

Front Line of Freedom: African-Americans and the Forging of the Underground Railroad in the Ohio Valley

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Review

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Green, Michael S. *Freedom, Union, and Power: Lincoln and His Party During the Civil War.* Fordham University Press, \$65.00 ISBN 823222756

Ideas and reality

The formation of the Republican Party

In 1860, less than a decade after having been organized, the Republican Party won control of the national government. Composed of Free Soil advocates, supporters of the Liberty Party, remnants of the Whigs, and increasingly by restive northern Democrats, the Republicans collected into one tent, all who were, to varying degrees, hostile to slavery and dissatisfied with government by those who owned slaves. Still something of an omnium gatherum as well on a national political party, the Republicans had brought together disparate political minorities on the basis of ideas, rather than organization. The initial fundamental idea was free soil, and an unyielding opposition to the expansion of slavery beyond the 15 slave states and into the territories. As the political crisis of 1860-61 deepened, Republicans placed additional emphasis on preserving the Union, by force of arms if need be. Assuming the authority of government in the spring and summer of 1861, Republicans were determined to use the power of government, politics, economics, and the military, to assume the preservation of the Union, the limiting of slavery, and the expansion of opportunity for free labor. Freedom, union, and power were the troika of ideals that Michl Green sees as guiding the work of the Republic administration of Abraham Lincoln.

Republicans held to these ideas not for political expediency but as a mission that unified the soul of the party rather than merely the votes. As the war grew in length and violence Republican devotion to these ideas grew as well. This was especially true of freedom. Abolition began on the radical fringe of the party, but migrated steadily toward the center, with discussion about the Emancipation Proclamation being more about timing than substance. The Battle Hymn of the Republic was not exaggeration; it caught the feeling of many in the

Republican/Union political coalition that this war was a holy crusade of blood, fire, and sword to cleanse the Union of the publicly supported sin of slavery. From the Puritan city on a hill to Abolition, American politics always had a religious dimension. In such an environment, the power of government would hardly be better used than to do the Lord's work by destroying slavery through saving the Union.

On these basic ends of union, freedom and power, all Republicans, Green suggests, were agreed, and this seems to be true. It was the interface of ends with means that produced the wide difference of opinion that Green notes. On matters of war, difference and criticisms centered on persons, particularly generals, but extended to editors, cabinet officers and those in Congress as well. Republicans were more united on questions of strategy, particularly by 1863. But domestic policy, so clean when out of power before the war, had become controversial when in power during the war.

Law and finance produced the greatest divisions. In law, efforts to free slaves by military fiat and suspension of habeas corpus created continuing political problems. From *ex parte Merryman* early in the war to *ex parte Milligan* toward its end, Republicans never developed a satisfactory *modus vivendi* between liberty and order. Only the end of the war brought an end to that problem. Financial issues, which originated with the need to finance the war, quickly extended to paper money, government support for those who bought bonds, and public subsidy for the transcontinental railroad. These issues did not end with the war, but became more contentions during the entire generation from Appomattox to Theodore Roosevelt than they had been during the wartime emergency. Green wisely deals with these as unfinished business and the time of Lincoln's death.

A book on the ideology of the Republican Party during the Lincoln presidency deals with the pressure of wants upon political thought. The war brought the disparate Republican coalition together, though, looking forward from the late winter of 1860-61, an astute observer might easily have predicted the opposite. Instead of abandoning any of their basic pre-war principles, the Republicans tied freedom, union, and power together more tightly, arguing that each was necessary to achieve the others. With the end of the war, Republicans began to split apart into hostile factions that revolved around ideas as well as personalities. With the death of Lincoln, the Republicans lost the anchor of political astuteness, common sense and personnel magnanimity that alone could

hold them together with freedom and union achieved and retention of power the lone remaining tie that bound. By 1866, the Republicans had become a different party from the one going into the war. They lacked the complexity ideological base that had brought them to victory in war and election. Green clearly understands this, and sensibly did not extend a book about ideas into an era when ideas meant less and less and power and money meant more and more.

James D. Hardy, Jr. is a professor of history in the Honors College at Louisiana State University and has published several books on both history and literature, including one on baseball.