thirty United States Muskets."⁹⁰ Both Webster and Jesse destroyed government records, as well as harassing, and even murdering, government officials.⁹¹ This act could be done to provide suspicion of the legitimacy of the government. Webster in particular targeted poll records.⁹² Guerillas were effective at causing worried confusion. Lewis Loder records an instance of a man having to transport his horse stock across the river to prevent its theft by "rebels."⁹³ Covington residents feared Webster so much a rumor started that he had captured a Union detachment meant to chase him from Falmouth.⁹⁴ Thus, forming and joining guerilla units who operated in home territory was an attractive and viable method for pro-Confederate sympathizers to influence the war in a direct way.

Pro-Confederate guerillas enjoyed support by pro-Confederate sympathizers, who formed highly organized ways to aid Confederate forces. The newspaper wrote in 1862 that Jesse's

⁸⁹ "Jesse Marching on the Ohio – He Will Probably Attempt to Capture Vevay," *Louisville Journal*, July 25, 1864.

⁹⁰ "Bob Breckinridge's Raid," *Louisville Journal*, November 5, 1864.

⁹¹ *Louisville Journal*, February 6, 1864.

⁹² *Ibid.*, August 3, 1864.

⁹³ Loder, *Diary*, August 27, 1862.

⁹⁴ "Bob Breckinridge's Raid."

“sympathizers will give them timely notice of the approach of any Union forces.”⁹⁵ A.C. Dicken enjoyed similar protection during his time in Campbell County. The most impressive victory of the pro-Confederate sympathizers’ network was the safe conduct of John Hunt Morgan south through the western portion of the region. He crossed the river at Ludlow, opposite the river from Cincinnati. Then, he was conducted in several stages through Boone, Gallatin, and Owen Counties. At the home of Henry Corbin, he received “visits from many friends in that vicinity” that offered “money, horses, and firearms.”⁹⁶ General Basil Duke corroborates as much in his account, describing Boone County as “sure asylum for such fugitives.”⁹⁷

Aiding fugitive Confederate soldiers behind enemy lines was one way for sympathizers otherwise removed from the war to act on their ideals. It aided the war effort obviously, because men like Morgan were able to return to military command and continue fighting. It aided morale that there were Confederate sympathizers that far behind enemy lines, and that they were able to successfully skirt Union authority so effectively. For these reasons, the organized network of northern Kentucky’s pro-Confederate sympathizers played an important part in the course of the Civil War.

Conclusion

Northern Kentucky was home to a prominent number of pro-Confederate sympathizers during the Civil War. They were made up of people who identified with the people and culture

⁹⁵ “Duplicity of the Kentucky Rebels – The People on the Lookout for the Rascals who are Emigrating Southward,” *Daily Alta California*, September 3, 1862.

⁹⁶ W.P. Corbin, “One of Morgan’s Pilots Through Kentucky,” *Confederate Veteran*, vol. 28, ed. S.A. Cunningham, (Nashville, TN: 1920): 139. Internet Archive. <https://archive.org/details/confederateveter28conf/mode/2up>.

⁹⁷ Basil Duke, *History of Morgan’s Cavalry* (Cincinnati, OH: Miami Printing and Publishing Company, 1867), 489.

of the South, as well as ideologues who supported the Confederacy politically. Given many reasons to support the Confederacy they organized together to antagonize the Union war effort. One reason they supported the Confederacy was to preserve slavery and superior social standing over blacks. Another was the alignment of family and neighbors with the Confederacy. Still another was a sectionalism and independent spirit that resented criticism from people of the North. This sentiment was discernable before the war, in cultural aspects and political outcomes. It manifested itself in numerous ways. Obviously, many northern Kentuckians fought as part of the Confederacy, or in pro-Confederate forces. Others aided Confederate fugitives and sought to disrupt Union forces where they encountered them. For these reasons, it is important to understand the historical significance of pro-Confederate sentiment in Northern Kentucky.

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