

11-1-2017

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Recommended Citation

Brown, Zachary (2017) "Changing Understandings of the American Civil War in Border Communities: The Cases of Augusta and Franklin Counties," *Armstrong Undergraduate Journal of History*: Vol. 7 : Iss. 1 , Article 3.

DOI: 10.20429/aujh.2017.070103

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/aujh/vol7/iss1/3>

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Changing Understandings of the American Civil War in Border Communities:
The Cases of Augusta and Franklin Counties

Zachary Brown

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On August 22, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln wrote to political ally Horace Greeley summarizing the Union's wartime purpose: "I would save [the Union] in the shortest way under the Constitution... my paramount struggle is to preserve the Union...not either to save or destroy Slavery."¹ Less than five months later, in his Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln would declare the destruction of slavery fundamental to the Union purpose: "All persons held as slaves within the rebellious states are, and henceforward shall be free...as a fit and necessary war measure for suppressing [the] rebellion."² In less than half a year, the scope of the war had transformed, and the heart of the Union cause reformed if not completely reconstructed. The battlefields of the Civil War were only one part of a greater drama – what the war, and subsequently union and disunion, would come to mean.

The border communities of Augusta County, Virginia and Franklin County, Pennsylvania attest to just how volatile and fundamental this drama was. Each community, as the conflict evolved, saw its understanding of both the Civil War and the idea of an American nation as wholly transformed. This transition was catalyzed around the important political events of the period: John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry, the Virginia Convention of 1861, and the fighting

¹ "A LETTER FROM PRESIDENT LINCOLN; Reply to Horace Greeley; Slavery and the Union The Restoration of the Union the Paramount Object," *New York Times*, August 24, 1862.

² "Emancipation Proclamation," *National Archives*, accessed August 20, 2016, http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured_documents/emancipation_proclamation/transcript.html

of the Civil War. In Franklin, the Civil War, first seen as only a fight to preserve the antebellum Union, increasingly connected to the rhetoric of free labor, evangelicalism, and abolitionism. In Augusta, what began as a struggle to preserve the ‘peculiar institution’ of slavery would evolve into an elaborate experiment in Confederate nation building.

In the antebellum period, these two border communities would not have appeared foreign to one another to a contemporary observer; “Franklin County and Augusta County shared a great deal...people sought out the same entertainments and read the same books...bore the same kinds of names and worshiped at the same kinds of churches...the differences were more subtle than that.”³ The leisure activities enjoyed by both communities were a similar mix of parades, music, and political speeches; civic groups like fire companies and militias were equally common. However, slave labor was essential to Augusta County’s way of life. The white people of Augusta “profited from [and] believed in slavery...they could not imagine doing without it.”⁴ Slavery was integral to their socio-economic existence.

In contrast, slavery was illegal in Pennsylvania. But in both communities, while whites largely monopolized wealth, freemen like respected barber Robert Campbell, who was even provided an obituary in August County’s *Staunton Vindicator*, could make a decent living; however, this was only acceptable for freedmen who pursued what residents called “nigger” work that was seen as unthreatening to white interests.⁵ Xenophobic nativism was also pervasive in both counties, uninhibited by political lines. German and Irish immigrants were described by the Democratic *Vindicator* of Augusta County as “ignorant and vicious masses,”

³ Edward L Ayers, *In the Presence of Mine Enemies: War in the Heart of America, 1859-1863*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), 31.

⁴ Ayers, *In the Presence of Mine Enemies*, 31.

⁵ Ayers, *In the Presence of Mine Enemies*, 20.

while the Republican *Franklin Repository* of Franklin County similarly described Irishmen as “drunk as a piper, and unable to take care of himself, let alone the family.”⁶ Methodists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians and Lutherans dominated the religious landscape of both communities. Numerous other examples attest to the fact that, in general, the mores, norms, trials and tribulations of daily life in the 1840s and 1850s in both counties would have been nearly indistinguishable if afforded a cursory glance. Yet, these two counties, separated by only two hundred miles and a state border, were destined for very different fates once the Civil War broke out. Augusta County and the state of Virginia would become the heart of the Confederacy with the capital located only one hundred miles east at Richmond. In contrast, Franklin County, and Pennsylvania, would remain part of the Union. Subsumed into separate nations in 1861, Franklin and Augusta County would come to have very different understandings of the war.

By late 1859, the United States seemed increasingly divided by deep sectional tensions. A quasi-civil war had already broken out in a series of violent confrontations known as Bleeding Kansas. The Kansas-Nebraska Act and Dred Scott decision had effectively rendered the Missouri Compromise of 1820 invalid. In the North, anti-slavery attitudes were on the rise as the “Republicans grew stronger in the North and...Pennsylvania...[attracted a political coalition characterized by coalition of nativism, anti-slavery, economic boosterism, reformism, religious intolerance...free labor idealism and regional chauvinism.”⁷ The Democrats split along North-South lines as the interests of the party began to diverge. At the Democratic convention before the election of 1860, the party was humiliated when it was unable to agree on a common candidate. Eventually the Northern and Southern wings of the party would meet in different

⁶ “The Union and Our Liberties,” *Staunton Vindicator*, April 5, 1861. “A Census Taking Anecdote,” *Franklin Repository*, July 18, 1860.

⁷ Importantly, the vast majority of the Republican Party did not support abolition of slavery at this time. In fact, much of the Republican coalition was fueled by racism. Ayers, *In the Presence of Mine Enemies*, 47, 60.

halls, nominating Stephen Douglas and John C. Breckinridge respectively. These tensions defined the Democrat-controlled communities of Franklin and Augusta counties. Any semblance of stability was lost in October of 1859 when radical abolitionist John Brown, who had played a central role in Bleeding Kansas, attempted to start an armed slave revolt by seizing the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. The U.S. Marines, under the command of Robert E. Lee put down the insurgency; John Brown was arrested, tried for treason, and hanged on December 2 1859. The polarization of North and South intensified further. Southerners regarded John Brown as a radical terrorist, representing the ever-present fear of a slave uprising.⁸ While the North largely repudiated Brown's violence, they increasingly sacralized and martyred Brown's cause.⁹ Franklin and Augusta demonstrate how political polarization, at least in border communities, prefigured the complicated responses and understandings of the Civil War.

Antebellum political rhetoric shaped reactions to John Brown's raid. The November 18th edition of the *Vindicator* described the virulent and impassioned rhetoric that flooded Augusta following John Brown's conviction: "Now that he has had so fair and impartial a trial as Virginia ever afforded to one of her own citizens, and has been condemned, these detestable negro-worshippers attempt to stay the hand of justice...if it continues much longer, Lunatic Asylums will soon have to be multiplied in Yankeedom."¹⁰ Such sentiment was shared by the *Vindicator's* Whig rival, the *Staunton Spectator* which claimed "John Brown embarked in his insane enterprise against Virginia...[he] believed.... many free white citizens...to be anti-slavery in sentiment.... [this was] the impression of [a] deluded man."¹¹ In December this fervor had become fuel for secession as the *Vindicator* claimed, "if the Federal Government refuses to

⁸ Ayers, *In the Presence of Mine Enemies*, 51.

⁹ Ayers, *In the Presence of Mine Enemies*, 51.

¹⁰ "Sign of the Times," *Staunton Vindicator*, November 18, 1859.

¹¹ "Democracy and Slavery," *Staunton Spectator*, February 7, 1860.

interpose to prevent such inroads as that which took place at Harpers Ferry, while Virginia is forbid by the Federal constitution, to protect herself—she must of necessity go out of the Union, and provide for her own defence [sic].”¹² This wave of fear and the subsequent rise in secessionist beliefs was deeply tied to a hatred of ‘Black Republicans,’ and the threat they presented to the ‘mutually beneficial’ institution of slavery. For Augusta, the successful trial of John Brown was a vindication of southern ways of life and understanding of the American socio-political system, handled well enough to quiet calls for secession. Thus, cooler heads prevailed for the time being; Augusta County resident William McCue wrote to his brother John, “I for my part love and cherish the Union...[I] endorse that sentiment of Webster, Union now and forever, one and inseparable.”¹³ It is clear that at this time the dissolution of the Union still seemed like an act of unreasonable and unjust treason.

While Northern abolitionist fervor was worrying, it was not necessarily new and remained unwonted in the federal government, which had quickly mobilized a detachment of troops to put down Brown’s raid. Only when anti-slavery Republicans began to assume control of the federal government, first in the form of a Republican controlled House of Representatives in 1859 and later with the election of Abraham Lincoln to the presidency, would southern secessionism emerge in any cohesive way throughout the South. Yet, a year later both McCue brothers would enlist in the Confederate Army.

The election of anti-slavery Republican Abraham Lincoln to the presidency in November of 1860 exacerbated sectional tensions beyond repair. Augusta voted overwhelmingly for the

¹² “The Governor’s Message,” *Staunton Vindicator*, December 9, 1859.

¹³ William McCue to John McCue, 25 December 1859, Papers of the McCue Family, 1777-1920, Accession #4406, Box 4, Special Collections Department, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Virginia.

Constitutional Union candidate John Bell.¹⁴ The Constitutional Union Party was composed of conservative Whigs, moderate Democrats, and former Know-Nothings, who sought to preserve both the antebellum Union and Constitution. This was certainly a vote for Union but also carried a clear desire to maintain slavery in the face of mounting hostility. The people of Augusta hoped that if the slavery issue were ignored, it would simply disappear overtime.

In stark contrast, Franklin County, in Pennsylvania, fostered a far more divisive environment regarding John Brown. Following John Brown's raid at Harpers Ferry, the *Repository* absolved Brown of any fundamental responsibility: "Who is responsible?...those...who first set on foot...encouraged and sustained the Border-Ruffian Pro Slavery war against the Free-Labor settlers of Kansas...it was the sufferings of himself and his family at the hands of the Pro-Slavery party in Kansas that inspired him with a bitter spirit of hatred against the whole institution...if anybody is to be held responsible for Brown's conduct we must say it must be those who made him what he is."¹⁵

The *Repository's* take on the Brown incident revealed the complicated and sometimes contradictory responses the event inspired. Even the Republican *Repository* was unwilling to support Brown's violence as justified, supporting his cause rather than his means. Equally, while Franklin newspapers acknowledged the injustices of slave owners as the source of Brown's fury, the institution itself was not held responsible. In fact, it was only Brown's hatred of the 'whole institution' that was seen as irrational. Crucially, Franklin was not an uninhibited bastion of Republicanism. The Democratic *Valley Spirit* published a powerful rebuke of John Brown as a Republican martyr: "[Republicans] put John Brown the murderer on a level with Jesus

¹⁴ "Augusta County: Age and Party Affiliation," *The Valley Project*, accessed August 20, 2016, http://valley.lib.virginia.edu/VoS/tablesandstats/augusta/apolitics_2.html

¹⁵ "Who Is Responsible?" *Franklin Repository*, October 26, 1859.

Christ...[Brown] went to Harpers Ferry to steal slaves...murder their masters...[He was a] liar, thief, traitor and murder.”¹⁶

Compared to the relatively politically homogenous Augusta, Franklin was home to a volatile cocktail of opinions on John Brown. While Republican ideology was strong and growing, Democrats, for the time being, controlled politics. In fact, on the eve of the 1860 election, Democratic Party activists outnumbered their Republican counterparts in the county 166 to 126.¹⁷ Supporters of the Democratic Party also tended to be wealthier than their Republican counterparts, outpacing Republicans 52 to 44 in the highest wealth cohorts.¹⁸ This is telling in three respects. First, it reveals that the North-South political divide was not as rigid as traditional wisdom suggests. Second, it belies any conception of the Civil War as an inevitable clash of cultures perpetuated by sentimentalist post-war films like *The Birth of a Nation* and *Gone with the Wind*. Third, it shows that Northern socio-economic elites remained, by and large, sympathetic to Democratic politics. Yet, the signs of change were soon evident. In 1860 Lincoln crushed Breckinridge in Franklin by capturing the vast majority of voters 30 years and younger and 31-40, the Wide-Awakes. The Wide Awakes was a paramilitary organization that formed “in order to promote Republican candidates...[and] police polling places in order to prevent Democratic vote fraud.”¹⁹ Of the total voting cohort, 32.2% went to Lincoln and only 15.8 % to Breckinridge.²⁰ As the sectional crisis reached its critical juncture, Franklin County had become suddenly, and swiftly, Republican. Younger voters, while by no means abolitionists, were clearly

¹⁶ “Admiration for Old Brown,” *Valley Spirit*, December 7, 1859.

¹⁷ “Franklin County: Party Activists, 1859-1860,” *The Valley Project*, accessed August 20, 2016, <http://valley.lib.virginia.edu/VoS/tablesandstats/franklin/frpartyactivists.html>

¹⁸ “Franklin County: Party Affiliation,” *The Valley Project*, accessed August 20, 2016, http://valley.lib.virginia.edu/VoS/tablesandstats/franklin/frpolitics_1.html

¹⁹ “Honest Old Abe Marching Forth to the White House,” *HarpWeek*, accessed August 20, 2016, <http://elections.harpweek.com/1860/cartoon-1860-Medium.asp?UniqueID=15&Year=1860>

²⁰ “Franklin County: Age and Party Affiliation, and Precinct Voting in 1860,” *The Valley Project*, accessed August 20, 2016, http://valley.lib.virginia.edu/VoS/tablesandstats/franklin/frpolitics_2.html

now critical of the southern Democratic vision of the republic. Freedom based on free labor, and by extension anti-slavery sentiment, was no longer vague pretensions but rather a fundamental part of an emerging northern ideal. Republicans had captured the minds and hearts, and at the very least the votes, of the border town men, many who would fight and die for the Union cause during the Civil War.

Subsequently, idyllic conceptions of free labor were at the center of the rhetoric in favor of preserving the Union in Franklin County. In May of 1861, just one month after the attack on Fort Sumter in South Carolina, Alex Cressler, a twenty one year old teacher from Southampton Township, Franklin County wrote to his friend Henry Bitner, “Northern boys must go to work...what could be more cheering to the hearts of freeman...than to see that the whole north will move...as one mighty machine...secession will be crushed.”²¹ Cressler’s language reveals a unity of purpose and vision that would have been foreign certainly to his Virginian counterparts, but also Franklin County just months earlier. For the young men of Franklin, from the outset, the war would be about preserving the Union as they envisioned it. In both Augusta and Franklin County, John Brown’s raid, and sectional politics turned violent had shattered the antebellum political settlement. The resulting political vacuum paved the way for radical changes to the nation, in both the North and South.

On December 20 1860, following the election of Abraham Lincoln, South Carolina became the first state to secede.²² The Deep South would follow in January and February. Virginia, the South’s most populous state, was much more of an enigma, especially border communities like Augusta. Both the Democratic *Vindicator* and Whig *Spectator* initially

²¹ Alex Cressler to Henry A. Bitner, 21 May 1861, Letters to Henry A. Bitner, 1861-1863, Accession #11395, University of Virginia, Alderman Library, Special Collections, Charlottesville, Virginia.

²² While not the heart of the cotton South, South Carolina had long been the most radical ‘Fire-Eater State’ (e.g. the Nullification Crisis of 1833).

opposed secession. The *Vindicator* claimed “South Carolina and her confederates of the Cotton States...precipitating a revolution, meet with but little sympathy in Virginia...as a sovereign state, nothing, we believe, is farther from her purpose than to coalesce with them in their...criminal purpose.”²³ While Lincoln was an anti-slavery President, he had no constitutional power that could abolish the institution. Thus, argued many Unionist newspapers, how could his election be reason for secession? However, the issue of secession divided Augusta’s elite. In January of 1861, state Senator Alexander H.H. Stuart, who was elected to represent Augusta County in the state’s secession convention, wrote to his daughter, “I found the most alarming excitement prevailing which threatened the most disastrous results...I sincerely hope the union party will succeed in electing a majority against secession.”²⁴ In contrast, John Imboden, a lawyer and former state legislator, wrote, “[Lincoln and Republicans] aim at the subjugation of 15 states [and the slaveholder].... I expect Civil War before the 1st of June.”²⁵ He would later add in more blunt terms, “if Virginia submits to the dishonor of standing by and seeing war made in the seceded states I will leave...we must immediately have the constitutional guarantees of the Crittenden plan at least or go with the south.”²⁶ An obvious divide had emerged; some, like Alexander Stuart, believed that the state institutions, code for slavery, could be best protected by staying in the Union where Virginia was protected by the Constitution. Others, including John Imboden, saw secession, especially after the Crittenden Compromise was rejected, as the only way for slavery to survive. Even Stuart, the most ardent Unionist at Virginia’s Convention, “was by no means soft in his defense of slavery...he sarcastically

²³ “Virginia and South Carolina,” *Staunton Vindicator*, November 30, 1860.

²⁴ Alexander H. H. Stuart to Frances Peyton Stuart, January 1861, Stuart Family Papers, 1785-1888, Mss1 St9102c, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

²⁵ J. D. Imboden to John McCue, 3 December 1860, Papers of the McCue Family, 1777-1920, Accession #4406, Box 4, Special Collections Department, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Virginia.

²⁶ J. D. Imboden to John McCue, 24 February 1861, Papers of the McCue Family, 1777-1920, Accession #4406, Box 4, Special Collections Department, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Virginia.

punctured arguments that would link secession to the protection of slavery.”²⁷ For all involved, secessionist and unionist supporters, the secession debate was less about the merits of secession, and more about the best way to protect the institution of slavery.

Although the Unionists initially dominated the Convention, they quickly began to lose sway. It became increasingly clear that Lincoln would not accept the early peace terms that the Confederacy offered – essentially demanding the complete constitutional protection of slavery – and even refused to receive the Confederate Peace Commission. Lincoln’s resolve severely undermined the Unionist claim that slavery would be safer in the Union. By March of 1861, just three months after repudiating secession, the *Vindicator* wrote “Lincoln threatens coercion, yet our Convention hesitates to secede; the Peace Conference...is repudiated by Congress, yet the Convention hesitates to secede... honor, freedom, justice, good faith, all are to be crushed under ...abolition villainy... the Convention cannot consign us to Northern despotism...the people of Virginia...will force their representatives to strike the blow.”²⁸ One month later, the *Vindicator*’s secessionist rhetoric became even more deafening: “Nothing but war will satisfy the intense hatred that is borne at the North to the institutions of the South—nothing can satisfy their hatred but the shedding of ‘their brother’s blood.’ It is too late now to talk of ‘Compromise,’ ‘Conference,’ or ‘Commission.’”²⁹ When the threat against slavery within the Union became increasingly real, secessionist rhetoric emerged supremely powerful and pervasive. As support for secession mounted, even men who supported Union were unwilling to take up arms against Virginia; the social and cultural pressures were simply too great to fight for the Union cause against the interests of their home state. Virginians saw the Civil War in simple terms defined by

²⁷ Ayers, *In the Presence of Mine Enemies*, 99.

²⁸ “Virginia – the Battle Ground,” *Staunton Vindicator*, March 15, 1861.

²⁹ “Wanted—A Policy,” *Staunton Vindicator*, April 12, 1861.

a social identity tied to slavery: “Virginia was a slave state...Republicans had announced their intention of limiting slavery...the threat could no longer be denied [or tolerated] even by those who loved the Union.”³⁰ While Lincoln had no formal power to abolish slavery, Virginians became increasingly convinced that his very election was a symbol of the inevitable growth of northern power and influence. From this perspective, if slavery was to survive, secession and Civil War, if necessary, were the only viable options. On April 17 1861, the Virginia Convention voted for secession and the state immediately began preparing for civil war.

The basic rhetorical framework of the Civil War was now firmly entrenched. Franklin was fighting to preserve the Union and the Republican liberal ideology of free labor. For the time being, abolition of slavery remained a hope of radical agitators who had only exacerbated the crisis. For Augusta, the Civil War would be fought to protect the very essence of Virginian life, and the slave system that undergirded it, from Yankee tyranny. Even the vast majority of the most ardent supporters of the Union in Virginia were unwilling to disavow such a cause. However, conceptions of the war were not static. As the war intensified, nationalism increasingly dominated understandings of the Civil War rather than the antebellum divide of free and slave labor.

In the Civil War 1863 was perhaps the most momentous year. On January 1, 1863, Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation freeing all slaves in Confederate territory. In May of 1863, General Lee humiliated Union forces commanded by Joseph Hooker at Chancellorsville, but lost his ‘right hand’ man, Stonewall Jackson, to friendly fire in process. The tide turned in July as General Meade defeated Lee at the Battle of Gettysburg and Ulysses Grant captured Vicksburg effectively splitting the Confederacy in two. On November 19,

³⁰ Ayers, *In the Presence of Mine Enemies*, 141.

Lincoln gave his famous Gettysburg Address, reinventing the essence of the American nation. This sequence of events transformed how the people of Augusta and Franklin understood and talked about the Civil War from 1863-1865.

In response to the Emancipation Proclamation, Augusta stood in complete defiance. The *Staunton Spectator* wrote, “We feel curious to know what the deluded people of the North think of the present unprecedented high prices of slaves in the South. Just at the very time when Lincoln declares that they are to be emancipated, they command higher prices than ever before...the South never felt that the institution of slavery was ever safer than at the present time...Lincoln both a fool and knave.”³¹ The Confederacy had succeeded in preserving slavery in the South during the war. While Lincoln could proclaim Confederate slaves free, he had no real power to actually emancipate them. Nancy Emerson wrote in her diary, “Lincoln’s proclamation has brought no desolation. What awful disappointment will be experienced by our friends the abolitionists. Never was a more quite and orderly Christmas.”³² Confederates initially understood the Civil War as a struggle to preserve slavery.

Thus, Confederate complacency regarding the security of slavery underscores an important transition. To the Confederacy, Lincoln’s Proclamation simply demonstrated that their fears of Lincoln and the Union had finally been realized. Out of this “the Confederacy, assimilating its transformation into a new nation-state [was] given a new sense of purpose.”³³ The people of Augusta wanted to demonstrate that the Confederacy had protected slavery. More importantly, however, they wanted to secure the Confederacy as a nation, albeit a slaveholding republic, rather than simply a rebellion to protect slavery. The fact that this nation would be a

³¹ “The Price of Slaves,” *Staunton Spectator*, January 6, 1863.

³² Nancy Emerson Diary, 8 January 1863, Accession # 9381, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.

³³ Ayers, *In the Presence of Mine Enemies*, 320.

slave holding polity was not in question. Rather than another example of Northern tyranny, the Emancipation Proclamation was in the eyes of Augusta's residents an irrelevant foreign diktat.

Consequently, slavery slowly but surely lost its status at the center of the war within southern rhetoric, replaced by a spirit independent nationalism. Jedediah Hotchkiss a Private in the 14th Virginia Cavalry who had fought at Gettysburg, wrote to his wife, "the talk of the Yankee papers about the...demoralized condition of our army is the purest nonsense...we could have remained at Gettysburg...we regret the loss of Vicksburg...but she is not the Confederacy and freedom does not die with her."³⁴ By 1864, Hotchkiss identified stabilization of the Confederate currency as a key to independence while making no mention of slavery.³⁵ Joseph Waddell, the owner of the *Spectator* and an ardent critic of the Emancipation Proclamation, declared in his diary that he would give up slavery in exchange for independence: "I greatly prefer independence without slavery, to submission with it, and would be glad enough to get rid of it if I could see any way of disposing of the negroes, without giving them up to barbarism or annihilation. It is rumored, on what authority I know not, that France and England have notified Lincoln of their intention to interfere in behalf of the Confederacy, upon our agreeing to *[deleted: gradual]* emancipation + to take effect sixty years hence—agreed!"³⁶

Waddell, one of the most politically adroit men in Augusta, realized that for the Confederacy slavery only served as a barrier to diplomatic relations with England and France. In 1865, even as Grant's forces closed in on Richmond, earlier slavery centered rhetoric proved completely transformed. Confederate soldier D.C. Snyder wrote to his wife in Staunton, "No

³⁴ Jedediah Hotchkiss to Sara A. Hotchkiss, 14 July 1863, Jedediah Hotchkiss Collection, Reel 4, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

³⁵ Jedediah Hotchkiss to Nelson H. Hotchkiss, 24 January 1864, Jedediah Hotchkiss Collection, Reel 4, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

³⁶ Joseph Addison Waddell Diary, 16 January 1865, Accession #38-258, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.

submission to tyrants has ever been our motto as Virginians. If the cause of the South is lost, all freedom of thought and speech is lost and we go back into the old monarchical forms of government.”³⁷ When the Virginia Secession Convention met in 1861, the best way to protect slavery was the only point of contention. By the end of Civil War, as the rhetorical focus shifted from preserving slavery to preserving the Confederacy, Augusta increasingly rationalized the conflict as a struggle to protect their new nation from the ‘monarchical’ oppression of the North.

In Franklin County, understandings of the Civil War underwent a similar transformation. The Emancipation Proclamation divided Franklin’s newspapers. The *Valley Spirit* mocked it claiming, “our views upon...emancipation are well known...we regard this pronunciamento, to use the language of the President himself as impracticable as the Pope’s bull against the comet...its effect will be...to make the war still more prolonged, bloody and bitter.”³⁸ While the Democrats no longer constituted the political majority, Copperheads, anti-war Democrats, remained a significant force; their ideology was powerful and divisive. In complete contrast, the *Waynesboro Village Record* praised Lincoln: “ the Proclamation...in brief, eloquent, and immortal sentences...it is not an argument...defense, or...declaration; it is simply the frank announcement of a brave and frank man...the considerate judgment of mankind.”³⁹ This divide between Republicans and Union Democrats had existed since the beginning of the Civil War. However, by 1863, as seen through the divisiveness over the Emancipation Proclamation, it had entered its critical phase. This climax would push the Republican Party towards new conceptions of the American nation, radically different from the antebellum political settlement.

³⁷ D.C Snyder to Rachel Snyder, 12 January 1865, D. C. Snyder Letters, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia.

³⁸ “The Emancipation Proclamation,” *Valley Spirit*, January 7, 1863.

³⁹ “The Proclamation,” *Waynesboro Village Record*, January 9, 1863.

Remarkably, out of this divisiveness, including Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and the Gettysburg Address, emerged a new ideal of civic equality built on the basis of liberal free labor ideology. As a result, preservation of the Union was no longer confined to political and economic pragmatism, particularly the safeguarding of free labor, but was now deeply tied to morality through evangelicalism and abolitionism. The very abolitionist spirit that the South dreaded had now emerged at the heart of the Union cause. John Hamer, in a letter to his sister, wrote a poem to sum up the developing sentiment: "We're contending for the right, God and freedom is our might, we'll bear our flag...triumphantly...for freedom's cause...see the god of Slavery dies...oppressor in his grave...behold the star of Freedom rise."⁴⁰ This appears to be exactly the kind of radical abolitionist sentiment that, in 1859, would have been inimical to Democrat and Republican alike. The pressures of the Civil War forced northern communities, like Franklin County, to confront the fundamental contradictions of the antebellum Union. Slavery and civic inequality, the preservation of which was the fundamental cause of disunion, would be indefensible in this remade republic; "from the Civil War emerged the principle of a national citizenship whose members enjoyed the equal protection of the laws, regardless of race."⁴¹ The abolition of slavery, once a fringe political position, was now at the heart of redefining, and reconstructing the Union.

The American Civil War remains an integral part of the development of the modern America people know today. In fact, many assert that the American Civil War was the fundamental turning point in American history. The industrial, economic, and state power that defines the United States today would not have been possible without the expansion of

⁴⁰ John Hamer to Eveline Hamer, 23 August 1863, John and Samuel Hamer Records, 191st Pennsylvania Infantry, Harrisburg Civil War Round Table Collection, Archives of the U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania.

⁴¹ Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 97.

government authority that took place during the Civil War. Thus, often lost in broad simplifications of the Civil War as an inevitable conflict with its roots in the nation's founding, lie the hidden complexities that are exemplified by the border communities of Augusta and Franklin County. While they ultimately understood and rationalized the Civil War in very different ways, Augusta and Franklin counties experienced significant change, often at tremendous pace; for both communities this change was a deliberate move away from antebellum ideas, problems, and dynamics in favor of new and often radically different ideas of nation building. The Civil War allowed for reform, revision and refinement of the nation on a scale that would have seemed unimaginable in 1860. Ultimately, the most important legacy of the Civil War was the destruction of slavery and the restoration and reconstruction of the American nation on the basis of the rhetoric of free labor, evangelicalism, and civic equality.

About the author

Zachary Brown is a native of Toronto Ontario and a junior studying history at Stanford University with a concentration in US history. His academic interests include the American Civil War, the rhetoric of Anglo-Indian interactions in the Colonial period, and political authority in the Hellenistic period and the early Roman Empire. Zachary hopes to pursue graduate studies in history.

Recommended citation

Brown, Zachary. "Changing Understandings of the American Civil War in Border Communities: The Cases of Augusta and Franklin Counties." *Armstrong Undergraduate Journal of History* 7, no. 1 (April 2017).