

“Cowardly and Incendiary Partisans”: Soldier Mobs, Loyalty, and the Democratic Press in the  
Civil War

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“My knavish country, thee,  
Land where the thief is free,  
Thy laws I love,  
I love thy thieving bills  
That tap the people’s tills;  
I love thy mob whose will’s  
All laws above.”

Ambrose Bierce, “A Rational Anthem,” 1882<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

On the afternoon of February 19<sup>th</sup>, 1863, about seventy-five convalescent Union soldiers from an army hospital at the small city of Keokuk, Iowa marched through town, making for the offices of the *Daily Constitution*. Once there, several of the group made their way inside, armed with sledgehammers. While their comrades formed a cordon in front of the building, the soldiers wielding hammers made a methodical attack upon the newspaper offices. Working from the ground floor up they spilled type, threw presses out of windows, and generally left the place “cleaned out.” A separate group of armed Union soldiers were dispatched by the provost guard to put an end to the violence, but the rioting soldiers outside refused to disperse, threatening their fellow soldiers with rifles and revolvers. Only once the destruction was complete would the convalescent soldiers consent to be led away. Part of one of the presses would later be recovered from the nearby Mississippi River.<sup>2</sup>

Mob violence against newspapers in the Civil War North was not uncommon. Broadly defined, such wartime attacks numbered well over a hundred. The practice of mobs attacking newspapers had a long history in the annals of the American press, dating back to the

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<sup>1</sup> Ambrose Bierce, *Poems of Ambrose Bierce*, ed., M.E. Grenander, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 18.

<sup>2</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, February 21, 1863.

Revolution. During the antebellum years, northern states had experienced a variety of mob attacks on abolitionist newspapers, most notably in November 1837 when Elijah Lovejoy was killed defending his press from a mob in Alton, Illinois. During the Civil War, however, a significant feature differentiated dozens of mobs from their antebellum predecessors: the attackers wore the Union blue of their nation's government. Loyal Americans struggled to explain why the same soldiers who were fighting rebels on the battlefield were attacking newspapers on the home front.<sup>3</sup>

The common feature of the newspapers that suffered attack by these soldier mobs was an allegiance to the Democratic Party. American newspapers of the war years were heavily partisan, with almost all local newspapers being affiliated with either the Democrats or the recently formed Republicans. This partisan association was often the result of some sort of formal affiliation, but the exact relationship between the publisher and the party was not always clear, and the line between editor and politician could be blurry.<sup>4</sup> During the Civil War most Democrats supported the war effort despite opposing the Republican Lincoln administration. As the war dragged on however, the existence of a borderline treasonous peace faction within the

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<sup>3</sup> John Nerone, *Violence Against the Press: Policing the Public Sphere in U.S. History* (New York City: Oxford University Press, 1994), 226-230. Nerone catalogues 111 mob attacks on presses during the Civil War, the majority of which were perpetrated by civilians. Due to several factors that make the recording and definition of mob action difficult and ambiguous (size, threats or violence done, and recording of an incident could all vary widely depending on time and place) it seems likely that continued study will lengthen this list. Contemporaries did not offer a specific definition of what they considered to be a mob, and the word was used frequently to describe a range of similar behaviors. David Grimstead offers a useful definition of mob action for historians of nineteenth-century American history: "incidents where six or more people band together to enforce their will publicly by threatening or perpetrating physical injury to persons or property extralegally, ostensibly to correct problems or injustices within their society without challenging its basic structures," David Grimstead, *American Mobbing: 1828-1861: Toward Civil War* (New York City: Oxford University Press, 1998), xii. For an account of press violence in the revolutionary and early republic periods see Nerone, 18-83.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *The Seventh Census of the United States* (Washington, 1850), lxxv. A census report calculates that 73% of newspapers published in the 1860 were politically oriented, and that 52% were overtly partisan. These percentages account for the number of published issues which may underrate their exposure, as individual copies frequently changed hands or were read aloud to groups. For a recent account of the role of the press during the Civil War Era with a focus on the major New York papers, see Harold Holzer, *Lincoln and the Power of the Press: The War for Public Opinion* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014).

Democratic Party contributed to increasingly frequent accusations of disloyalty against the Democrats. This faction, nicknamed Copperheads, drew almost unanimous ire from Union soldiers, who felt that the existence and strength of such a cowardly movement dangerously undercut their mission to put down the rebellion. It was not uncommon for soldiers to remark that when the war was done, they wished to do worse to those traitors at home than they had to the rebels in the field.<sup>5</sup>

The Copperheads constituted the most stalwart anti-war political force in the North. Their moniker, foisted upon them to deliberately connote a treacherous snake, became a common epithet among Northerners and soldiers especially, for those deemed unsupportive of the war effort. For their part, Copperheads defined themselves as conservatives seeking a return to the *status quo antebellum* and a commitment to three issues in particular: an immediate peace, protection for civil liberties, and opposition to the Emancipation Proclamation. The number of “true believer” Copperheads—those who were implacably furious about wartime habeas corpus suspensions, press censorship by the army, the draft, and the Emancipation Proclamation—was likely quite small. Those few were often loud and vituperative however and cast a large shadow in the minds of pro-war Northerners. It was not uncommon for pro-war Northerners to openly advocate the arrest and suppression of those who espoused Copperhead opinions. Many Democratic soldiers who voted against the party ticket (or at least refused to vote for it) cited the

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<sup>5</sup> Jenifer Weber in *Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln's Opponents in the North* (New York City: Oxford University Press, 2006), 69-70, argues that soldiers' increasing frustration with Copperheads started following the fall 1862 elections in which Democrats picked up thirty-two congressional seats, and several state legislatures and governorships. This is congruent with the temporal distribution of the soldier mobs studied here which saw a significant increase in the late winter/spring of 1863, see Figure 2 (page 24). For an alternative interpretation of post-1862 Republican fear and frustration with Democratic electoral success in the Midwest (the region that experienced most soldier mob attacks), see Brett Barker, “Limiting Dissent in the Midwest: Ohio Republicans’ Attacks on the Democratic Press,” in Ginette Aley and J.L. Anderson ed., *Union Heartland: The Midwestern Homefront During the Civil War* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013), 169-190.

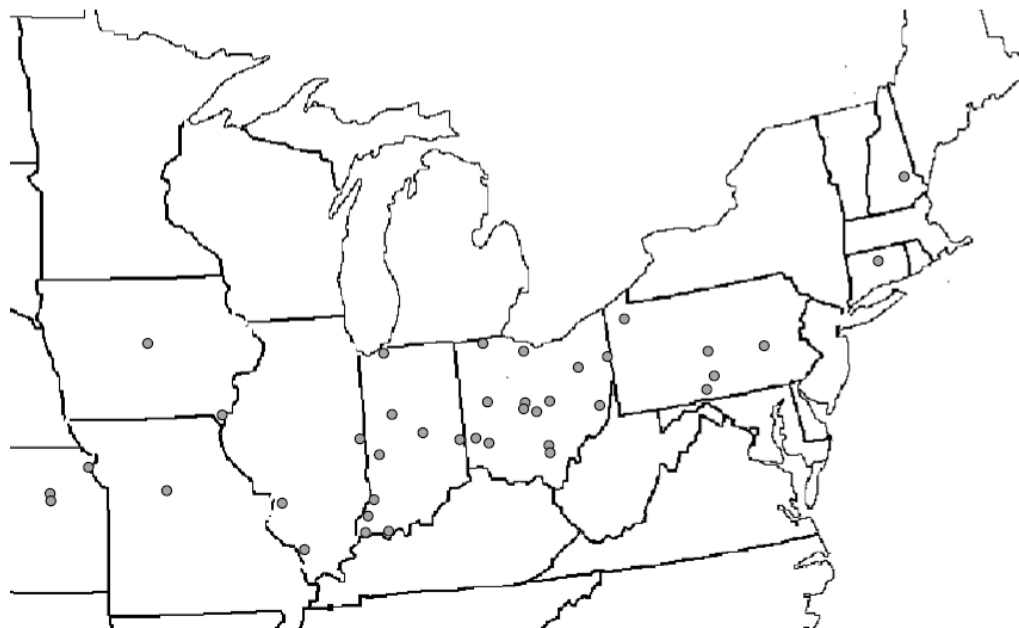
Copperheads on the home front as the reason for temporarily abandoning their party. Historians such as Frank Klement and more recently Jennifer Weber have discussed the Copperheads at length; for the purposes of this essay the most relevant aspect of this faction is its role in the popular and political consciousness of the time, and the degree to which the papers that were mobbed exhibited the Copperhead sympathies so often attributed to them.<sup>6</sup>

The author is aware of forty-one instances of wartime mob attacks in which Union soldiers composed the entirety or a substantial majority of a mob attacking a Northern newspaper. These attacks could take a variety of forms, including the destruction of an office, arson, demands that a flag be displayed, or threats of future violence—but threats and office destruction were by far the most common. These attacks, like the Copperheads themselves, were overwhelmingly concentrated in the Midwest. Twenty-eight occurred in the states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin, with Ohio and Indiana experiencing the greatest number by far. Ohio, which saw the most with fourteen, was the home of Copperhead headman (and 1863 Ohio gubernatorial-candidate-in-exile) Clement L. Vallandigham, as well as Copperhead congressman and Democrat 1864 vice presidential candidate George Pendleton, and newspaper editor turned Copperhead congressman Samuel S. Cox. Indiana, the site of the second most attacks with nine, saw intense partisan conflict during the war as relations between the Democratic legislature and Republican Governor Oliver Morton broke down to such a degree that the legislature refused to pass any appropriations bills, and Morton ran the state using federal and private money for the duration of the war. These attacks overwhelmingly took place in highly partisan political

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<sup>6</sup> Jonathan White, *Emancipation, the Union Army, and the Reelection of Abraham Lincoln* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014), 35-36. For a cogent summary of Copperhead historiography see Thomas E. Rodgers, “Copperheads or a Respectable Minority: Current Approaches to the Study of Civil War-Era Democrats,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 109 (June 2013).

environments where the threat Democrats could pose to the war effort was obvious—something the soldiers, always hungry for political news, did not fail to notice.<sup>7</sup>



Distribution of Soldier Mobbings in the Northern States  
1861-1864  
Two attacks not pictured: Sacramento, CA and Visalia, CA

These mob attacks on Democratic newspapers by northern soldiers carried political implications for both the attackers and the victims. The soldiers' behavior largely fit within the bounds of an established Northern tradition of social violence, in which a mob shut down a paper whose speech they deemed threatening and seditious. By focusing their damage on property, most often the press and type, and refraining from personal violence and more general destruction, the soldiers made clear that they were not engaged in simple rowdyism but rather in

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<sup>7</sup> This total is derived from Robert S. Harper, *Lincoln and the Press* (New York City: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1951) and Nerone, *Violence Against the Press*, 226-230, with four additional attacks compiled by the author. It is unlikely that this constitutes a complete list. For the purposes of this total, each individual altercation is defined as a separate incident such that a single regiment that threatens or attacks multiple newspapers in one day (as the 24<sup>th</sup> Indiana did on March 1, 1864), is counted as several incidents. Due to occasional vague or conflicting information regarding issues such as participants and timing, some incidents are occasionally omitted for the purpose of calculating statistics. This is noted when done.

a deliberate effort to silence a press. For the victimized paper the attack was potentially damning; individual soldiers might be dismissed as cowards or shirks, but as a group they were representative of the loyal national Union forces and their choice to attack a newspaper conveyed their distaste for it in no uncertain terms. Suddenly papers which had been refuting charges of disloyalty from fellow editors and citizens were backed into a corner. How would they explain why Union soldiers had targeted them for attack?

This essay seeks to explain why soldiers attacked Democratic newspapers as a mob, and how Democratic papers characterized these attacks. It will argue that both the soldiers and the Democratic press drew from antebellum precedents for this type of socialized violence. The soldiers adopted the ritualistic and performative trappings of antebellum anti-press mobs and associated the Democrats with outright disloyalty and extremism. The Democrats for their part consistently invoked abolitionism in their condemnations of such attacks, re-purposing language they had used previously used to condone widespread mobbing when the abolitionists had been the victims. Both sides saw the other as threatening the country with permanent disunion: the soldiers believed the Democrats' criticism of the war effort gave new life to the rebellion and threatened their effort to restore the Union, while the Democrats saw the soldiers' mobbings as part of a trend towards despotism and radicalism that would corrupt the Union and ensure the rebels would never return to the fold. The first section of the essay will examine the history of anti-press mob action in the antebellum United States and how it was practiced and justified; the second will examine the use of the term Copperhead and soldiers' perceptions of wartime loyalty; and the third will examine the attacks themselves and the trends and patterns in the Democratic coverage.

## MOB LAW IN ANTEBELLUM AMERICA

By the early 1830s, mob attacks on American newspapers had become a standard form of social violence, but their origins predated independence. In the years leading up to the American Revolution, discontented British colonists in New England began operating under a distinct logic that justified mob violence as a form of legally legitimate action rooted in the tradition of British constitutionalism. Legal scholar John Phillip Reid argues that Boston Whigs used mobs to enforce a view of British constitutionalism that gave pride of place to the freedom of a community, an interpretation that gave mobs legitimate legal standing as expressions of a community's just grievances. Mobbing was not equivalent to lawlessness, as they saw it. Rather a mob could act to ensure justice where the legal process failed or was absent. Mobs which successfully claimed this legal mantle secured the support of local authorities. As expressions of the local will, mobs were able to move through the streets with impunity and were used to defend a variety of community interests, from preventing exportation of foodstuffs to implementing quarantines and enforcing eminent domain. While these justifications were rejected by most of the Tory or Loyalist persuasion, some early Americans actively attempted to construct a space in which mob violence was a sanctioned method of redress by the local community against intolerable ideas and laws.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> John Phillip Reid, "In a Defensive Rage: The Uses of the Mob, the Justification in Law, and the Coming of the American Revolution," *New York University Law Review* 49 (1974): 1043, 1052-60, 1086. Pauline Maier, "Popular Uprisings and Civil Authority in Eighteenth-Century America," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 27 (January 1970): 5-8. See also William J. Novak, *The People's Welfare: Law and Regulation in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 51-82, 191-234. Thomas Slaughter has cast doubt on the utility of comparing eighteenth and nineteenth century crowd actions, warning such comparisons often mistakenly portray the nineteenth century as distinctly violent by comparison. See Thomas P. Slaughter, "Crowds in Eighteenth-Century America: Reflections and New Directions," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 115 (January 1991), 3-34.



By the time the Revolution broke out, roughly two-thirds of the established newspapers supported independence, leaving Tory and Loyalist papers a distinct minority among printers. During the colonial period, printers had conceived of themselves as a disinterested medium claiming to simply disseminate whatever they were paid to roll off their presses. Printers relied on avoiding conflict with economic and political interests to stay in business, and so this policy was sensible in addition to being a manifestation of printers' self-conception of themselves as neutral craftsmen. The 1765 Stamp Tax jump-started the politicization of printers in the thirteen colonies, in part because new high taxes on paper would have drastically increased the prices of their publications and put many out of business. Newspapers and print were instrumental to the success of the Revolutionary movement, and printers who published criticism of the Patriots faced the possibility of intimidation and violence.<sup>9</sup>

In the early years of the Republic, newspaper mobbing often spiked around foreign conflicts such as the Quasi-War and the War of 1812, that created high-stakes partisan environments in which mobs specifically invoked the legacy of the Revolution and their right as an aggrieved majority, to suppress newspapers. In a developing American tradition of justifying mob violence as legitimate, dissenters stressed that they represented the community interest and acted as a form of lawful authority. The key feature of this emerging mob tradition was its focus on popular support and the limitation of violence. For example, when Alexander Hanson, printer of the *Federal-Republican*, condemned the mob that drove him from Baltimore in 1812, his

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<sup>9</sup> Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Modern Communications* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 39 60-68. Nerone, *Violence Against the Press*, 35. Although some newspapers suffered suppression by military authorities during the war these cases were relatively limited. While some cases such as the destruction of notorious Tory James Rivington's New York press bear superficial similarity with the soldier mobs described in this essay, there are significant differences such as the active cooperation of civilians with the mob, and the soldiers involved being recently raised militia rather than men who had been under arms for several years. Nerone, *Violence Against the Press*, 36-40.

accusations that it constituted a small group of unpopular partisans conceded the point that, had they been a truly popular mob, the attack would have been legitimate. Majoritarian mobs in the early republic explicitly claimed to be acting in place of local authorities, attempting to sustain their legitimacy by moving quickly to their target and limiting their destruction to newspaper offices, suggesting planning and order, not lawless ravaging. By specifically targeting their attacks, mobs could cast themselves as an arm of the law, suppressing a certain violation with violence, but also exercising discretion and restraint.<sup>10</sup>

By the 1830s, these ideas had coalesced into a distinctly Northern tradition of social violence, defined by David Grimstead in his study of antebellum mobs as a “network of customary rather than codified social expectations and possibilities.” Mobbing as a form of social violence became more regionally distinct as the anti-abolitionist mob violence of the antebellum years began to spike in 1835. While slave and free states experienced a roughly equivalent number of mobs, their behavior and reception varied decisively. In the North property was almost always the target of the mobs (in the case of attacks on newspapers this was almost always the offices, the press, and its type); deaths were rare and those that did occur were often suffered by the rioters. These mobs often provoked some acknowledgment or response from local officials, and there was the possibility (though uncommon) of some minor legal restitution for the victims. The southern tradition was almost entirely opposite: mobs targeted people, often with deadly intent, in incidents that were ignored by local authorities at all levels. Many of the features associated with antebellum Northern mobs—the focus on property, the response though

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<sup>10</sup> Nerone, *Violence Against the Press*, 65, 68-70.

not prevention from authorities, and the conception of a mob as a legitimate option to suppress a threat to community order—would continue to define mobs through the Civil War.<sup>11</sup>

The new era of mobbing that dawned in 1835 was largely due to efforts by abolitionists to spread their movement to new portions of the country where it was not welcomed. Utilizing new printing technology that substantially increased the number of publications they could produce and dispatching lecturers to help promote the growth of new anti-slavery societies, abolitionists sought to broaden their base of support and the geographic reach of their message. By the spring and summer of 1835, mob action against abolitionists increased significantly, as men representing establishment economic, political, and religious interests violently harassed the abolitionists who they accused of inviting disunion. To these men, abolitionists were a radical irritant who threatened the peace of the locality with their divisive speech, and a mob was deemed a legitimate method to suppress the threat.<sup>12</sup>

Like the mobs of revolutionary New England, those that attacked antislavery newspapers showed a cognizance of legal procedure, using law to justify and legitimize their actions. Mob actors operated under an interpretation of constitutional law that stressed the rights of the community (a town or county) against the individual. The right of a community to regulate itself was seen as a fundamental component of republican liberty. Civil liberties were understood to be subject to local rules and regulations and giving primacy to private interests (or rights) over the welfare of the community seemed an odious inversion of republican principles. A natural

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<sup>11</sup> Grimstead, *American Mobbing*, 13-16, quoted on 14.

<sup>12</sup> Leonard Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing: Antiabolition Mobs in Jacksonian America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1970), 52, 81, 149. Coming to an accurate total of all anti-abolitionist attacks in this period would be impossible as many went unrecorded, but of the 134 such attacks Nerone notes in his book, 24 (18%) were against abolitionist presses in particular, rather than public speakers or other abolitionist evangelizers. Nerone, *Violence Against the Press*, 221-225.

consequence of the preeminence given to community welfare was the conclusion that free speech guarantees existed as a grant from the community to the individual, and it followed that antislavery advocates had forfeited their claim to the protection of the right of free speech and press by threatening their community with their disruptive agitation. Mobs went to lengths to perform actions that gave the impression of deliberate authority, and to establish that abolitionists' presence was a threat to the community. In the case of the citizens of Lexington, Kentucky, suppressing Cassius Clay's *True American* in 1845, a town meeting passed unanimous resolutions both denouncing the paper and stressing the previous tolerance their "great popular movement" had shown towards Clay. When they attacked his press, the work was carried out by a designated "Committee of Sixty" who published pamphlets justifying their actions to their fellow citizens. While certainly everyone did not agree with the attackers' legal logic, they clearly acted from a coherent idea of the legality of their actions and made efforts to convince others of their righteousness.<sup>13</sup>

Beyond general legal philosophy, mobs specifically cited the common law of public nuisance as a justification for violence against antislavery newspapers. Nuisance was a legal doctrine that had originated in British law to deal with the negative externalities of an individual's use of their property and constituted an important underpinning of nineteenth-century American regulatory law. Mobs tended to be less concerned with specific legal precedents for abatement or termination by mob (as there were few to none) but relied heavily on the basic principle that an individual's obnoxious expression could be labeled a public nuisance and be liable to be suppressed. Reiterating the basic principle behind nuisance law, antebellum

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<sup>13</sup> Kielbowicz, "The Mob and Mob Law in Attacks on Antislavery Newspapers," 560-67. Novak, *The People's Welfare*, 9-11.

legal scholar Charles Goodrich explained in his 1853 *The Science of Government* lectures, “the public interests are more important and more essential than any mere individual rights.” Joseph Story, in his 1833 *Commentaries on the Constitution* seemed to acquiesce to extralegal suppression of speech, noting that absolute freedom of speech was impossible as, “Men would then be obliged to resort to private vengeance, to make up for the deficiencies of the law.” While mobs’ use of nuisance law to justify their actions were not uniformly accepted, their legal logic was far from radical.<sup>14</sup>

With firm faith in the legality of their occupation, mobs relied not on specific court precedent, but on general legal principles and dicta to justify their actions. Abatement was typically justified only in the case of a private nuisance where the aggrieved party was a single individual or group that could take action on their own authority to end the nuisance. The courts had failed to make clear the distinction between a private and public nuisance, leading many in the public to believe that anyone could take the abatement of a public nuisance into their own hands. In some cases the perpetrators were remarkably explicit, such as in an 1858 incident in which a small group broke into the St. Cloud, Minnesota offices of antislavery journalist Jane Swisshelm, and after breaking her press left a note declaring that “The citizens of St. Cloud have determined to abate the nuisance.” In pursuing what was construed to be a legal abatement, mobs might hold a community deliberation and endeavor to remove or destroy the source of the

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<sup>14</sup> Novak, *The People’s Welfare*, 50-79, (Goodrich quoted on 46). Kielbowicz, “The Mob and Mob Law in Attacks on Antislavery Newspapers,” 574-79. Story quoted in 576. Those seeking to suppress what they saw as disloyal publications sometimes alluded to the logic behind public nuisance law even if they did not cite it directly. Brigadier General Milo Hascall for instance declared that it was imperative to shutter disloyal newspapers, writing, “As well I might establish a number of small pox hospitals in the heart of the city, and then punish the people for being infected with that loathsome disease, as to allow newspapers and public speakers to belch forth their disloyal and treasonable doctrine.” Hascall’s comparison of disloyal speech to a threat to public health, and his specific example of small pox hospitals, buildings that were restricted and sometimes destroyed based on public nuisance law, demonstrates how those who saw speech as a threat justified their actions as a defense of the political health of a community. Stephen E. Towne, “Killing the Serpent Speedily: Governor Morton, General Hascall, and the Suppression of the Democratic Press in Indiana, 1863,” *Civil War History* 52 No. 1, 55.

offense (usually copies of the paper and the press itself) with little collateral damage. The deliberations might be drawn out and involve local, law enforcement, legal, and elected officials as members of a town meeting or of the mob itself. Echoing the involvement of local leaders in pre-revolutionary times, their involvement here served as evidence both of community support for the action, and of its ultimate legality. This sort of excessive attention to legality and conscious building of public support was most present in Midwest where antislavery victims might have sympathizers in town, to whom the mob had to justify itself. Thus, by the late 1830s Americans had developed a distinct legal intellectual framework justifying the suppression of certain newspapers, and the use of mobs to accomplish that end.<sup>15</sup>

The anti-abolition mob violence that spiked in the mid-1830s was the last major mobbing outbreak until the Civil War and it had largely petered out by the end of the decade. Mobs in the northern states had established a tradition of acting as a self-conceived legal enforcement agent to punish and deter the promulgation of ideas deemed hostile to the community. An outbreak of anti-press mobbing required a highly charged political environment in which some editors insisted on publishing sentiments that others could plausibly claim were so outside of acceptable discourse that they could legitimately be suppressed by majoritarian violence. If enough fellow citizens determined speech to be outside the bounds of acceptable public discourse, a mob was a possible remedy. These mobs were distinguished by the attention they paid to legal norms, their focus on property, the lack of collateral damage and occasional restraint by institutional authorities. Although the circumstances of wartime mob attacks by

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<sup>15</sup> Kielbowicz, "The Mob and Mob Law in Attacks on Antislavery Newspapers," 571, 574 n46, 580-584. Occasionally antislavery mobs had charges brought against participants, but the consequences were rarely, if ever severe. Kielbowicz examined twenty instances of mob violence against antislavery newspapers between 1833 and 1859 and found some form of property damages recovered in five cases, six instances of charges being brought but ending in dismissal or acquittal, and no legal consequences in the remaining nine. Kielbowicz, "The Mob and Mob Law in Attacks on Antislavery Newspapers," 567-569.

soldiers were unique, they largely fit within this broader American tradition of social violence. In attacking Democratic papers that they believed dangerously encouraged disunion, the soldiers drew from a tradition that Democrats themselves had helped create when they attempted to shutter abolitionist presses with the same methods and for the same reason. These soldiers were not simply improvising or acting impulsively—they drew from the established context of mobs as a form of American social violence.<sup>16</sup>

### **SOLDIERS AND THE ISSUE OF DEMOCRAT LOYALTY**

The outbreak of the Civil War produced a new rash of mob attacks upon the press, with the critical difference that a significant portion of the attackers were soldiers in the pay of the United States army. Over a hundred mob-type attacks on newspapers occurred in the North during the war years, of which soldiers' attacks made up approximately a third.<sup>17</sup> The soldiers' attacks represented a culmination of political hostility towards a faction they believed was illegitimate, a hostility that was nurtured over years in the service during which soldiers developed a distinct idea of themselves as accomplishing a heroic mission that civilians had no right to criticize.

Union soldiers had a voracious appetite for newspapers, which served as entertainment, a connection to home, and an important source of news about state and national politics.<sup>18</sup> Army

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<sup>16</sup> Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing*, 156-170. Kielbowicz, "The Mob and Mob Law in Attacks on Antislavery Newspapers," 572-3.

<sup>17</sup> In *Lincoln and the Press*, Robert Harper notes 63 mob attacks against American newspapers in the north, of which soldiers were primarily responsible for 24 (38%). John Nerone's more exhaustive catalogue (Nerone, *Violence Against the Press*, 226-230) lists soldier involvement in 37 of 111 recorded instances (33%), although elsewhere he claims soldiers participated in "over forty" such attacks (Nerone, *Violence Against the Press*, 118). Despite the difficulty of coming to a comprehensive total, there is no evidence to suggest either scholar has dramatically missed the mark in generally accounting for soldier participation rates in wartime mobs.

<sup>18</sup> For newspapers as entertainment see Bell I. Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank: The Common Soldier of the Union* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), 153. For newspapers as a connection to home see Steven J. Ramold, *Across the Divide: Union Soldiers View the Northern Home Front* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 18-25. For newspapers as sources of political information see Joseph A. Frank., *With Ballot and Bayonet:*

and national administration leaders were aware of this and made continual efforts to prevent Democratic newspapers from reaching the soldiers for fear they would hurt morale. The army was an intensely political milieu, and in many cases soldiers' interest in politics increased over the course of the war. Soldiers came to identify their struggle in the field with the political struggle at home, and increasingly viewed civilian criticism of the war effort and of war measures as an illegitimate attack on the project for which they were risking their lives. Their anger was turned not so much towards those who neglected to enlist or failed to show necessary levels of support for the war effort, but towards those they deemed Copperheads, who through their political agitation at home actively undermined and disrespected the soldiery.<sup>19</sup>

The Copperheads on the other hand saw themselves as a legitimate conservative opposition. Unfortunately for them, their demands for immediate peace and intense opposition to the Emancipation Proclamation were at odds with a North that largely accepted emancipation and African-American troops as a wartime necessity and wanted to see the conflict result in victory and reunion. This made the Copperheads rather unsympathetic figures, and many Northerners expressed the hope state and national governments would do more to silence them. For all their clamor Copperheads were relatively few in number, and a discrete minority among the Democrats. While Copperheads certainly made their influence felt at several key points in the war, playing the part of a boogeyman did more for their overall relevancy than their political positions.<sup>20</sup>

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*The Political Socialization of American Civil War Soldiers* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 139-140, 169-170.

<sup>19</sup> White, *Emancipation, the Union Army, and the Reelection of Abraham Lincoln*, 90-91. Frank, *With Ballot and Bayonet*, 38; Adam I. Smith, *No Party Now: Politics in the Civil War North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 93-94. Ramold, *Across the Divide*, 19. J. Matthew Gallman, *Defining Duty: Personal Choice, Popular Culture, and the Union Home Front* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 258.

<sup>20</sup> Weber, *Copperheads*, 3-7. Exact numbers of Copperheads are difficult to pin down, but the scholarly consensus is that they remained a consistent minority within the party throughout the war. For a summary of northern war time



Whatever their real numbers or political influence, the specter of Copperheadism loomed large in the minds of Union soldiers. After the 1862 mid-term elections went largely for the Democrats, soldiers became increasingly worried about the effect of home front critics on the war effort. Newspapers from home spouting critiques of the Lincoln administration's war policy and letters recounting the anti-war sayings and writings of former neighbors angered many soldiers. "Prominent men as [Copperhead congressman] Vallandigham are making political capital out of the reverses that have fallen upon us...No patriotic love of the Union seems to live in the Copperhead heart!" complained one Illinois soldier in early 1863. Later that spring, several Indiana soldiers issued an ultimatum to hometown friends, declaring that "if you cannot renounce your allegiance to the Copperhead scoundrels and own your allegiance to the Government which has always protected you, *you are my enemy*." Bearing in mind the fall 1862 elections that had won many new seats for the Democrats, soldiers increasingly worried that sentiment on the home front no longer supported their crusade to restore the government.<sup>21</sup>

Many soldiers believed that Copperhead speech hurt the war effort by giving hope to the southern rebels and depressing morale, thereby prolonging the war. It was not hard to come to this opinion; Copperhead spokesman Clement Vallandigham frequently lambasted the war as an expensive, deadly, failure. In a well-publicized lame duck speech to Congress in January 1863 he complained long and bitterly that, "twenty months have elapsed, but the rebellion is not crushed" that the war "made this country one of the worst despotisms on earth" and that despite ample time and resources the government had "utterly, signally, disastrously...failed to subdue ten

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opinion on the legitimacy of suppressing dissenting (often Copperhead) views, especially in the press, see Mark Neely Jr., *The Union Divided: Party Conflict in the Civil War North* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 89-90.

<sup>21</sup> Frank, *With Ballot and Bullet*, 103; Weber, *Copperheads*, 69-70. John Holahan, 7<sup>th</sup> Illinois quoted in Ramold, *Across the Divide*, 118. Orville Chamberlain, 74<sup>th</sup> Indiana, quoted in Weber, *Copperheads*, 101-102.

millions of rebels.” Vallandigham’s defeatist rhetoric gave fuel to the growing impression that the Copperheads were back-stabbers who at best cared little if the Union prevailed. Ten days after his “Speech on the Great Civil War in America” hit the papers, an Illinois soldier complained in a letter, “If the mouths of the Northern traitors could only be shut, the rebellion would not last Sixty days longer.” That October in the midst of Vallandigham’s gubernatorial bid, an Ohio soldier home on sick leave witnessed a rally for the Copperhead candidate and recalled how it felt “painful” to see those he and his comrades were protecting from “the ravages of disunion and anarchy” show no gratitude but instead “cast upon us the vilest epithets.” “Whenever [the Vallandigham supporters] caught sight of blue coats and brass buttons” he remembered sullenly, “they would hurrah for Vallandigham and Jeff Davis.” Union soldiers, many of whom had now spent multiple years fighting to suppress the rebellion, believed they were owed support from the home front and that the Copperheads who opposed the war were as much their enemies as the rebels.<sup>22</sup>

In most cases soldiers who considered themselves Democrats were no more charitable toward perceived Copperheads than their Republican comrades. One Pennsylvania soldier made his thoughts known in the *York Republican* under a pseudonym, lamenting, “I love the Democratic Party, but oh! God, when I see men who call themselves Democrats, who abuse and misuse the word democracy for a cloak to hide their damnable purpose, my heart burns within me with indignation.” Some Democratic soldiers became frustrated when their disapproval of war measures like the Emancipation Proclamation caused them to be grouped together with Copperheads despite their service in the army. Democrat Major Durbin Ward recalled a like-

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<sup>22</sup> Clement Vallandigham, *Speeches, Arguments, and Letters* (New York City: J. Walter and Company, 1864), 427-429. John J. Moulton, quoted in Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank*, 286. Charles Dana Miller, *The Struggle for the Life of the Republic: A Civil War Narrative by Brevet Major Charles Dana Miller, 76<sup>th</sup> Ohio Volunteer Infantry*, ed. Stewart Bennet and Barbara Tillery (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2004), 134.

minded general facetiously interrogating him, jokingly conveying frustration with how a term reserved for traitors was being used to describe loyal army men. “Do you believe in prosecuting the War against the Rebellion to the last dollar and the last man?” the general asked. “Do you believe a nigger to be better than a white man?” Upon receiving a dutiful “I do!” and “I do not,” the general held out his hand and laughingly exclaimed “I hail thee brother Copperhead!” The fellow officers mocked how Republicans equated their disparagement of African-Americans with treason, despite their loyal service. Historian Jonathan White, in arguing that the Union army was not as uniformly Republican in its politics as once thought, points out that many Democratic soldiers voted for Republican candidates (or did not vote at all), because they felt betrayed by this peace wing of their party. Many explained their reasoning explicitly, claiming that they had not abandoned their party, but they could not vote for it as long as it was corrupted by the anti-soldier Copperheads.<sup>23</sup>

As the Copperheads found few friends among even the army Democrats, hatred of those traitors at home became a major unifying thread among the soldiers. “Copperheadism has brought to the soldiers here together more than anything else,” remarked an Ohio Corporal in May of 1863. This widely shared opprobrium had downsides, however. Historian Steven Ramold notes that Copperheads’ public image reflected the communications gulf between the soldiers and the home front; having been away from home for months or years soldiers relied on accounts from newspapers or friends and family to draw conclusions about the political situation back home. The size and influence of the vocal and divisive Copperheads could be magnified as the very worst of them got the most attention, lending credence to conspiracy theories involving

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<sup>23</sup> “F” to the *York Republican*, quoted in Dennis W. Brandt, *From Home Guards to Heroes: The 87<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania and Its Civil War Community* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 167. White, *Emancipation, the Union Army and the Reelection of Abraham Lincoln*, 34-37 (Durbin Ward, quoted on 8).

treasonous plots and various secret societies. These threats, as Ramold puts it, “rested upon innuendo, incomplete information, and suspicions that proved easy to manufacture into a conspiracy, and virtually impossible to completely disprove.” In this environment the distinctions between Democrats who supported the war and the Union but were frustrated with the Lincoln administration, and those few who were Copperheads through and through, began to blur. To some soldiers, all Democrats were Copperheads.<sup>24</sup>

This tendency to conflate all Democrats with the very worst their party had to offer was more worrisome considering that many soldiers expressed a desire to do violence to those they deemed Copperheads. Soldiers increasingly began referring to their political enemies at home in military terms, as people to be warred against—not as partisan rivals but as traitors. As one Union officer put it, “While we are watching and fighting the armed enemy in the field, let us not forget that our enemies are *not all* in the field, nor are they *all* in the South, but that there are *many* of them lurking around and about our own dear homes.” The Indiana soldiers quoted earlier delivering an ultimatum to their Copperhead friends and relatives at home finished their letter by declaring that if their friends did not renounce their beliefs, then the soldiers would prefer they “were in the ranks of *my open, avowed, and manly* enemies, that I might put a ball through your black heart, and send your soul to the Arch Rebel himself.” In March 1863, as mob attacks by soldiers were beginning to increase, Pennsylvania soldier James Miller darkly predicted “I should not wonder to see the time after this war is over that [with] our own strong arms we will take vengeance on those cowardly skunks that are a disgrace to our country.” Following the 1862 elections, the threat posed by the Copperheads began to loom large in the minds of Union soldiers. With the war soon to enter its third year, dissent was seen by them as

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<sup>24</sup> Enos Lewis, quoted in Weber, *Copperheads*, 94. Ramold, *Across the Divide*, 115-119. Quoted on 116.

increasingly illegitimate, and those who the soldiers perceived as harming the Union cause no longer deserved legal or constitutional protection in their eyes.<sup>25</sup>

The soldiers' anger and ultimately their actions against these newspapers highlight the two primary problems historian William Blair identifies regarding treason during the Civil War: how to identify it and who could deal with it once it had been identified. In antebellum America, the local community had regulated speech and defined what constituted dangerous or intolerable words. Indeed, as far back as the late colonial period, mobs had justified their violent actions against their neighbors in terms of protecting a wide range of community interests. With the coming of the Civil War, many Americans adopted an increasing acceptance of government efforts to suppress dangerously treasonous speech, and the military became a visible manifestation of how that newly vested authority was wielded. Beginning especially in the early months of 1863 soldiers began to conclude that they were the answer to both those questions: *they* could determine what was treason and disloyalty, and *they* could punish it where they found it. The crucial innovation mobbing soldiers made to the American anti-press mob tradition was to conceive of themselves as representatives of an offended *national* community. Their obligation, their "duty" as some called it, to suppress such papers was grounded in their role as agents of the federal government, as representatives of the national will. In their eyes it was their sacrifice for that government and by extension the national community that legitimized them as just and necessary defenders against treasonous influence.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Frank, *With Ballot and Bayonet*, 172-173. Handwritten speech by an unknown Union Officer, quoted in Smith, *No Party Now*, 93. Orville Chamberlain, quoted in Weber, *Copperheads*, 102. James T. Miller quoted in Timothy J. Orr, "A Viler Enemy in Our Rear: Pennsylvania Soldiers Confront the North's Antiwar Movement" in Aaron Sheehan-Dean, ed., *The View From the Ground: Experience of Civil War Soldiers* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 179.

<sup>26</sup> William Blair, *With Malice Toward Some: Treason and Loyalty in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 2014), 37, 60-61. Maier, "Popular Uprisings and Civil Authority," 5. Democrats for their part saw soldier mobs as an agent of a Republican administration that sought to suppress their legitimate dissent through

Democratic newspapers were a visible symbol of the politics that the soldiers now viewed as traitorous. Due to the relatively inexpensive costs of establishing a press and Americans' voracious appetite for political news, partisan newspapers proliferated and in many areas were run or funded, with varying degrees of oversight, by the local parties. Certainly, many local papers across the North and Midwest were not Copperhead aligned, but virtually all frequently criticized the president and his war policies, a critique that more and more soldiers viewed as illegitimate coming from a civilian. Some papers on the other hand were widely recognized as voices of the Copperhead faction and several would suffer violence at the hands of soldiers before the war was out. The Dayton *Daily Empire* in southwestern Ohio was one such, operating in the congressional district of chief Copperhead Vallandigham (he was a former owner of the paper), while in Columbus, Samuel Medary published *The Crisis*—quite possibly the most vituperative voice in the Copperhead cacophony—with a bare minimum of equipment. The most infamous however is undoubtedly Wilbur Storey's Chicago *Times*, which made its name in the spring of 1863 when Major General Ambrose Burnside shut it down for several days, citing the harm its publishing posed to the war effort. It is difficult to exaggerate the degree to which popular newspapers and politics were synonymous at the time; in many communities these papers would have stood as visible and vocal symbols of their party.<sup>27</sup>

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suspensions of civil liberties. Suspensions of *habeas corpus* rights in 1861 and 1862 fueled a Democratic narrative that portrayed the Lincoln administration as a tyrannical project bent on despotism with the army as its main tool. These were largely overblown concerns, arrests were mostly restricted to the border slave states and though they reached a highwater mark in August of 1862 they never again reached that level. See Mark E. Neely Jr., *The Fate of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln and Civil Liberties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 51-62, 136-138 For the most explicit justification of mob soldiers' actions and their self-conception see the Keokuk hospital mob's public defense in the *Keokuk Gate City*, republished in *Democrat and News*, February 25, 1863.

<sup>27</sup> Ramold, *Across the Divide*, 19. "About the Dayton Daily Empire (Dayton [Ohio]) 1850-1865", from the Chronicling America Historic American Newspapers Collection of the Library of Congress. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85026002/>. Accessed March 14, 2018. For a brief discussion of the Lincoln administration's handling of Burnside's actions see Craig D. Tenney, "To Suppress or Not to Suppress: Abraham Lincoln and the Chicago *Times*" in *Civil War History* 27 (September 1981): 249-259. For more on the

The hostility the Union army felt towards the Copperheads and anyone who disparaged the war effort cannot be overstated. Beginning in the winter of 1863, soldiers of all stripes increasingly expressed an animus for those on the home front they saw as actively hindering their efforts to suppress the southern rebellion. The virulence with which Copperheads espoused their fringe political beliefs drew attention, and their occasional political successes led the soldiers to see them not just as a potential political threat, but as a danger to the nation itself. In their righteous anger soldiers conflated any complaints about the way the war was being handled with Copperhead sympathy, and “Copperheadism” became a word that could be deployed freely to invalidate criticism and implicitly accuse the speaker of disloyalty. It is in this climate that soldier mob attacks on Democratic newspapers must be examined, especially as they increased dramatically in the beginning of 1863. Union soldiers tapped into a Northern American tradition that legitimized the use of mob violence to suppress obnoxious and dangerous speech in the press, adopting several key regional behaviors that connected their actions to a distinctively Northern tradition of mob violence. In attacking these newspapers, the soldiers were declaring that criticism of the war effort was so outside the realm of acceptable discourse as to be unprotected speech.

### **SOLDIER MOBS AND THE DEMOCRATIC PRESS**

Over the course of the Civil War Democratic newspapers were targeted in at least forty-one attacks by mobs composed of Union soldiers. These attacks occurred in at least nine different states, although more than half took place in Ohio and Indiana. They occurred primarily

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bizarre life of Wilbur Story see Justin E. Walsh, *To Print the News and Raise Hell!: A Biography of Wilbur F. Story* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2012, original, 1968).

in the winter months, with sixty-one percent of the attacks taking place in the first four months of the calendar year, and in the latter half of the war, with 1863 and 1864 combined containing eighty percent of the attacks.<sup>28</sup> The size of these mobs could vary significantly, from a dozen soldiers or fewer in the case of a February 1864 attack on the Lancaster *Ohio Eagle*, to as many as one hundred in the case of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ohio cavalry's March, 1863 mobbing of the Columbus *Crisis*. All this is to say, these attacks typically occurred in Midwestern states during winter and early spring varying from a collection of rogue soldiers to a small horde.<sup>29</sup>

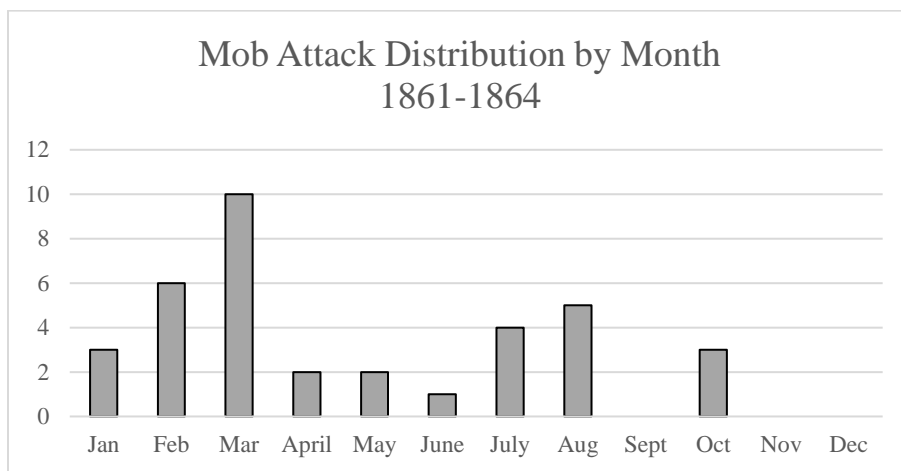


Fig. 1 Soldier Mob Attack Distribution by Month (1861-1864). Mob attacks were most common in the winter months when the armies were typically inactive, with March seeing by far the most frequent attacks. Attacks displayed here number 36, due to spree attacks being recorded as one incident, and the omission of attacks with unconfirmed dates.

<sup>28</sup> The total number of attacks reported includes all incidents that the author is aware of, including those that ended in minimal violence, and treating separate attacks in one day by the same persons as multiple events. The percentages reported are calculated from a total of 37, discounting one attack because of lack of data regarding its timing and consolidating two instances of multiple attacks in one day into a single attack.

<sup>29</sup> *Ohio Eagle* (Lancaster), February 4, 1864, reprinted in *The Crisis* (Columbus), February 17, 1864. Members of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ohio disagree about the size of the mob, but William Smith and Isaac Gause put the number near one hundred. See William J. Smith, *William James Smith's Memoirs of the Second Ohio Volunteer Cavalry Company M*, Robert W. Hatton ed. (Milford, OH: Little Miami Publishing, 2008), 43-44; Isaac Gause, *Four Years With Five Armies: Army of the Frontier, Army of the Potomac, Army of the Missouri, Army of the Ohio, Army of the Shenandoah* (New York City: Neale Publishing, 1908), 113-121. Some mobs were reported to be larger than one hundred persons, but the reliability of such estimates is unknown.



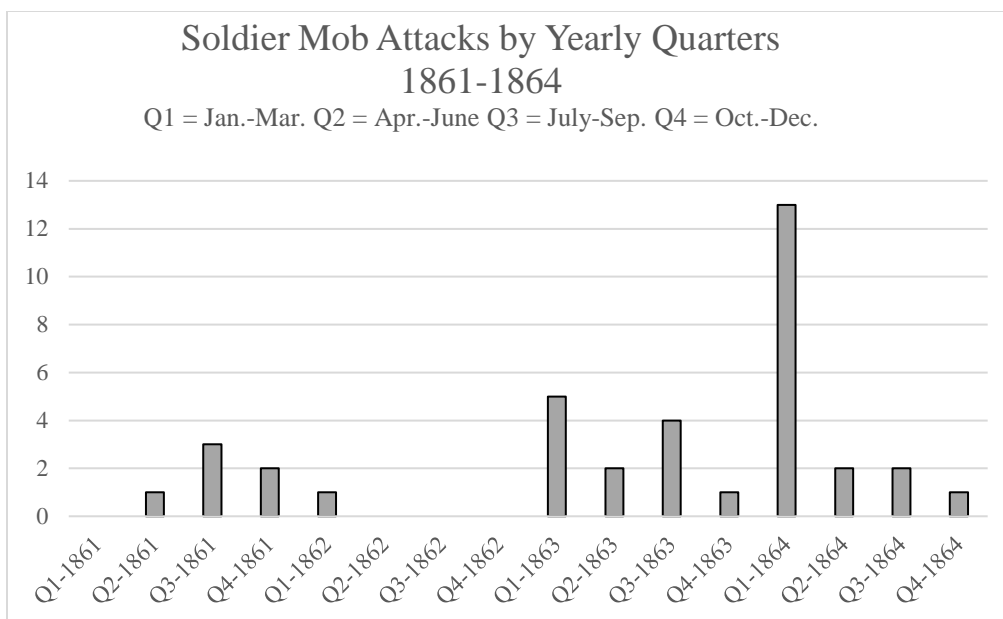


Fig. 2 Soldier Mob Attack Distribution by Yearly Quarters (1861-1864). Mob attacks were relatively infrequent until the winter months of 1863. The months of January-March in 1863 and 1864 saw the largest outbursts of violence. Attacks displayed here number 37, due to spree attacks being recorded as one incident, and the omission of attacks with unconfirmed dates.

Soldier mobs played out according to the traditional script for northern anti-press mob violence. Newspapers ubiquitously characterized these gangs of soldiers as a “mob” or “mob-law.” While the fact that the participants were soldiers was discussed in detail, most headlines failed to distinguish between mob attacks on newspapers by soldiers or civilians, indicating that those perpetrated by soldiers were seen as a variation on traditional mob violence.<sup>30</sup> This is due to the fact that the soldiers’ behavior fit within the bounds of the northern anti-press mob tradition. There is very little personal violence associated with these mobs, with the death toll amounting to only one (a civilian killed in a large brawl that followed a March 4, 1864 attack on the *Dayton Daily Empire*). Soldiers focused on damage against property, specifically the materials within the office used to print the newspaper. Destruction of presses with hammers,

<sup>30</sup> Typical examples from one paper include “Another Arrest—The Lebanon Citizen Destroyed by a Mob,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, reprinted in *Daily Ohio Statesman*, August 12, 1862, and “A Press Destroyed by a Mob—Its Meaning—Danger to Public Liberty,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, March 7, 1863. The first describes an attack made up of civilians, the second of soldiers.

axes or other implements, scattering of type, and dumping the press itself in a nearby river were all common features of soldier mobs. These were frequently perpetrated in a relatively orderly and predictable fashion, with designated soldiers sometimes standing guard outside to ensure the work was not disturbed, and those doing the destruction working in a methodical fashion, focusing their efforts on the press and type and leaving the building itself largely undamaged. Arson and destruction of surrounding buildings was rare. By acting in this fashion, with apparent order and deliberation, by limiting their violence to the office itself, and refraining from personal violence, the soldiers' actions fit the northern script of anti-press mob violence. By focusing their destruction on the implements of printing they clearly communicated the political nature of their act and their displeasure with that particular newspaper. It would be difficult to understand these attacks as anything other than a direct political attack by veteran soldiers attempting to silence certain political speech.<sup>31</sup>

Wartime civilian anti-press mobs exhibited some of the same behaviors of soldier mobs, but the variation in the form and timing of their attacks illuminate some significant differences in the driving motivation of the two groups. While civilian and soldier mobs both engaged in a variety of mob behavior, civilian mobs seemed to prefer threats and demands for signs of loyalty (usually by the editor displaying a flag), while soldiers preferred sacking an office. This reflects a difference in the temporal distribution of the attacks as well, as many civilian mobs (fifty-seven percent) occurred in the first and last years of the war and frequently manifested as a response to major events such as battles and surrenders, while soldier mobs were concentrated in 1863 and 1864 and were often responses to perceived home front hostility.<sup>32</sup> There is significant

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<sup>31</sup> The attack in Keokuk, Iowa described at the beginning of this essay is a prime example of these behaviors. *Chicago Tribune*, February 21, 1863.

<sup>32</sup> Nerone, *Violence Against the Press*, 119-120. Percentage derived from the 63 civilian mobs with reliable dates Nerone catalogues in Appendix C (226-230) with 29 occurring in 1861 and 7 in 1865.

geographic variation as well, as most soldier mobs were restricted to Midwestern states, while civilian mobs were much more dispersed, including several that occurred in New York City and San Francisco.<sup>33</sup> Although both civilian and soldier mobs that attacked Democratic newspapers were accused of being politically ignorant or radical, these accusations were leveled with much more vehemence and regularity when soldiers were the perpetrators. Civilian mobs could sometimes be accepted as simply a political mob of partisan enemies—deplorable, but normal. In this spirit, Democratic civilians could occasionally constitute a mob themselves and make an attack on a Republican paper. Civilian and soldier mobs both engaged in mob attacks within the same tradition of social violence, but they tended to attack for different reasons at different times, while working from a shared understanding a mob as a legitimate way to curb dissent.<sup>34</sup>

Close physical proximity between soldiers' lodgings and an anti-war newspaper could help incite a mob, as was the case in two well-reported attacks from the winter of 1863. Keokuk, Iowa lay in the southeast corner of the state bordering Illinois and Missouri and boasted a population of just over 8,000 when the war broke out but had reached nearly 10,000 residents by the second year of the war. Due to Keokuk's prime location on the Mississippi it became a major staging ground for troops going to and returning from the southern theatre, and as a result a major hospital was established there by mid-1862. Keokuk was also home to the *Daily Constitution* published by former lawyer and legislator Thomas Clagett. Born in eastern Maryland, Clagett served as a Whig in a couple terms of the Maryland legislature, before relocating to Iowa in 1850 where he opened his newspaper. Entering politics again, now as a

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<sup>33</sup> New York City saw four mobs on April 15, 1861, two days after the surrender of Fort Sumter, San Francisco saw five mobs on April 15, 1865 a week after Lee's surrender at Appomattox.

<sup>34</sup> The Portsmouth *Daily Times* (Ohio) for instance referred to a Lebanon, Ohio civilian mob as "simply a partisan mob, originated for the purpose of destroying the press of an opposing party." Soldiers mobs were rarely excused so easily. *Portsmouth Daily Times*, August 23, 1862.

Democrat, he had most notably served on the 1861 special legislative session called to ready the state for war.<sup>35</sup>

The attack by soldiers recuperating at this hospital that opened this essay was reportedly sparked by an article in the *Daily Constitution* titled “Politics in the Army.” Decrying the political influence some Indiana officers were reported to exert on their men, and the influence exerted on them in turn by the “partizan bigots at home,” the article proved offensive enough to spark a large mob in late February. Numbering seventy-five by one account, and twice that according to another, the soldiers marched down to the *Constitution* offices where they carried out a methodical attack upon the office, wrecking the place from top to bottom with the aid of several sledgehammers. The damaged machinery was then loaded onto a dray and carted towards the Mississippi river to be sunk. Soon enough, Lieutenant C. J. Ball and the local provost guard arrived on the scene and attempted to corral the soldiers back to the hospital. While they met spirited resistance from the soldiers who stood guard outside to make sure the work was completed, the convalescents were eventually returned to their quarters.<sup>36</sup>

One hundred miles upstream the *Daily Democrat and News* in Davenport, Iowa was apoplectic, calling the attack a “damnable outrage” and raising the obvious question, “Are the people to be required to pay and support these soldiers in idleness, lounging round hospitals, when by their acts they conclusively demonstrate they are able bodied and fit for service?” The

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<sup>35</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *The Eighth Census of the United States* (Washington, 1860), 148; Gerald Kennedy, “U.S. Army Hospital: Keokuk, 1862-1865,” *Annals of Iowa* 40 (Fall, 1969): 118. Benjamin F. Gue, *History of Iowa: From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century*, 4 vols. (New York: The Century History Company, 1903), 4:48.

<sup>36</sup> Hubert H. Wubben, *Civil War Iowa and the Copperhead Movement*, (Ames: Iowa State University Press), 112. *Chicago Tribune*, February 21, 1863; Kennedy, “U.S. Army Hospital: Keokuk,” 133.

soldiers for their part were unrepentant, and proud enough to publish a brief justification of their action which is worth quoting in full:

“We, the undersigned soldiers of the U.S. army, being fully convinced that the influence of a paper published in this city called *The Constitution*, edited by Thos. Claggett, has exerted, and is exerting, a treasonable influence, (inexcusable by us as soldiers) against the Government for which we have staked our all, in the present crisis. We, therefore, consider it a duty we owe to ourselves, our brethren in the field, our families at home, our Government and our God, to demolish and cast into the Mississippi river, the press and machinery used for the publications of the aforesaid paper, and any person or persons that interfere, so HELP US GOD.”<sup>37</sup>

Brigadier General Benjamin S. Roberts, commander of the military district of Iowa, investigated the incident but he had little sympathy for Claggett. He condemned the attack and promised to punish future such indiscretions, but also suggested that Iowa citizens could prevent such instances by refusing to tolerate papers such as the *Constitution* in the first place. Claggett appealed to Iowa governor Samuel Kirkwood for protection and aid, but Kirkwood rebuffed him claiming Claggett had brought the trouble on himself by allowing the suffering soldiers to believe he was their enemy. Claggett did eventually resurrect his paper, but this sort of indifference to victimized editors’ plight was not uncommon, as the case of the Columbus *Crisis* also demonstrates.<sup>38</sup>

Columbus, founded in 1812 when the Ohio legislature decreed that a new state capital be carved from the forest on the high east bank of the Scioto River, boasted a population of over 18,000 when the war began. This made it the smallest of Ohio’s four large cities, although it would soon grow exponentially as it became a hub of wartime organizing. Columbus had gone for Democrat Stephen Douglas by a healthy margin in the 1860 presidential election with the

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<sup>37</sup> *Keokuk Gate City*, republished in *Democrat and News*, February 25, 1863.

<sup>38</sup> *Democrat and News* (Davenport), February 23, 1863. Wubben, *Civil War Iowa*, 112.

Little Giant taking fifty-four percent of the vote compared the Lincoln's forty-three, and it was here that Samuel Medary published *The Crisis*, an unusual weekly that lacked both advertisers and a press of its own. Medary was an old face in Ohio Democratic politics, having been a state legislator and senator, he had also been instrumental in establishing the state Democratic newspaper, *The Ohio Statesman*. After serving as governor of the Minnesota and Kansas territories during the Buchanan administration, Medary returned to Columbus where he put his ample talent for making enemies to work, loading *The Crisis* with all the vituperation he could muster.<sup>39</sup>

In March 1863, two weeks after the attack in Keokuk, *The Crisis* fell victim to the troopers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ohio cavalry stationed just west of Columbus at Camp Chase. The enlisted men had recently returned from a furlough, and it was around that time that, as Private William J. Smith put it, that “[*The Crisis*] got extra bold,” going as far as to express hope that the soldiers should not return from the South alive. Taking advantage of a policy by which enlisted men could attend church in town under the escort of an officer, the soldiers gathered a group under the leadership of Sergeant Thomas Harris, choosing a windy, snowy night, so that only those who intended to participate in the attack would join them in braving the elements. The newly constituted mob made it to Columbus without incident, stopped only briefly by a guard at the Broad Street covered bridge.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Charles C. Cole Jr., *A Fragile Capital: Identity and the Early Years of Columbus, Ohio* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2001), 1-10; U.S. Census Bureau, *The Eighth Census of the United States*, 373-396; Lurton Dunham et al., *Message and Reports to the General Assembly and Governor of the State of Ohio for the Year 1860, Part 1* (Columbus: Richard Nevins State Printer, 1861), 286; Robert S. Harper, “The Ohio Press in the Civil War,” *Civil War History* 3 (September 1957), 221-224.

<sup>40</sup> Smith, *Memoirs*, 60. Gause, *Four Years in Five Armies*, 114.

There is little to no agreement over how the men were armed, and how many they were. Smith put their numbers at “nearly a hundred,” while Sergeant Isaac Gause declared that “more than one hundred” soldiers rendezvoused with him and his companions to form the mob, while Captain H.W. Chester thought the total was closer to “a score or two.” There was no agreement among the newspapers either with the local Republican *Journal* claiming a mob “two hundred in number,” while the Democratic *Ohio Statesman* thought it only “fifty to seventy-five men.”<sup>41</sup> Gause claims the men carried “clubs, hatchets, and axes” and that he and other men lacking weapons stole pickets from a fence. The *Statesman* in turn claimed the mob was “armed with swords and revolvers” while historian Robert Harper reports that “the soldiers carried rifles with fixed bayonets.” The most that can be said with reasonable certainty is that the attack was carried out by a large body of armed soldiers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ohio cavalry, on the snowy night of March 5<sup>th</sup>.<sup>42</sup>

Having been directed to the offices of *The Crisis*, Sergeant Harris dispatched several groups of two or three men each to stand guard at either end of the block and across the street, while the rest of the men poured into the offices. Furniture, books, maps, and anything else that could be found inside was hurled from broken windows, with some of the debris ending up in the Sciota River. Several policemen arrived declaring their intention to stop the violence, only to be turned away by threats from the soldiers standing guard. Their task accomplished, the soldiers made their way swiftly back to camp, except for a short, unsuccessful, diversion to track down the type *The Crisis* used which they had not found in the office. This side project resulted in

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<sup>41</sup> Smith, *Memoirs*, 60; Gause, *Four Years in Five Armies*, 114; H.W. Chester, *Recollections of the War of the Rebellion: A Story of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ohio Volunteer Cavalry, 1861-1865*, Alberta Adamson, Robert I. Girardi, and Roger E. Bohn ed., (Wheaton, IL: Wheaton History Center, 1996) 43; *Ohio State Journal*, March 6, 1863 and *Daily Ohio Statesman*, March 6, 1863 both republished in *The Crisis* (Columbus), March 11, 1863.

<sup>42</sup> Gause, *Four Years in Five Armies*, 114-115; *Daily Ohio Statesman*, March 6, 1863, reprinted in *Crisis* March 11, 1863; Harper, *Lincoln and the Press*, 338.

breaking down the back door of the *Ohio Statesman*'s offices, but that was the last of the damage.<sup>43</sup>

Many of the soldiers took souvenirs in the form of books, papers, and pens, but ultimately discarded them when they got wind that their commander Colonel August Kautz intended to have them searched for evidence of their complicity in the affair. Burning their keepsakes kept their barracks stove going all night, and although it was obvious that the church party from the previous night were the culprits, officers showed little zeal for ferreting out any proof. Kautz ultimately let the whole thing go.<sup>44</sup>

Many of the characteristics common to these incidents are evident here. The soldiers in both cases were motivated by articles criticizing and insulting the army and the war effort. They targeted easily accessible papers in or near the town in which they were stationed. Both mobs exhibited some level of organization in the form of a division of labor between those carrying out the attack and those standing guard. Their focus in both cases was on a public, performative destruction of property, taking special care to ensure that elements of the printing apparatus were deposited in a nearby river. Afterwards their actions were condemned by their respective commanders, but they were not punished. Not every attack contained all of these elements, but their similarities are indicative of how these attacks generally played out, and it is instructive how alike two attacks carried out at roughly the same time five hundred miles apart could be.

Sergeant Gause records a pair of revealing comments in his colorful memoir of his time in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ohio that speak to the way this mob tradition was understood by the soldiers involved. Gause had been born in 1843 and raised in Ohio, spending much of his childhood in the eastern

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<sup>43</sup> Gause, *Four Years in Five Armies*, 115-117.

<sup>44</sup> Gause, *Four Years in Five Armies*, 118-119.



portion of the state before moving southwest to live on his Quaker uncle's farm in Goshen, near Cincinnati. He returned to eastern Mahoning County to enlist in the cavalry months before he turned eighteen and was nineteen at the time of the mobbing. He would earn the medal of honor a year and a half later at the age of twenty, and his memoirs were published several decades later when he was in his mid-sixties. Gause reported that as the men escaped back to Camp Chase, Sergeant Harris learned that no type had been found at *The Crisis* office, and that "[Harris] said that was a very important point, and that it must be found and demolished." Later, after discovering that some of the men had made off with books and papers from the offices Gause was apparently dismayed; "I protested...as the raid was not intended for plunder." These statements reveal a concern that the men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ohio cavalry adhere to the norms of the mob action that they were undertaking: that it was "very important" to scatter or destroy the type of a paper that was being mobbed, but that it was wrong to steal from the office even after dumping the entire contents of their offices in the street. While Gause's often self-serving narrative should not be taken at face value, these otherwise extraneous comments are evidence that he and the men he participated with carried distinct ideas about the proper way to carry out the mobbing of a newspaper.<sup>45</sup>

While "mob law" and "mob rule" in the abstract were quite uniformly condemned by the press, some Republican papers did attempt to justify the soldiers' ire at the Democratic editors. "The outbreak [of mob violence] is more venial in our soldiers than in any other members of our community," the *Chicago Tribune* opined in early 1863. "The provocation is more direct and intense. These men have left their homes to peril their lives in the service of their country," the *Tribune* explained. Soldiers had reason to "keenly resent" the "northern organs of treason."

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<sup>45</sup> Gause, *Four Years in Five Armies*, 9-16, 116, 118.

Following the attack on *The Crisis*, the *Cleveland Daily Leader* remarked that “The practice of mobbing every objectionable sheet is a dangerous one” but also excused the soldiers, offering a fairly accurate critique of *The Crisis* calling it “the most malignant of all sheets in opposing the war” before going on to accuse it of being guilty of “assisting the traitors generally.” The Republican press tended to view mob attacks by soldiers upon Democratic papers as a natural if unfortunate consequence of their disloyal writings. They lamented the trend towards mob violence but did so in a way that recognized that it could be a harsh but just punishment. There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of their worry for the state of public order that the mobs might threaten, but the fact that it was not uncommon to simultaneously excuse the behavior indicates a level of acceptance that such violence was within the realm of acceptable responses to such provocation.<sup>46</sup>

The Democratic press on the other hand uniformly condemned these attacks, with their coverage consisting of three major elements. The primary excuse the Democratic press used to explain these attacks was that the soldiers were acting not of their own volition, but at the instigation of local miscreants. These agitators were uniformly described as either “abolitionists” or “republicans” in an attempt to frame the attack as an element of domestic political rivalry, not as censure by the enlisted men. Secondly, Democratic papers would claim soldiers’ ignorance of the writings of the paper they attacked. This allowed the papers to again criticize Republicans as they blamed the Lincoln administration for keeping Democratic papers out of the army, and to delegitimize the soldiers’ attack as an informed political action. Third, Democrat papers often claimed that the soldiers had been plied with alcohol supplied by the abolitionist instigators. This further established the perfidy of those real troublemakers, while also casting the soldiers’ as a

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<sup>46</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, February 21, 1863. *Cleveland Daily Leader*, March 7, 1863.

drunk, freewheeling gang. Combined with claims to have always been a “friend of the soldier” and promising retaliation on local Republicans, the Democratic press generally attempted to explain these outbreaks of violence as a symptom of the depravity of their civilian political foes.

In their coverage of these attacks, much of the Democratic press was anxious to fix the blame on local partisans, not on the soldiers themselves. In recounting an attack made by around twenty Ohio soldiers on their offices, the *Dayton Daily Empire* indignantly claimed, “The deluded soldiers directly engaged in the affair, were mere tools in the hands of cowardly leaders, who, in all they do, say and write, keep in view the paramount object of inflaming the soldiery, both at home and in the field, against democratic citizens.” Taking stock of what was the worst outbreak of soldier mob violence during the war, the *Rockport Democrat* stated in March 1864, “But the soldiers are not to blame for these repeated outrages. It is the hell-born Abolitionists at home who urge them to the commission of such deeds of violence.” Likewise, in reporting an attack by paroled Wisconsin and Illinois soldiers that drew much attention among Midwestern Democrats, the *Eaton, Ohio Democratic Press* declared defiantly, “The [Richmond, Indiana] *Jeffersonian* will rise again, and shine brighter than ever, but the villains who turned the soldiers into smashing tools will be marked, branded, and watched, just as policemen watch pickpockets.” Across the board, the Democratic press refused to publicly concede that Union soldiers might have a legitimate grievance against them, claiming instead that the soldiers were misled by local agitators.<sup>47</sup>

Attributing the attacks to local political foes had several advantages. This framing denied the soldiers’ agency in the attack, which allowed the papers to avoid criticizing the loyal soldiery

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<sup>47</sup> *Daily Empire* (Dayton, OH), March 4, 1864. *Rockport Democrat* (Rockport, IL), reprinted in *Evansville Daily Journal* (Evansville, IN), March 8, 1864. *Democratic Press* (Eaton, OH), March 19, 1863.

and freed them of the opprobrium that might come from being seen as having incited the soldiers anger enough to spark an attack. Additionally, it shifted the blame onto local political rivals who the Democratic papers could claim were engaging in the deplorable practice of instigating crowds of young men to violently harass their political opponents. Finally, by labelling the shadowy ne'er-do-wells they were blamed as "abolitionists" the Democrats fixed them with a label that had carried the menacing connotation of disunion and represented an extreme end of American politics. As discussed earlier, mob attacks in American history were most common and popular when targeted at those whose political views could be plausibly portrayed as beyond the bounds of acceptable speech. The abolitionists who had suffered a mass outbreak of violence in the mid-1830s had been one such group, now it was the Democrats who criticized the war that suffered. In response, Democrats attempted to turn the tables and recall a time when it had been the other side of the political spectrum that suffered this sort of violence. Calling their enemies abolitionists, especially in the immediate wake of the Emancipation Proclamation, was an effort to smear their rivals as social extremists who were vanguards of societal change they decried, and who had previously been suitable targets for this same sort of violence.

The Democratic press also consistently claimed that the soldiers who attacked them did not actually know the writings and positions of the papers they attacked. This of course helped explain why the local Republicans and abolitionists were the true villains, while again working to remove the soldiers' agency as political citizens. James Elder, the aggrieved proprietor of the Indiana-based *Jeffersonian* had similar thoughts, remarking "Of course the soldiers know nothing about the printing offices here. These soldiers belong to Illinois and Wisconsin." In reference to an attack on their offices in the late winter of 1863, the Rockport *Union Democrat* expressed the hope that the whole company of soldiers would not be blamed for the acts of a few

and went on to remark, “nor do we think the few who made the assault should be censured too much, as they never had read a copy of our paper, and knew nothing of our principles.”<sup>48</sup> The *Cincinnati Enquirer* elaborated on the connection it saw between the ignorant soldiers and lying troublemakers on the home front writing in March of 1863;

“Now, we have little blame for these mob soldiers in comparison with the disgust and detestation we feel for the cowardly and incendiary partisans who, for base purposes, incited them to these deeds of violence, so unbecoming a true soldier. They do not read Democratic papers. They are not allowed to do so, and only know of their contents by the false and distorted comments of lying demagogues in or out of the abolition press.”<sup>49</sup>

These “cowardly and incendiary partisans” as the story went, helped keep the soldiers in ignorance so they could be better manipulated to do the partisans’ nefarious bidding. By claiming that these shadowy agitators sought to recruit soldiers en masse to perform attacks they dared not attempt themselves, Democrats cast the agitators they blamed for these attacks as lonely radicals and denied them the popularity that had legitimized such mob attacks in the past.<sup>50</sup>

While these Democrats were not wrong that soldiers were being denied access to their papers, the conclusions they drew from that fact were off the mark. Restrictions on soldiers’ access to the Democratic press were imposed with varying levels of zeal and rigor both by the administration in Washington and by individual officers. While this did have the effect of

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<sup>48</sup> Letter from James Elder, reprinted in *Indiana State Sentinel*, March 23, 1863. *Princeton Union Democrat* reprinted in *Indiana State Sentinel*, March 8, 1864.

<sup>49</sup> *Cincinnati Enquirer*, March 17, 1863.

<sup>50</sup> While civilian mobs did outnumber soldier mobs during the war, there is little evidence that the Democratic condemnation of home front agitators as the cause of soldier mobs has much merit. No specific persons are ever named although vague accusations were occasionally made against the local Republican paper and their vaguely defined “abolitionist” allies (see for example Buffalo *Evening Courier and Republic*, September 18, 1863). Democrats claimed that these undefined persons were a real threat but that they were also too few and too cowardly to accomplish a mobbing without aid from the soldiery, an explanation that so perfectly absolves the soldiers of responsibility while blaming Republicans without conceding Republican popularity, that it stretches credulity.

making it more difficult for Democratic soldiers to engage with their particular newspapers, it did not mean the soldiery was completely cut off from that portion of the press. Soldiers read almost anything they could get their hands on and some papers made it through, as did clippings and descriptions of articles enclosed in personal mail. As discussed above however, soldiers relying on second-hand accounts for descriptions of Democrat papers could easily be biased by hearing only the most inflammatory published rhetoric. Likewise, Democrat papers passed around camp could be remembered most for the worst things they had to say about the soldiers, even if that did not represent the coverage as a whole. Just because efforts were made to keep Democratic papers out of the soldiers' hands, does not mean they were ignorant of what such papers said.<sup>51</sup>

The third major element of the Democratic coverage of these attacks was the reported drunkenness of the soldiers. The *Indiana State Sentinel* blamed the attack upon the *Jeffersonian* in part on “the influence of bad whiskey” and the *Daily Empire* lauded the soldiers who did not join their “drunken comrades” in attacking its offices. Similarly, the Chambersburg *Valley Spirit* reported definitively that the culprits of a June 1863 attack, “The perpetrators of this act were some of the soldiers of the 125<sup>th</sup> regiment,” who had been supplied with liquor and incited to violence by the “Union Leaguers.” James Elder thought he was a victim of a similar scheme claiming, “Some of the fellows here, who have been trying to get up a mob against the *Jeffersonian* office, got some of the soldiers drunk, told them the *Jeffersonian* was a “secession sheet,” ...and got them to engage in destroying the office.” The charge of drunkenness was not usually levelled on its own, the drunk soldiers were accused of being instigated (and usually

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<sup>51</sup> For a discussion of army and administration efforts to limit soldiers' contact with the Democratic press see, White, *The Union Army, Emancipation, and the Reelection of Abraham Lincoln*, 55-59.

supplied) by local abolition agitators. Drunkenness is generally portrayed as another tool used by abolitionist saboteurs to make the soldiers the agents of their nefarious intentions.<sup>52</sup>

Drunkenness is the most difficult charge to parse in the case of the soldier mobs but seems very likely to be overblown. Drunkenness was certainly a problem for the Union armies and it was not unusual soldiers to go on a bender following a long period of inactivity such as those spent in their winter camps. However, when heavy drinking produced large-scale violence it was usually in the form of brawls and fights among fellow soldiers, not the coordinated violence that characterized anti-newspaper mob attacks. If a portion of the soldiers were drunk during a given attack it certainly does not follow that the alcohol was a necessary inducement. Many soldiers lacked compunctions about declaring their violent hostility to those they labelled Copperheads, and a good number seem to have been perfectly willing to mob newspapers, drunk or otherwise. A minority of obviously intoxicated soldiers could also be used as an example with which those papers looking to condemn the mobs could smear the whole group. The lack of extraneous violence is probably the strongest argument against lending credence to the Democratic accusations; brawls and personal attacks were rare during mobbings with the soldiers' energies usually being applied largely to the press and the office. If whiskey sometimes increased the soldiers' zeal there seems little evidence that it has major significance in explaining the phenomenon as a whole.<sup>53</sup>

Democrats did not take these attacks lying down, and they frequently counseled retaliation, specifically retaliation against the hometown Republicans and abolitionists.

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<sup>52</sup> *Indiana State Sentinel*, March 23, 1863, *Daily Empire*, March 4, 1864. *Valley Spirit* (Chambersburg, PA), June 3, 1863. Letter by James Elder, reprinted in *Indiana State Sentinel*, March 23, 1863.

<sup>53</sup> Foote, Lorien, *The Gentlemen and the Roughs: Manhood, Honor, and Violence in the Union Army* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2010), 29-30.

Vallandigham himself made calls for reprisals from his Canadian exile, declaring in public letter that there was, “one remedy for past and preventative of future injuries; and that is *instant, summary, and ample reprisals upon the persons and property of the men at home, who by language and conduct are always inciting these outrages.*” The *New York Argus* also felt that justice could be found in revenge suggesting that, “Whenever a Democratic newspaper is suppressed by a mob let a Republican office be sacked. Violence is a game that two can play at; and perhaps by holding some of the Republican journals as hostages, security can be given to Democratic journals.” Mob attacks upon Republican papers were few and far between however, and soldiers never attacked any but those affiliated with Democrats. While certainly many Northerners were not Republicans, it was unusual that a locality was so heavily tilted towards the Democrats that a Unionist Republican paper could be considered beyond the realm of acceptable speech during the war.<sup>54</sup>

Some Democratic papers were indignant that one of their fellows had been targeted for attack, claiming that the victimized paper was very favorable in its attitude towards the soldiers. The *Cincinnati Enquirer* for example thought the soldiers who attacked the *LaPorte Democrat* in early 1864 had no excuse, “the *Democrat* has uniformly been mild in its utterance upon the Administration, and its columns have always encouraged the soldiers in the field.” The *Indianapolis Sentinel* averred, “The Democratic party is now and always has been the true friend of the soldier” the *Rock Island Argus* would later testify, “There are a few exceptions, of course,

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<sup>54</sup> Letter from Clement L. Vallandigham, published in *Salem Weekly Advocate* (Salem, IL), March 24, 1864. *New York Argus* reprinted in *Plymouth Democrat* (Plymouth, IN), March 26, 1863. Robert Harper notes three instances of Republican papers being targeted, one German language paper *Wecker* targeted by a pro-rebel mob in Baltimore, the *Dayton Journal* was attacked by civilians angry about Vallandigham’s 1863 arrest, and the *Union* of Louisiana, Missouri was wrecked in the summer of 1864. The common thread in these attacks is that they occurred either in border states or in the case of Dayton, an area of known Copperhead sympathy. Harper, *Lincoln and the Press*, 154, 241, 148.



but generally the soldiers are generous and just.” While the Democrat press proved willing to occasionally accuse the soldiery of being drunk and mean-spirited, this was an extension of the Democrats’ general strategy of excusing and explaining away soldiers’ behavior. There was little to gain by being seen as an enemy of the loyal soldiers, especially when trying to prove one’s own loyalty. Even as Democratic presses across the Midwest were attacked by groups of soldiers, many still stuck to the line of supporting the troops but opposing the war.<sup>55</sup>

Democratic papers refused to accept the conflation of their gripes about war policy and constitutional concerns with outright disloyalty. During the first major outbreak of violence in the winter of 1863, the Ottawa, Illinois *Free Trader* complained that all Democrats were being labelled Copperheads and traitors simply for opposing Lincoln and cited examples from English history of loyal conservative opposition in times of strife. Later that month the *Indiana State Sentinel* defended its right to criticize the government and threw the charge back by implication at Lincoln, the soldier mobs and the Republican press, writing, “the men who are willing to crush out freedom of speech and the press, and who justify the despotic usurpations of a faithless administration, may justly be branded with disloyalty.” A week later the *Sentinel* printed a speech by recognized Copperhead congressman George Pendleton who blamed attacks on Democratic presses on the fact that they had dared to invite the American people to question the Lincoln administration. The conviction among the Democratic press that they had a legitimate right to criticize the war time government clashed violently with the soldiers’ conviction that such criticism went too far and that they had the right to draw the line.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> *Cincinnati Enquirer*, February 25, 1864. *Indianapolis Sentinel*, March 7, 1864, *Rock Island Argus* (Rock Island, IL), July 7, 1864.

<sup>56</sup> Ottawa (IL) *Free Trader*, March 12, 1863. *Indiana State Sentinel*, March 23, 1863, speech by George H. Pendleton, reprinted in *Indiana State Sentinel*, March 30, 1863.

## CONCLUSION

In some ways the anti-press mob violence that Union soldiers participated in was unprecedented—there was no historical analog for the American armed forces to engage in such widespread violence against the press of their own accord. To highlight the exceptionality of these incidents, however, obscures all the ways in which they drew from a long tradition of mob violence in America. In attacking the Democratic press, the soldiers implicitly lumped those they called Copperheads in with the abolitionists of the 1830s and the Tories of the Revolution, factions whose ideas threatened the body politic in such a way as to leave them beyond the protections of the law. By restricting their purge to the offices of the offending paper, its press and its type, the soldiers were acting within previously established bounds of what behavior was acceptable when attacking a newspaper, legitimizing themselves through restraint. Previous mobs had claimed legal justification by invoking the interest of the local community. Union soldiers drew from this precedent when they claimed the mantle of the *national* community by virtue of their sacrifice for the Union. Through their hardship they felt they had earned the right to police the bounds of disloyalty. Union soldiers during the Civil War attacked newspapers in the manner they did because the norms for such an action had already been established, they merely updated them for their current conflict.

The writing of the aggrieved Democratic political press indicates that they understood these attacks within an existing framework of speech suppression. Rather than characterize themselves as victims of rowdy and misbehaving young men, they assiduously deflected agency and often blame from the soldiers and sought instead to blame abolitionists who they viewed as contemptible social radicals. As mass attacks by soldiers could be interpreted as a denunciation by the loyal soldiery, they tried to shift blame to local political rivals instead. They sought to

defuse the possibility of interpreting the soldiers' actions as a political statement that might belie their claims of loyalty. Democrats adopted rhetorical strategies that minimized the agency of soldiers, portraying them as unwitting, sometimes intoxicated pawns of wily and cowardly agitators. The Democratic press was no doubt aware of the potential of anti-press mobs for speech suppression, and they defended themselves by claiming to be victims not of outraged, politicized soldiers, but of a conspiracy of cowards who used the honorable boys in blue for their notorious ends.