

“Drawn Together in a Blood Brotherhood”: Civic Nationalism amongst Scandinavian Immigrants in the American Civil War Crucible

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***Abstract:** The American Civil War, 1861-1865, broke out during a time of intense debate over slavery and fear of foreign-born influence on American society. The war's outbreak, however, provided both freedmen and immigrants an opportunity to prove their loyalty to the United States. Scandinavian Americans, among other ethnic groups, seized the opportunity. This article argues that the Scandinavian elite implicitly constructed at least three different forms of ethnic identity – here termed exclusive, political, and national – to spur enlistment at the ground level, gain political influence, and demonstrate American allegiance. In the process the Scandinavian war effort strengthened these immigrant soldiers' ties to their adopted nation, while a political ethnic identity, initially constructed in opposition to other ethnic groups, was weakened by the Scandinavians' experience in the American multiethnic military crucible. The Civil War thereby hastened Scandinavian immigrants' path towards the American mainstream, where many veterans subsequently served as a bridge between their local communities and broader American society, and reinforced their belief in American civic nationalism.*

***Keywords:** Civil War, Scandinavian Americans, ethnic identity, civic nationalism, immigrants, Americanization, whiteness*

When the American Civil War broke out in April of 1861, at least 44,000 Norwegian, close to 20,000 Swedish, and more than 10,000 Danish immigrants were living in the United States.¹ These Scandinavians were part of an immigration wave that had brought approximately four million foreign-born people to American shores in less than two decades. More than 1.3 million German and 1.7 million Irish immigrants had arrived during this time span and – for better or worse – helped shape political discourse in America.²

In the decades leading up to the Civil War, broad-based fear of immigrant groups led to various nativist political movements advocating curtailment of foreign influence on, and foreign access to, the United States. Within this nativist movement, “concerns about the future role of the West,” unfolded as anxiety about immigrant subversion of perceived American Protestant values – mainly liberty, equality, opportunity, and self-government – were debated.³ As a testament to nativism’s political appeal, anti-immigrant candidates in 1854 won at least 70 out of 234 seats in the House of Representatives and the movement was subsequently described as both a “tornado” and a “hurricane” sweeping across the United States, with one main goal: reducing “the power of foreign-born voters in politics.”⁴ While the nativist movement was primarily directed at Catholic immigrants, “Yankee bigotry” could, as Jørn Brøndal and Dag Blanck have noted, “also hurt Scandinavian immigrants, as when some were either labeled ‘Norwegian

1 The author would like to thank *American Studies in Scandinavia* editor Dr. Ari Helo, Associate Professor Jørn Brøndal, and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful feedback.

2 Torben Grøngaard Jeppesen, *Danske i USA 1850-2000. En demografisk, social og kulturgeografisk undersøgelse af de danske immigranter og deres efterkommere [Danes in the United States 1850-2000. A Demographic, Social, and Cultural Geographic Study of The Danish Immigrants and Their Descendants]* (Syddansk Universitetsforlag, 2005), 48, 117, 126, 131. According to Jeppesen approximately 4.1 million foreign-born immigrants lived in the U.S. by 1860 and close to 65 percent of the roughly 70,000 Scandinavian Americans lived in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Illinois, while less than 3 percent lived in the Confederate States. See also Jon Gjerde, *The Minds of the West: Ethnocultural Evolution in the Rural Middle West 1830-1917* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 37.

3 *The Minds of the West: Ethnocultural Evolution in the Rural Middle West 1830-1917*, 52-55.

4 Jeppesen, *Danske i USA 1850-2000. En demografisk, social og kulturgeografisk undersøgelse af de danske immigranter og deres efterkommere*, 45. See also James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 130-144. McPherson points out that the 1854-55 election ended the two-party system consisting of Whigs and Democrats. “Most estimates [of the newly elected Congress] counted somewhere in the neighborhood of 105 Republican congressmen, 80 democrats and 50 Americans [nativists] (...) Of the Republicans (not all of whom yet acknowledged that label), perhaps two-thirds had at least a nominal connection with Know-Nothingism.”

Indians’ due to their supposed political ignorance, or compared unfavorably with African Americans.”⁵ Moreover, Yankee Americans at times singled out Scandinavian immigrants because of their “picturesque costumes and strange physiognomy.”⁶

Yet, as white Protestant immigrants Scandinavians also enjoyed certain privileges, as recognized by the Scandinavian newspaper *Emigranten*’s first editor, Claus Clausen, in his opening editorial. On January 30, 1852 Clausen wrote, “[we] came here as strangers and friendless, ignorant of Your institutions, Your language and Your customs, but You cheered our hearts with a friendly welcome.” Scandinavian immigrants, according to Clausen, had not yet “Americanized,” but the editor promised that his fellow immigrants would immediately strive to “be one people with the Americans” in order to “contribute their part to the final development of the character of this great nation.”⁷

The opportunity to help shape the character of the United States presented itself less than a decade later when the American Civil War commenced. Within a year of the war’s outbreak in 1861, Claus Clausen and thousands of his fellow Scandinavian immigrants were contributing to the preservation of the Union, and later abolition of slavery through military service in a civil war that forever changed the character of American society and, in the process, the Scandinavians themselves.

American Civic Nationalism

“When they [the recently arrived immigrants] look through that old Declaration of Independence,” posited Abraham Lincoln in an 1858 debate against his political rival Stephen Douglas, that Declaration is “the electric cord [linking] the hearts of patriotic and liberty-loving men together.”⁸

The idea expressed by Lincoln, a belief in America’s founding documents as a vehicle for national unity in the absence of “an ancient bloodline,” is now commonly referred to as “civic nationalism,” a concept of

5 Jørn Brøndal and Dag Blanck, “The Concept of Being Scandinavian-American,” *American Studies in Scandinavia* 34, no. 2 (2002): 5.

6 Gjerde, *The Minds of the West: Ethnocultural Evolution in the Rural Middle West 1830-1917*, 27.

7 Claus L. Clausen, “To Our American Friends,” *Emigranten*, January 30, 1852.

8 James M. McPherson, “‘Two Irreconcilable Peoples’? Ethnic Nationalism in the Confederacy,” in *The Civil War as Global Conflict: Transnational Meanings of the American Civil War*, ed. David T. Gleeson and Simon Lewis (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2014), 87.

American citizenship identified with “ideas of liberty, republicanism, manhood suffrage, equality of opportunity, and the absence of rigid class lines,” according to historian James McPherson.⁹

Yet, Lincoln failed to carry any southern states in the 1860 presidential election and by the time he took office it was clear that the idea of civic nationalism had broken down along sectional lines. In other words, proponents of civic nationalism were faced with a struggle against supporters of southern ethnic nationalism, based, among other things, on “a belief in the common genetic descent of the group” and the racialized idea that “the Negro [was] not equal to the white man.”¹⁰

Immigrant groups, mostly settled north of the Mason-Dixon line, were therefore forced to reckon with this ideological chasm. Generally speaking, civic nationalism held greater sway over these foreign-born settlers than southern pro-slavery beliefs, but it was simultaneously clear that ideas based on an ethnic, or racial, identity were powerful currents both North and South. As we shall see, for Scandinavian American immigrants there was seemingly no contradiction between love of a new fatherland based on lack of “class and caste systems” and expressions of social superiority in relation to other ethnic groups.¹¹

I argue that, in addition to their support for civic nationalism, Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish immigrants developed an “exclusive” Scandinavian

9 Ibid., 86-89.

10 Ibid., 89. McPherson defines “ethnic nationalism” as “the sense of identity and loyalty shared by one group of people united among themselves and distinguished from others by one or more of the following factors: language, religion, culture, and, perhaps most important but also most nebulous, a belief in the common genetic descent of the group” and points out that southerners claimed that “northern and southern whites belonged to different ethnic groups – or races, as ethnic groups were usually described in the nineteenth century.” See also Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 5. According to Gerstle, the idea of an American racial nationalism, was based on the notion that “Africans, Asians, nonwhite Latin Americans, and, in the 1920s, southern and eastern Europeans, did not belong in the republic and could never be accepted as full-fledged members.”

11 Ibid., 86-87. See also Fritz W. Rasmussen, “Record! Of Skandinavians, Who Have Been Settled and Lived in the Town of New Denmark, Brown Co: Wis. - from the Commencement of Settlement of the Town,” in *Fritz William Rasmussen Papers. Diaries, 1857-1876; Account Books, 1856-1909; “Record of Skandinavians Who Have Been Settled and Lived in the Town of New Denmark, Brown county, Wisconsin. Box no. 8* (Wisconsin Historical Society, 1880). Rasmussen writes, “we have come to this Country, where we are as free, privileged [sic] and no distinction - as to ‘Liberty and Equality’ of person – as the Nobles – so called – are in the lands where we came from.” See also Walter D. Kamphoefner and Wolfgang Helbich, eds., *Germans in the Civil War: The Letters They Wrote Home* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

identity, based on notions of a shared Nordic past, religion, culture, and language. As argued by Jon Gjerde, this exclusive ethnic identity, which was tacitly accepted by Anglo-Americans as they needed military units filled with foreign-born soldiers, actually strengthened the immigrants’ identification with civic nationalism. Within the Scandinavian American community, the Civil War spurred this process along. “[T]he stress and danger of combat,” argued Theodore Roosevelt later, “generated pressures to unify that no peacetime initiative could simulate.”¹²

Yet, while the Civil War spurred Scandinavian immigrants’ path to the American mainstream, this was not necessarily the case for other ethnic groups. The existence of a Civil War crucible in Roosevelt’s image seems like “conventional wisdom” to most historians, writes Walter Kamphoefner and Wolfgang Helbich in their examination of the German Civil War experience, yet, according to the authors, this immigrant acculturation might as well “have happened in civilian life,” and perhaps then even faster. On the idea of a Civil War crucible, Kamphoefner and Helbich, based on their German sources, add, “it is evident that in the Union army general fraternization across ethnic lines simply did not happen.”¹³

Conversely, Christian Samito, in his study of Irish and African American soldiers argues that there was an explicit link between military service and “inclusion as part of the American people.”¹⁴

A partial resolution to these competing claims is likely found in their objects of study. Just as scholars, according to Susannah Ural, “cannot apply the motivations of white native-born soldiers to all soldiers in the conflict,” it would be an untenable generalization to equate the German experience with that of the Irish, African Americans, or by extension Scandinavian Americans.¹⁵

Thus, this study uncovers Scandinavian immigrants’ views of exclusive ethnicity, inter-ethnic rivalry, and civic nationalism as expressed during the

12 Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century*, 6-7. Both Gerstle and McPherson draw on Michael Ignatieff in their conceptual use of civic nationalism. See also Gjerde, *The Minds of the West: Ethnocultural Evolution in the Rural Middle West 1830-1917*, 59-65.

13 Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War: The Letters They Wrote Home* 31-32.

14 Christian G. Samito, *Becoming American under Fire: Irish Americans, African Americans, and the Politics of Citizenship During the Civil War Era* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 40.

15 Susannah J. Ural, ed. *Civil War Citizens: Race, Ethnicity and Identity in America’s Bloodiest Conflict* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 5.

Civil War.¹⁶ For analytical purposes, these three categories related to Scandinavian ethnic identity have been termed exclusive, political, and national.¹⁷

Exclusive Ethnicity: Inclusion and exclusion

On September 30, 1861, the Wisconsin-based Scandinavian newspaper *Emigranten* issued a call, under the heading “opraab,” for a volunteer regiment consisting solely of Scandinavian immigrants. The aim was clear: Norwegian, Swedish and Danish martial enthusiasm was lacking in the Midwest, and an exclusively Scandinavian military units was sorely needed to distinguish the Scandinavian war effort from that of other ethnic groups.¹⁸

To all able Scandinavians in the United States, countrymen and fellow citizens! The authorities above in this our new homeland have as we all know called the citizens of the country to arms to support the government in its attempt to preserve the Union and its constitution. (...) Scandinavians! Let us recognize our present position, our duties and our responsibility as we should understand them. We have still far from carried the part of the war's burdens in respect to delivering personnel as the Scandinavian population's great number here in the country oblige for us. (...) While the adopted citizens of other nationalities such as the Germans and Irish have put whole regiments in the field, the Scandinavians of the West have not yet sent a single complete Company of infantry to the grand Army. Must the future ask: Where were the Scandinavians, when we saved the mother country?¹⁹

The appeal was signed by ten prominent Scandinavian businessmen, editors, and opinion-leaders (in all nine Norwegians and one Dane), and yielded important clues to how this ethnic elite wanted Scandinavian identity to be understood in the public sphere.²⁰ On the one hand, Scandinavians were

16 Torben Grøngaard Jeppesen, *Dannebrog På Den Amerikanske Prærie [Dannebrog on the American Prairie]* (Odense: Odense University Press, 2000), 64. See also Nels Hokanson, *Swedish Immigrants in Lincoln's Time*, Reprint ed., Scandinavians in America (New York: Arno Press, 1979), 77. Jeppesen and Hokanson both claim that the Civil War helped Scandinavian immigrants assimilate into the American mainstream, but the support is mainly anecdotal. Jeppesen for example cites a conversation at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin with a librarian who had researched the immigrant Civil War experience generally, and his claim is thus seemingly not based on own work with primary sources.

17 Anders Bo Rasmussen, “Not for the King but for God and Country: Scandinavians and Ethnic Identity During the American Civil War,” *The Bridge* 30, no. 1 (2007): 1-5.

18 Carl Fredrik Solberg, “Opraab [Call],” *Emigranten*, September 30, 1861. My translation.

19 Ibid.

20 J. A. Johnson et al., “Madison Wis Septbr 25th 1861,” in *Archives Division. Wisconsin. Executive Department. Military Correspondence. Series 49. Box 11* (Wisconsin Historical Society, 1861). See also Olof Nickolaus Nelson, *History of the Scandinavians and Successful Scandinavians in the United States.*, vol. II (Minneapolis: O. N. Nelson & company, 1900), 204-14.

an exclusive group with a common language and culture perceived to be competing with Germans and Irish immigrants in displays of loyalty (and by extension political power), on the other hand, they were part of a greater national project which was part of what had drawn them to their adopted homeland in the first place.

The phrase “Scandinavians in the United States, countrymen and fellow citizens” referred to an alleged shared ethnicity purely among the exclusive group of “our countrymen,” namely “Scandinavians in the United States.” If the request should be credible, then the Norwegians, Swedes, and Danes who read or heard about the call for volunteers had to agree that they indeed were part of a “Scandinavian population” who likely, borrowing a phrase from James McPherson, believed in a “common genetic descent of the group.”²¹ No one else in the United States could share this exclusive ethnicity unless they, in the words of J. Milton Yinger, shared “important segments of a common culture” in which notions of language, territory, race, and religion played crucial parts.²² As proof that these ethnic Scandinavian military units were exclusive in terms of language, *Emigranten’s* editor on October 8, 1861 published a letter by the appointed Norwegian colonel, Hans Heg, who emphasized that the “Regiment’s officers would be men who speak the Scandinavian languages. Thereby also giving the Scandinavian, who does not yet speak the English language, opportunity to enter into service.”²³ This reference to a common Scandinavian origin and identity was a practical construction to maximize recruitment and perhaps also a necessary one since Yankee-Americans, as Brøndal and Blanck have noted, were not able to tell Danes, Swedes, and Norwegians apart.²⁴

Additionally, out east where a Scandinavian company had already formed in New York under the command of a Norwegian captain, a Danish first lieutenant, and a Swedish lieutenant, “drill was conducted and commands were given in Danish, since most of the volunteers were Danes and

21 McPherson, “Two Irreconcilable Peoples? Ethnic Nationalism in the Confederacy,” 85. In the Scandinavian American context speaking of “ethnic regionalism” or “ethnic localism” instead of “ethnic nationalism” seems more accurate as the Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish immigrants, in contrast to Confederate leaders, were not working politically towards an American nation based on their ethnic ideology and values, but did retain parts of their Old World culture in the areas where they settled.

22 Milton J. Yinger, “Ethnicity,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 11 (1985): 159.

23 Hans C. Heg, “Opraab. [Call.],” *Emigranten*, October 7, 1861. My translation.

24 Brøndal and Blanck, “The Concept of Being Scandinavian-American,” 3-5.

Swedes.”²⁵ Consequently, the exclusive ethnic identity promoted by the Scandinavian regiment’s organizers afforded non-English speaking immigrants the opportunity to fight in a war to preserve their adopted government’s civic nationalist values.

Secondly, the call for volunteers introduced a political ethnicity, in which Scandinavian unity, and subtle expectations of future political power, was defined in opposition to the “other nationalities such as the Germans and Irish,” that had “put whole regiments in the field.” According to the recollection of Solberg, the notion of this partially politically-motivated military unit was first articulated in the late summer of 1861 by Hans Heg in a conversation with *Emigranten*’s editor. “If we are going to have any influence then we must get into the war now,” the future commander of the Scandinavian Regiment said.²⁶

Lastly, the petition called for affiliation with values greater than Scandinavian-American culture or state-wide political power. It called for adherence to the values of civic nationalism. This rhetoric echoed frequently through the pages of *Emigranten* and the Swedish-American *Hemlandet* during the Civil War. As the prominent Norwegian immigrant leader, and temporary regimental secretary, John A. Johnson, noted on September 2, 1861, “I have spoken with several Scandinavians there [in Wisconsin], who wish to volunteer under the flag of the United States to help suppress the slaveholders’ insurrection and uphold the country’s constitution and laws.”²⁷

The ability to retain an “exclusive” Scandinavian ethnic identity while still maintaining loyalty to the founding principles of the United States, what historian Jon Gjerde calls “complementary identity,” was part of the Midwest’s appeal to immigrants. According to Gjerde, this complementary identity “powerfully promoted an allegiance to American institutions” and stood in stark contrast to nativist politicians’ call for Anglo-American conformity based on Protestant American (republican) culture.²⁸

25 O. P. Hansen Balling, *Erindringer Fra Et Langt Liv [Memoirs of a Long Life]* (Kristiania: S. & Jul Sørensen Bogtrykkeri, 1905), 67. My translation.

26 Albert O. Barton, “Reminiscences of a Pioneer Editor,” *NAHA Studies and Records* 1 (1926).

27 Carl Fredrik Solberg, “Et Skandinavisk Kompagni Af Frivillige Foreslaet Oprettet [A Scandinavian Company Proposed],” *Emigranten*, September 2, 1861. See also J. A. Johnsen, “Skandinavisk Kompagni [Scandinavian Company],” *ibid.*, September 2, 1861. My translation. The fact that slavery was indirectly sanctioned by the Constitution played an insignificant role in the public debate as it unfolded in the Scandinavian press during the Civil War.

28 Gjerde, *The Minds of the West: Ethnocultural Evolution in the Rural Middle West 1830-1917*, 8, 12, 59-65.

When the Civil War broke out in 1861, the Republican Party was, from a Scandinavian American vantage point, more closely aligned with civic nationalist ideas of freedom and democracy, than the rivaling Democratic Party. The Scandinavian press was thus firmly in the Republican camp, while German and Irish journalistic outlets more frequently sided with the Democratic Party then identified with the preservation of slavery. For the Midwest to maintain its appeal, it was therefore important for Scandinavian Americans to maximize political influence at the expense of these other immigrant groups. By the summer of 1861 it seemed clear that Civil War service was the shortest path to that influence. As Heg succinctly stated, “the men who conduct this war are going to be the men who will conduct affairs after it is over.”²⁹

Political Ethnicity: Scandinavians and the Other

“We all tend to make a model of ourselves and to pass judgment over all those seemingly not created in our own image,” read an 1891 editorial in the Chicago-based *Skandinaven* “You probably do not have to journey far to find a Norwegian who considers himself fully the equal of the Yankee, somewhat better than the German and vastly superior to the Irishman. To compare him with a Pole, a Bohemian, or an Italian he would consider outrageous.”³⁰

Thirty years earlier, in 1861, there were few Poles or Italians in Wisconsin, but the notion of Scandinavian Americans defining themselves in opposition to other ethnic groups was as true in 1861 as it was in 1891. Among these minorities, Scandinavians confidently placed themselves at the top of an indiscernible white hierarchy and several societal steps above African Americans.

In his “Opraab” from September 30, 1861, editor Solberg expressed a thinly veiled worry about the political and social consequences to Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish immigrants, if the question “Where were the Scandinavians when we saved the mother country?” was asked by other ethnic groups after the Civil War.³¹ Scandinavian immigrants, in other

29 Barton, “Reminiscences of a Pioneer Editor.”

30 Jørn Brøndal, *Ethnic Leadership and Midwestern Politics* (Chicago: The University of Illinois Press, 2004), 35.

31 Solberg, “Opraab.” My translation.

words, had to become increasingly visible to the larger American society in the Union war effort, while positioning themselves in relation to other immigrants both externally and within the Scandinavian community itself. What was at stake – apart from local political power – was a struggle over inclusion and exclusion in relation to the American republic. The Naturalization Act of 1790 had clearly stated that only “free white persons,” of good character could attain American citizenship.³² Consequently, Scandinavian Americans during the Civil War asserted their civic capability through claims of ethnoracial superiority. The Scandinavian American press frequently provided their readers with the necessary arguments.

German and Irish immigrants constituted the two largest ethnic groups in Wisconsin and together accounted for approximately every two out of every three foreign-born persons in the state.³³ With their widespread support for the Democratic Party, the German and Irish immigrants therefore frequently drew the ire of Scandinavian counterparts.³⁴

By 1860, the Scandinavian press had turned solidly Republican, as the Democratic newspaper, *Nordstjernen*, shifted its political allegiance in 1859 ostensibly because of *Uncle Tom's Cabin's* strong emotional anti-slavery appeal (*Emigranten* had thrown its support behind the Republican Party five years earlier). Explaining the editorial shift, *Nordstjernen's* editor Hans Borchsenius, concocted a story aimed at “disparaging Catholicism,” and thus implicitly disparaging Irish immigrants, by claiming that a “distorted” papal version of Harriet Beecher Stowe's bestseller had been published in Rome portraying the slave driver Simon Legree as a “zealous Protestant.”³⁵

32 Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century*, 4.

33 Jeppesen, *Danske i USA 1850-2000. En demografisk, social og kulturgeografisk undersøgelse af de danske immigranter og deres efterkommere*, 122-130. Of the 276,927 foreign-born persons registered in the 1860 census, 123,879 were German immigrants, while approximately 60,000 were listed as Irish immigrants and roughly 23,000 as Scandinavian immigrants.

34 Carl Fredrik Solberg, “Præsidentvalget [The Presidential Election],” *Emigranten*, November 5, 1860, 2. My translation. Solberg's observation is supported by Burton who notes that “German Catholics (...) stood firmly within the Democratic fold.” William Burton, *Melting Pot Soldiers - The Union's Ethnic Regiments*, 2nd ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), 17-19. See also Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War: The Letters They Wrote Home* 4. “Germans across the North were less likely to vote Republican.” See also Samito, *Becoming American under Fire: Irish Americans, African Americans, and the Politics of Citizenship During the Civil War Era* 6. “[M]any Irish Americans remained loyal to the Democratic Party during the war and sought restoration of the Union as it was before the war.”

35 Arlow William Anderson, *The Immigrant Takes His Stand: The Norwegian-American Press and Public Affairs, 1847-1872* (Northfield, Minnesota: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1953), 68.

Additionally, *Hemlandet* in Chicago was known to be staunchly Republican, and pointed out the tension between the freedom-loving Swedes, who marched to the Rockford, Illinois courthouse under the Swedish banner chanting “hurrah,” for Abraham Lincoln, in stark contrast to the Irish who kept demonstratively quiet on the day of the Presidential election in 1860.³⁶

In Wisconsin’s Brown County, Fritz Rasmussen, who voted for Abraham Lincoln in the election of 1860, later voiced concern over the German link between religion and politics while expressing exasperation – albeit good-naturedly – over a discussion with an old Bohemian doctor, “as fanatical a democrat as any; as partial as a ‘baptist proselyte preacher.’”³⁷ Additionally, Rasmussen, who was deeply religious, expressed himself more starkly on the topic of Catholicism and politics the following year when he went to the local school house and cast a “Union vote,” while complaining about “the clamour [sic] the ‘Catholic’s made” and the fact that they were “all without national distinction – Democrats.”³⁸ And when Fritz Rasmussen, against his will, was forced to go to war in late 1864, his father Edward Rasmussen wrote him with news from the latest Wisconsin draft which drew a clear line between the son fighting for his life on the frontlines in Mobile, Alabama, and the lack of German patriotic fervor: “[T]hey only got a couple of Germans, the rest have run away,” wrote Edward Rasmussen.³⁹ Danes, according to the elder Rasmussen, were clearly more dutiful than Germans.

Yet, the ethnic group in Wisconsin most closely associated with Catholicism was the Irish (since approximately only one out of three Germans were Catholic), and throughout the Civil War, Scandinavian editors expressed their opposition to this particular ethnic group. In an editorial on January 28, 1864, the newly created *Fædrelandet* published an editorial claiming that “even today the Irish is an alien, whom other Nations loathe to have amongst them.”⁴⁰ On July 28 that same year, a Norwegian immigrant man

36 H., “Rockford, Ill. D. 10 Nov. 1860., *Hemlandet*, November 14, 1860.

37 Fritz W. Rasmussen, “Sunday December 14, 1862,” in *Fritz William Rasmussen Papers. Diaries, 1857-1876*, (Wisconsin Historical Society, 1862).

38 “Tuesday November 3, 1863,” in *Fritz William Rasmussen Papers. Diaries, 1856-1876* (Wisconsin Historical Society, 1863).

39 Edward Rasmussen, “Denmark Den 23. Martz 1865,” in *Fritz William Rasmussen Papers. Correspondence, 1834-1942; Records of the New Denmark Home Guards, 1876-1883, and Evangelical Christian Society, 1871-1897; “History of the Town of New Denmark.”, 1876, 1881; and Miscellaneous Material. Box no. 1. Green Bay Mss 4.* (Wisconsin Historical Society, 1865). My translation.

40 Unknown, “Europa Og Amerika [Europe and America],” *Fædrelandet*, January 28, 1864, 1. My translation.

in Dakota, complained that the majority of Norwegian women's suitors were "Irish, Germans, and other mixed goods [blandingsgods]," while *Fædrelandet's* editors followed up with a derogatory editorial on October 13, less than a month before the presidential election.⁴¹

[T]he masses are formed by the Irish and Germans, who never knew what the constitution contained and blindly follow their leaders' say (...) When we see Norwegian farmers among this crowd, we have to believe that either they seek office at the presidential election or they have degraded themselves to being equals with the Irish and intellectually inferior Germans.⁴²

Later the editorial went on to compare writers of Democratic campaign pamphlets with animals or – in the same sentence – Irish and uncivilized "wild-Germans" (Vildtydskere). Yet, there was a double standard to this stance, since Scandinavians themselves in 1864 advocated supporting candidates based solely on ethnicity. This was the case with Ole Heg, Hans Heg's younger brother, who had served in the 15th Wisconsin, but in the fall of 1864 decided to run on a Democratic ticket for local office, and was endorsed by Solberg in the staunchly republican *Emigranten*.

Preferably we feel that for such local functions, little attention should be paid to the party, but as much as possible always be on the side of a fellow countryman (...) Had it been for a more important political office, such as Congress (...) we should have expressed the hope that he would not be elected.⁴³

Despite this ethnically motivated support for a Democratic candidate, *Emigranten*, as Arlow Anderson has pointed out, also did not shy away from lashing out at Germans or Irish, and "chose to play upon the anti-Catholic sentiments of the Norwegians" in early 1865.⁴⁴

Apart from the obvious political disagreement between Scandinavian and Irish immigrants, the two ethnic groups engaged in a few notable violent clashes during the Civil War, but otherwise served amicably together. The

41 T. "Til de Norske Piger [To the Norwegian Girls]," *Emigranten*, July 28, 1864. My translation.

42 "Et Ord, Demokrater! [A Word, Democrats!]," *Fædrelandet*, October 13, 1864, 2. My translation.

43 "Kandidat Til Assembly I Racine Co., Wis., - En Normand Nomineret [Candidate to Assembly in Racine Co., Wis., - A Norwegian Nominated]," *Emigranten* 1864, 2. My translation.

44 Arlow W. Anderson, "Lincoln and the Union: A Study of the Editorials of *Emigranten* and *Fædrelandet*," *Norwegian-American Studies and Records* 1949, no. 15 (1949): 118.

Scandinavian sense of opposition in relation to Irish immigrants became physically tangible on Christmas Eve 1861, when a brawl over a keg of beer broke out between the 15th and 17th Regiment, known as the “Scandinavian” and “Irish” regiments, respectively. Soldiers on both sides reported on Christmas Day with “sore noses and black eyes.”⁴⁵

Additionally, the problems of an “exclusive” Scandinavian ethnicity were soldiers could serve without knowing English became apparent to Lieutenant Colonel Ole Balling on November 9, 1862 as he tried to command a company of New York Irishmen on the verge of mutiny.⁴⁶ Balling, who by his own account spoke “a largely inadequate” English, was shot in the back by these “Irish marauders and Bushwackers,” but survived the assassination attempt thanks to a heavy winter coat and a fast horse.⁴⁷ Because of such real life confrontations, and religious differences, Scandinavian immigrants clearly distinguished themselves politically and socially from the Irish, who, as James McPherson has noted, competed “with free blacks at the bottom of the social order.”⁴⁸

Concerning Scandinavian attitudes towards “free blacks” and slavery, it is clear that Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish immigrants had a sense of social, as well as racial, superiority, and thus shared many of the prejudices common to white men of their era. This sense of social superiority was expressed at all levels of society, from the common farmers to the highest diplomatic circles, and occurred on a continuum from backhanded race-based compliments to overt racist statements ostensibly based on science.⁴⁹

45 Waldemar Ager, *Oberst Heg Og Hans Gutter [Colonel Heg and His Boys]* (Eau Claire, 1916), 228. My translation.

46 Unknown, “Oberstløjtnant Balling [Lieutenant Colonel Balling],” *Emigranten*, September 1, 1862.

47 Balling, *Erindringer Fra Et Langt Liv [Memoirs of a Long Life]*, 75-77. My translation.

48 McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*, 137.

49 Ferd. S. Winslow, “Henry Ward Beechers Prædikener Om Negerne I Amerika [Henry Ward Beecher’s Sermons on the Negroes in America],” in *Kirkelig Maanedstidende*, ed. Kirkens præster i Amerika (Innansville, Wisconsin: Den Skandinaviske Presseforening, 1857). The abolitionist preacher Henry Ward Beecher, whose activist church in Brooklyn was attended frequently by Scandinavian Americans, for example spoke about “the Negroes” unenviable social position as being partially shaped by his lack of “beauty,” since, among other examples, the white nose “was long, thin, and curvy,” while the black nose “was flat, broad, and hideous.” My translation. See also Robert Watt, *Hinsides Atlanterhavet: Skildringer Fra Amerika [Beyond the Atlantic: Accounts from America]*, III vols., vol. II (Copenhagen: P. Bloch, 1872), 234-244. For examples of Danish diplomats describing “negroes found on slaveships, as (...) completely raw and uncivilized,” see Waldemar Raasløff, “Kongl. Dansk Gesandtskab. Washington Den 15de December 1861 [Royal Danish Legation. Washington the 15th of December, 1861],” in *Collection 1175. Koloniernes centralbestyrelse kolonialkontoret. 1855-1918 Immigration af arbejdere. Immigration af arbejdere fra Italien*

Ferdinand Winsløw, for instance, was deeply moved by Henry Ward Beecher's abolitionist sermons in Brooklyn in the mid-1850's and publicly implored his countrymen in the Midwest to fight for "serfdom's dissolution, and equality and freedom for all people." Yet, he did not privately practice what he publicly preached.⁵⁰ When Winsløw in 1861 wrote home to his wife Wilhemina, as Captain and quartermaster of the 9th Iowa Regiment, he often expressed common, albeit seemingly well-meaning, racial stereotypes that revealed a sense of social superiority. "Our mess – that is the Colonel, the Major Secretary and myself – has hired an excellent nigger who does nothing but cook from morning until evening."⁵¹ Concerning his morning ritual, Winsløw later added about a servant named Homer, "When I am dressed, he spreads the table, comes back with a waiter with my coffee, milk, sugar, steak and other eatables, and there I sit in my lordly solitude, the nigger standing in front, ready for any command."⁵²

Starker language was employed by the Norwegian Civil War soldier Henry Syvertson on June 9, 1864, when he wrote the following passages to *Fædrelandet* from Kentucky about fear of racial amalgamation, "Any phrenologist (...) would tell you based on the head's development that a Negro is unsuited for higher education (...) That a time should come when an educated, moral woman would marry a Negro I doubt. The loathsome stench alone that comes off a Negro in the summer time would be an insurmountable obstacle."⁵³

Also the Scandinavian Regiment's colonel, Hans Heg, wrote to his wife Gunild on March 7, 1862 about a new servant. "I have got me a negro that does all my hard work. He is about 16 years old (...) he seems to be a good Nigger. I got him a pair of pants, and he struts around as big as a monkey."⁵⁴

In the early part of 1863, less than two weeks after Abraham Lincoln's signing the Emancipation Proclamation, Heg showed that the President's

1884 mm. Box 910 (Copenhagen: Rigsarkivet, 1861).

50 Ferd. S. Winsløw, "Brooklyn. 11th Septbr. 1856. Religion Og Politik," in *Kirkelig Maanedstidende [Church Monthly]*, ed. Kirkens Præster i Amerika (Inmansville: Den Skandinaviske Presseforening, 1856). My translation.

51 Ferdinand Sophus Winsløw, "Benton Barracks, St. Louis. 2 October 1861," in *Ferdinand Sophus Winslow letters, September 1861-February 1862* (University of Iowa, Special Collections Department, 1861).

52 "Pacific, Mo. 15 January 1862," in *Ferdinand Sophus Winslow letters, September 1861-February 1862* (University of Iowa, Special Collections Department, 1862).

53 Henry Syvertsen, "Lexington, Ky., Mai 30te 1864," *Fædrelandet*, June 9, 1864.

54 Theodore C. Blegen, ed. *The Civil War Letters of Colonel Hans Christian Heg* (Northfield, Minnesota: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1936), 57.

action did not immediately alter relations between powerful white men and former slaves. The Scandinavian Regiment’s colonel wrote his young daughter Hilda that he was sending home a black horse and “a Negro.” As such, Heg’s letter can be read as a testament to a Scandinavian officer who seized the right to control freedmen’s lives almost like he would control his horse. In other words, Hans Heg by early 1863 seemingly placed newly freed black people somewhere between white men and animals in the American social hierarchy.⁵⁵ In other words, Scandinavian Civil War soldiers voiced moral and political opposition to slavery consistent with civic nationalism, while simultaneously articulating a sense of social superiority, i.e. based on education and class, more akin to ethnic and racial nationalism.

Yet, by the time of Hans Heg’s death in September of 1863, black soldiers had started to prove their worth on the battlefield, and were slowly but surely winning the respect of their fellow comrades in arms.⁵⁶ As it turned out, on the frontlines the American Civil War crucible more successfully melted Scandinavian immigrants with German, Irish, and African Americans. In other words, notions of ethnic and racial nationalism were pushed to the background in favor of a common fight for civic nationalism.

National ethnicity: American Crucible

In the very same letter where Ferdinand Winsløw described hiring his “excellent nigger” cook in St. Louis, he also revealed that he by no means saw Germans as adversaries. Instead Winsløw had gone straight to the “German Hotel Rheinische Weinhalle,” happily drank weissbier, enjoyed the German camp band’s version of “Das Teure Vaterland,” and lived with a German family in Nashville when his quartermaster duties took him there in 1863. “I am glad I live with this German family,” Winsløw wrote, “you know these people are never as libertineous as the Yankees.”⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Ibid, 175.

⁵⁶ James M. McPherson, “A. Lincoln, Commander in Chief,” in *Our Lincoln*, ed. Eric Foner (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2008), 28. “A year later [August 19, 1864], with more than a hundred thousand black men under arms, Lincoln considered their contribution essential to victory. Without those soldiers, he said, □we can not longer maintain the contest... & we would be compelled to abandon the war in 3 weeks.”

⁵⁷ Winsløw, “Benton Barracks, St. Louis. 2 October 1861.” See also “Batesville Ark. 18 May 1862 Sunday Morn,” in *Ferdinand Sophus Winslow letters, February-September 1862* (University of Iowa. Special Col-

Winsløw's diluted sense of ethnic tension was not uncommon during the Civil War. William Burton argues in *Melting Pot Soldiers* that "geography, personal friendships, occupation, class, non-ethnic politics, and ambition [...] outweighed ethnicity" for most soldiers on the ground.⁵⁸ Civil War companies were culled from local populations, which meant that soldiers often knew each other well and these local relationships, regardless of ethnicity, necessarily took on a prominent role in the Scandinavian Civil War soldiers' lives. For the relatively small number of Scandinavians "lost in the ocean of American life," as one 1892 commentator noted, interacting with other ethnic groups was necessary to survive. This situation was even more pronounced during the Civil War where there were far fewer Scandinavians and the common Confederate enemy muted northern ethnic rivalry while strengthening adherence to civic nationalism.⁵⁹

As James McPherson notes, "[the] ideological commitment of so many of those volunteers of 1861 and 1862 was one reason for the high casualty rates of Civil War armies. Fighting for liberty was a dangerous business." This danger brought the soldiers together and even for the exclusively ethnic Scandinavian regiment, military service strengthened their identification with American values.⁶⁰ The elections of 1862 and 1864 present perhaps the strongest evidence of "exclusive" and "national" ethnicities' being complementary, as the Scandinavian Regiment in 1864 exhibited almost unanimous allegiance to Abraham Lincoln's party, at a time when the Civil War had changed explicitly from a war for reunion to a war for emancipation. Of the soldiers in the Scandinavian regiment that managed to vote in the presidential election of 1864, 176 out of 177 voted for Lincoln which was far more than the three out of four Union soldiers who voted for Lincoln on average.⁶¹ Additionally, votes for congressional representatives show that while Democratic candidates received 6 votes out of 189 (3,2

lections Department, 1862). As well as "Nashville. September 20 1863 Sunday," in *Ferdinand Sophus Winsløw letters, September 1862-April 1865* (University of Iowa. Libraries. Special Collections Dept., 1863).

58 Burton, *Melting Pot Soldiers - The Union's Ethnic Regiments*, 175.

59 Brøndal and Blanck, "The Concept of Being Scandinavian-American," 5.

60 James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades - Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 116.

61 Chief Clerks of the Senate and Assembly, ed. *The Legislative Manual of the State of Wisconsin*, (Madison: Atwood & Rublee, 1865), 172. See also Unkown, "Valget i Wisconsin [The Election in Wisconsin]," *Emigranten*, November 23, 1863. See also Ager, *Oberst Heg Og Hans Gutter [Colonel Heg and His Boys]*, 176. See also McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*, 489.

percent) in 1862 among the soldiers of the 15th Wisconsin, that number had dropped to 1 out of 160 (0,6 percent) in 1864.⁶²

Though the sample size of Scandinavian soldiers’ voting patterns during the Civil War is admittedly small, it is clear that the Scandinavian soldiers supported Abraham Lincoln to a greater extent than any other Wisconsin unit, and as the Civil War citizen armies reflected the societies they were created by, the Scandinavian soldiers’ wholehearted support for Lincoln reveals an noteworthy contrast to German immigrant communities. As Kamphoefner and Helbich show, “the number of German votes for Lincoln (...) failed to increase between 1860 and 1864, and the percentage of support in German areas actually declined slightly. Milwaukee was one of only two big cities where Lincoln lost ground between elections.”⁶³

Interestingly, the Civil War, in some instances, also expanded the Scandinavian immigrants’ sense of who were worthy of inclusion in the American polity, just as their Civil War service, as we shall see, had qualified the Scandinavian soldiers themselves in the eyes of Yankee Americans. Fritz Rasmussen visited a Black church in Alabama in the summer of 1865 and was elated at the thought of worshipping alongside former slaves, “the emotions I felt are impossible to describe,” and the knowledge “that there is no more a slave in Alabama,” filled him with joy.⁶⁴

Likewise, Yankee-Americans got a glimpse of a Scandinavian group that now actively defended civic nationalism’s core values, while standing firmly in Abraham Lincoln’s camp. The fact that all Scandinavian soldiers served in ethnically mixed brigades, regiments, or companies, likely strengthened that sentiment for both Yankee-Americans and immigrants.⁶⁵ The Scandinavian Civil War soldiers’ experience gave them a valuable multiethnic network and, as Jørn Brøndal has shown, helped Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish veterans play an important part in Wisconsin politics towards the end of the centu-

62 A. C. Johnson et al., “Statement of Votes Polled for State Senators by the Electors of Company B of the Fifteenth Wisconsin Regiment of Infantry at an Election Held at Bowling Green Ky. On Tuesday, the Fourth Day of November, A.D. 1862,” in *Wisconsin. Governor Military Votes, 1862-1865. Series 60. Box 2* (Wisconsin Historical Society, 1862). See also Joseph Mathieson et al., “Statement of Votes Polled for Electors of President and Vice-President of the United States,” in *Wisconsin. Governor Military Votes, 1862-1865. Series 60. Box 11* (Wisconsin Historical Society, 1864). Five soldiers in company I, a company that did vote in 1862, for unknown reasons abstained from voting in 1864.

63 Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War: The Letters They Wrote Home*, 12.

64 Fritz W. Rasmussen, “Camp at Montgomery, Ala. Juli Den 23de 1865,” in *Fritz William Rasmussen Papers. Diaries, 1857-1876* (Wisconsin Historical Society, 1865).

65 Burton, *Melting Pot Soldiers - The Union’s Ethnic Regiments*, 232-233.

ry.⁶⁶ Most importantly, however, the Scandinavian immigrants who served in the Civil War either learned English, as evidenced by their frequent mixing of Scandinavian languages and English in letters home, or honed already existing language skills, thereby easing their entry into the American mainstream.⁶⁷ Even *Fædrelandet's* proudly Norwegian editors had to agree that “without this language they [Norwegians and their children] cannot successfully move forward and work among their American fellow citizens.”⁶⁸

At the ground level, Scandinavian Americans interacted daily with other ethnic groups. Fritz Rasmussen's first letter home from the campaign against Mobile in March 1865, detailed spending miserable, rainy days huddled up on a pile of coal with his Irish comrade-in-arms Patrick Perry, and a week later sharing his tobacco with a Prussian named George Böhme.⁶⁹ Rasmussen, as was a common practice among Scandinavian Civil War soldiers, also peppered his native Scandinavian prose with English phrases. After the war, Rasmussen became involved in the local militia, and perhaps due in part to his language skills, also served in several smaller positions of trust in Brown County, Wisconsin.⁷⁰ As secretary of the New Denmark Homeguards, Rasmussen had a chance to reiterate his oft-expressed admiration for the United States, and the universal values on which it was founded, when he was selected to give the first 4th of July speech in New Denmark in 1876 – the centennial of the Declaration of Independence.⁷¹

66 Brøndal, *Ethnic Leadership and Midwestern Politics*.

67 O. M. Hovde, ed. *The Civil War Diary of George Johnson Hovden Translated by Norma Johnson Jordahl* (Luther College Library, 1971). Hovden while writing in Norwegian frequently used English phrases like “piket [picket],” “crosede [crossed],” “branch af [of] Tennessee Rever [River],” “skermish [skirmish]” and “convalessent [convalescent] camp.” See also Theodore Hansen, “Casheville Georgia, Mai 22th 1846,” in *Civil War Mother's Pension. Application 258778* (National Archives, 1864). Theodore Hansen wrote his parents in Danish (while using phrases like “Gavnementet [the Government]” and “draft”) and at times attempted to write his two younger siblings in English.

68 Unknown, “Til Fædrelandets Læsere [To Our Fatherland's Readers],” *Fædrelandet*, January 14 1864, 1. My translation.

69 Fritz W. Rasmussen, “Camp on Fish River, Alabama. Marts Den 24de 1865,” in *Fritz William Rasmussen Papers. Diaries, 1857-1876; Account Books, 1856-1909; Record of Skandinavians Who Have Been Settled and Lived in the Town of New Denmark, Brown county, Wisconsin. Box no. 8* (Wisconsin Historical Society, 1865). See also “April Den 1ste 1865,” (Fritz William Rasmussen Papers. Diaries, 1857-1876: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1865).

70 “Record! Of Skandinavians, Who Have Been Settled and Lived in the Town of New Denmark, Brown Co: Wis. - from the Commencement of Settlement of the Town,” in *Fritz William Rasmussen Papers. Diaries, 1857-1876; Account Books, 1856-1909; Record of Skandinavians Who Have Been Settled and Lived in the Town of New Denmark, Brown county, Wisconsin. Box no. 8* (Wisconsin Historical Society, 1880).

71 “History! Of the Town of New Denmark, Brown Co. Wis.,” in *Fritz William Rasmussen Papers. Correspondence*.

For Scandinavian immigrant soldiers, the American Civil War crucible thus diminished ethnic differences instead of exacerbating them, a fact illustrated by many soldiers’ postwar lives: Ferdinand Winsløw developed a broad ethnic network during his Civil War service; his brother-in-law Christian Christensen received a thick stack of recommendation letters from Yankee officers, as well as the German-born general Peter Osterhaus, after he informed them of his resignation; Swedish Hans Mattson became Minnesota’s Secretary of State; and Hans Heg, who ended up in command of a multiethnic brigade that included the Scandinavian regiment, was well on his way to a post-war political career, when he met his end at the battle of Chickamauga in 1863.⁷² Norwegian Ole Balling became a famous artist whose painting of the future American president “Grant and his Generals,” can still be found at the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery.⁷³

These Scandinavian immigrant leaders’ experience thus mirrored that of the Germans, even as German immigrants did not assimilate into American society as readily. Still, Mischa Honeck notes:

[Germans understood that] courage in combat and a noble role in victory were important bargaining chips for power and influence in an expanding multiethnic republic. Several German American Union officers cashed in on their military laurel, going into business or entering government service.⁷⁴

Hence, when the Scandinavian Regiment gathered for a reunion in Wisconsin on New Year’s Eve 1866, the event, attended by Wisconsin’s governor

dence, 1834-1942; Records of the New Denmark Home Guards, 1876-1883, and Evangelical Christian Society, 1871-1897; “History of the Town of New Denmark.”, 1876, 1881; and Miscellaneous Material. Box no. 1. Green Bay Mss 4.(Wisconsin Historical Society, 1876). For an expression of earlier Scandinavian complementary identity see John A. Johnsen’s Fourth of July speech from 1864. J. A. Johnson, “88 Year Ago to Day the Immortal Continental Congress,” in *John A. Johnson Papers. P691. Box 12* (Norwegian-American Historical Association., 1864).

72 Edward Canby, “New Orleans La Mar 5th 1865,” in *Letters received by the Commission Branch of the Adjutant General’s Office, 1863-1870*. (National Archives, 1865). General Edward Canby called Winsløw an “officer of experience and energy.” On Christensen see Peter Joseph Osterhaus, “Headquarters District of Mississippi. Jackson, Miss, June 14, 1865,” in *Papers of Christian T. Christensen. Christensen (Christian Thomsen) Collection. 1862-1876. Box 1*. (Huntington Library, 1865). As well as John Ellis Wool, “Troy 17 June 1865,” in *Papers of Christian T. Christensen. Christensen (Christian Thomsen) Collection. 1862-1876. Box 1.: Huntington Library, 1865* (Huntington Library, 1865). On Heg see Burton, *Melting Pot Soldiers - The Union’s Ethnic Regiments*, 167.

73 Richard S. Cramer, “Ole Balling, Painter of Civil War Heroes,” *American-Scandinavian Review* 54 (1966).

74 Mischa Honeck, “Men of Principle: Gender and the German American War for the Union,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 5, no. 1 (2015): 58.

and several state officials, was filled with expressions of how Scandinavian ethnic identity complemented the values of their adopted nation.

Speaking at the reunion, Colonel Ole C. Johnson noted that all Scandinavians in their exclusively ethnic unit, “recognized that they were fighting for the Republic’s survival,” and accordingly for the “justice and constitutional freedom,” epitomized by the United States.⁷⁵ Claus Clausen, who had written *Emigranten’s* first editorial about “Americanization,” sent a letter from his home in Minnesota where made a case for the Civil War as a complementary identity crucible:

It is a beautiful and noble idea that has spurred this meeting: To gather the still living members of the Scandinavian Regiments (...) whose sacrifice contributed forcefully to victory for [their] native country and the freedom which today’s gathering is a reminder of. Called away from peaceful pursuits by the war trumpet in the Union’s darkest hours to join the ranks against an overconfident enemy, nobody more cheerfully heeded the call and honored it through bravery, determination, and discipline than the members of the Scandinavian Regiments, both officers and privates; and under the harshest of ordeals they were continually drawn more intimately together in a blood brotherhood, that showed that old Nordic loyalty had not degenerated by being transplanted to American soil.⁷⁶

While Clausen’s letter could be read as a testament to a blood brotherhood created only among Scandinavian soldiers in defense of their newfound “native” country’s civic nationalism, an American-born officer’s speech that same evening revealed how the immigrants’ war service was perceived as part of a larger Civil war crucible from an Anglo-American perspective. General Carlin assured the assembled veterans that he thought of them and his entire multiethnic brigade as “brothers,” and added that in defense of the starry banner “the Scandinavian brothers-in-arms exhibited character traits that were admired everywhere.” Regarding the Scandinavian soldiers’ Americanization, Carlin emphasized that the immigrants through their Civil War service had proven their worth and thus moved closer to society’s mainstream. Based on the Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish soldiers he had observed firsthand in the Civil War, Carlin concluded, “[i]t is my opinion that of all foreigners the Scandinavians become the best Americans.”⁷⁷

75 Ole C. Johnson, “Forhandlinger Og Beslutninger, Vedtagne Af Det 15de Wisconsin-Regiment under Dets Gjenforening 1ste Januar 1867 [Negotiations and Resolutions Enacted by the 15th Wisconsin Regiment at Its Reunion January 1, 1867],” *Fædrelandet*, January 10, 1867. My translation.

76 C. L. Clausen, “Clausens Brev [Clausen’s Letter],” *Emigranten*, January 7, 1867. My translation.

77 Carl Fredrik Solberg, “Festen for Det 15de Wisconsin Regiment [The Celebration for the 15th Wisconsin

Conclusion

American civic nationalism was the most powerful factor pulling Scandinavian immigrants to the United States in the years leading up to Civil War. When war broke out in 1861, the Scandinavian immigrants' commitment to these foundational American values were put to the ultimate test. After German and Irish immigrants had successfully raised regiments and even brigades of soldiers in the spring and summer of 1861, Scandinavian leaders realized that Norwegians, Swedes, and Danes needed additional motivation to enlist and through the press recruited an exclusively Scandinavian regiment based on a constructed Scandinavian identity. This exclusive Scandinavian identity was based on ideas of a common Nordic bloodline, common culture, and common language. Through ethnic units, non-English speaking Scandinavians were afforded an opportunity to serve in the defense of civic nationalism.

The Scandinavian regiment was seen by the Scandinavian ethnic elite as essential to achieving political influence after the war and the main Midwestern adversaries were German and Irish immigrants closely identified with the Democratic Party. Thus, the Scandinavian ethnic elite frequently lashed out at these larger immigrants groups and placed Norwegians, Swedes, and Danes at the top of an indiscernible white hierarchy, based partly on their support for the Republican politicians and thus by extension a moral opposition to slavery. Privately, however, Scandinavian immigrants, at all societal levels, frequently described African Americans in derogatory terms and thus reflected the prejudices of broader American society in the Civil War era.

Yet, Scandinavian military service did increase the soldiers' support for Abraham Lincoln and the Republican Party. Additionally, Scandinavian soldiers' in a multiethnic Union army muted inter-ethnic rivalry on the frontlines, while the immigrants' newfound network and better knowledge of English hastened their path towards the American mainstream. Many Scandinavian veterans subsequently served as a bridge between their local communities and larger American society.

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