

CHAPTER THREE

“Every . . . day laborer . . . will find a rival in a negro”

Fear and Suspicion of “Secret Societies” and Blacks

Like all Northern cities, Detroit rallied to Lincoln’s initial April 1861 call for volunteers when it seemed clear to everyone that the preservation of the Union was *the* fundamental reason for going to war. Circumstances had clearly changed eighteen months later. The preliminary announcement of Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation in September 1862, coupled with the talk of conscription, began to seriously dampen Northern war fever in some quarters, which lasted all the way through to the president’s reelection in November 1864. Those who had opposed the war from the outset kept quiet at first, opting to see how matters played out, but by the fall of 1861 into the summer of 1862 their voices were being heard. These Northern citizens who discouraged enlistments and questioned the war came to be known as Peace Democrats to some, Doughfaces or Copperheads to others (this last moniker a comparison to the extremely venomous snake that makes no rattle with its tail, thus making it all the more dangerous). The earliest known use of the “Copperhead” to describe the Lincoln administration’s most vociferous critics dates to the summer of 1861 with an anonymous letter writer to the *Cincinnati Commercial*. The writer further described the Copperheads by quoting Genesis 3:14: “Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the day of thy life.”¹

Regardless of the epithet, most of these war resisters held to a common belief: that a noble war for the preservation of the Constitution

and Union had now become a war *primarily* for the ending of slavery. From their perspective, though abhorrent, slavery was legal; therefore, any attempt to end it by military force was trampling upon the Constitution, not to mention the rights of the individual states. Moreover, the shedding of the white man's blood for the purpose of emancipating what was generally believed to be a degraded race was viewed as an abomination. In short order, the Copperhead mantra became "The Constitution as it is and the Union as it was."

As discussed earlier, Detroit's antislavery roots had run deep for years though, paradoxically, the town's support for and belief in the equality of the black race was always virtually nonexistent. For decades, the town had been the terminus of a key branch of the Underground Railroad. But now, this apparent change in the *raison d'être* of the war generated immense debate. Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation did more to change the perception of the war in Detroit and other Northern cities than any other issue, especially within the state's Democratic Party and its chief organ, the *Detroit Free Press*. On September 22, 1862, Lincoln issued an executive order proclaiming a formal liberation of all slaves in any state of the so-called Confederate States of America that did not peaceably return to the Union by January 1, 1863. Realizing the political realities, the act did not cover those slaves in bondage in the crucial and neutral border states of Kentucky, Maryland, Delaware, Missouri, or the soon to be newly created state of West Virginia.

The Copperheads immediately denounced the proclamation, pointing out that not only didn't the act free slaves immediately but, more important, it signaled that the war's purpose was now changed from preserving the Union to emancipation. These Democrats pointed to Lincoln's decree as irrefutable proof that Republican promises that the war was only about Union and not black rights or emancipation were now exposed as the lies that Democrats had always insisted they were. "A practical enunciation of the [Republican] party platform will henceforth color the war," the *Free Press* sadly predicted. Seeing themselves from the beginning as strict and conservative interpreters of the Constitution, the Peace Democrats clearly viewed Lincoln's decree as an unlawful usurpation of power by the executive branch.²

Throughout the North, thousands of anti-emancipation soldiers deserted or simply vanished after gaining a furlough. Scores of others in military hospitals quietly decided that their wounds or illnesses were far worse than initially thought and chose to stay put. At the

same time, the proclamation was ridiculed by some as freeing the slaves only in those areas where the Union had no power. Anti-black Northerners' greatest fear was that the decree would flood the Northern states with freed blacks, who would inevitably compete with poor whites for the available manual work or else become costly thieves or indigents. Furthermore, whites abhorred the inescapable association between the races that would inevitably occur. From the day the first shells exploded over Fort Sumter, the Peace Democrats' oratory overflowed with allusions to racial mixing, or what became known as "miscegenation," that played on white society's darkest fears and racial prejudices.³

According to Montgomery Wilson, a prominent Republican writer of the day, the first commandment of every Copperhead, such as the *Detroit Free Press*, was "Thou shalt hate the Nigger with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." With the Midwest grappling with an economic recession, such Copperhead arguments played well with members of the Michigan populace who were originally of Southern origin as well as with the poorer Irish immigrants.⁴

The *Free Press*, initially a supporter of the "Save the Union" war aims, now became one of the Lincoln administration's most strident critics. For editor Henry N. Walker, like Wilbur Storey before him, fighting for the sanctity of flag and Union was one thing, but spilling the white man's blood and spending immense amounts of national treasure in order to free the Negro was quite another. Meanwhile, the paper played its miscegenation fears to the hilt, with consistent headlines such as "A Negro Runs Away with the Wife of a White Man," "Miscegenation in Detroit," and so on. So great was the *Free Press's* "Negrophobia" that within months of Lincoln's announcement it was even envisioning blacks being appointed as general officers in the Union army: "We expect to see Fred[erick] Douglas or some prominent barber buck arrayed in all his glory of twin stars. Let the white volunteers prepare to touch their caps to black generals." Such rhetoric caused unsuspecting black freemen new to Detroit consternation when they realized that the *Free Press's* name had nothing to do with sympathy or alliance with the black race's plight. "I bought the *Free Press*, and hired a boy to read it to me, and the boy read it to me," wrote William Webb in his memoirs years later. At that time, Webb was an escaped slave who had just arrived in Detroit. "I thought it was the most curious free paper I ever heard

read. It seemed to me that it sided with the rebels, and being in a free state, I was surprised. I could not understand it. I thought the boy had made a mistake in reading it. I thought surely it must be a friend to the colored people, being named the Free Press."⁵

The protection of unskilled labor jobs for working-class white men was a core value of Democrats and the *Free Press*. From the paper's perspective, "the dignity of labor" had been maintained prior to the war simply because the demand for labor had exceeded supply. "But let the country be abolitionized," it argued, "let the north be overrun with negroes, as it must be if the slaves are emancipated, and every wood sawyer, day laborer, servant, porter, or other employee, will find a rival in a negro, will have the bread snatched from their mouths by the sable pets of the abolitionists." This was an economic, social, and inherently racist fear that transcended party lines. When Michigan's Radical Republican and antislavery senator Jacob Howard was informed by a colleague that Michigan's black population would soar to 123,000 as compared to its current 6,800 if the slaves were liberated and then settled in the Northern states in a proportion similar to their white population, Howard dryly remarked, "Canada is very near us, and affords a fine market for 'wool.'" ⁶

Though Detroit had garnered scores of European immigrants in the past twenty or so years and had received a substantial influx of newcomers from New York and New England "Yankee" stock, the city's ties to Northern culture were by no means an absolute. Significant numbers of Southern families from western Virginia and Kentucky had also moved northward in the rush for settlement. The Ordinance of 1787 outlawing slavery in the Old Northwest meant that Southerners migrating northward would be of the non-slave-owning class. Their ambivalent attitude to blacks, slavery, and their Southern homeland during the Civil War was evidenced by their cautious reception of the Emancipation Proclamation.⁷



DIVISIVENESS began to take hold in the North in the fall of 1861 as it became clear that the war was going to last well beyond the ninety days initially expected. With military success wanting and congressional elections looming, Northern conservative Democrats began pointing fingers at Republicans—especially the Radical Republicans led by Michigan's own Senator Zachariah Chandler and Governor Austin Blair—for their staunch refusal to negotiate with the South as

well as their abolitionist leanings. In the meantime, radical elements in the Republican Party began to view any criticism of their party, the Lincoln administration, or their war aims as proof positive of secessionist sympathies or leanings. Bolstered by the belief that there were Rebel spies bent on skullduggery lurking around every corner, rumors quickly sprang up throughout the Northern states of "home-grown" plots to undermine the Union war effort. These nefarious schemes were alleged to be the work of various Southern-sympathizing "secret societies" or, according to Professor Frank Klement, "dark lantern societies," that bore cultish names like the Sons of Liberty, the Order of American Knights, and the Knights of the Golden Circle. Members even allegedly acknowledged one another with secret signs and handshakes.⁸

The Knights of the Golden Circle did indeed exist, as the group had been organized in 1854 by Dr. George W. Bickley in Cincinnati—a city that held the questionable honor of being the birthplace of the Know-Nothings as well as the site of anti-immigrant riots. The Knights, or "KGC," as they soon came to be known, spread to the South and Southwest in the mid- to late 1850s. Initially, the Knights' goal was the annexation of territory from Mexico, for this was the era of "Manifest Destiny," and the prospect of expanding slavery into these lands appealed to many Southern "fire-eaters." In short order, the KGC also became identified with white supremacy, "states' rights," and the Democratic Party, to the extent that that party represented all those interests. When war came, the KGC's focus changed from Mexican escapades to Southern support. With Confederate armies already under arms, Bickley and his Knights realized that they would be best put to use in areas where Southern sympathy remained considerable, such as the northwestern states; however, Federal control of those areas prevented such public expression.⁹

Zealous Unionists soon began seeing Knights everywhere. A thin, anonymously authored booklet appeared in Kentucky, the new center of KGC activity, that purported to be an exposé of the Knights' activities. It included the allegation that the *Detroit Free Press* was one of numerous Northern newspapers "eagerly sought for by the brotherhood in their respective States, and in different States, to indicate the progress of the work, and which are deemed able auxiliaries." Meanwhile, partisan Republican papers soon took advantage of such fears and innuendo by indiscriminately claiming that their Democratic opponents were in league with these societies, even when

those opponents were prominent, upstanding members of the community. Irrefutable proof, however, always seemed to be lacking.¹⁰

Into the midst of such intrigue strode Dr. Guy S. Hopkins of North Branch (Lapeer County), Michigan. Hopkins was a staunch and loyal Democrat who, by late 1861, had become increasingly resentful of such Republican accusations, especially when he read the charge that the Knights had infiltrated Detroit. The *Free Press* deemed the accusation, coming as it did only three days before state elections, unworthy of even a reply. Like that paper, the good doctor was certainly no wallflower. He had spoken out quite loudly in town, proclaiming his vehement disagreement with the policies of Lincoln and the Republicans. One town resident claimed that Hopkins and his associates had erected a flagpole in North Branch from which they planned to run up a secessionist flag. His diatribes became so boisterous that local Republicans accused him of treason while friends cautioned him against further action.¹¹

Hopkins reached his emotional limit when he read of a recently concluded several-day visit to Saginaw and Detroit by former president Franklin Pierce. Like Hopkins, Pierce was a devoted Democrat who had strenuously and publicly voiced his disagreement with Lincoln administration policies during his Michigan trip, especially Lincoln's suspension of the writ of habeas corpus and the administration's numerous arbitrary arrests. It was also reported that Pierce had stated he would prefer to see his former secretary of war, Joseph Holt, as president rather than any man living. While in Detroit, Pierce had stayed at the home of Robert McClelland, the esteemed former Democratic governor of Michigan and onetime secretary of the interior in Pierce's cabinet. Pierce had also visited with seventy-nine-year-old Lewis Cass, one of the state's most venerable public figures. Despite McClelland's and Cass's sterling public reputations, Hopkins read in the Republican-leaning *Detroit Tribune* within weeks of Pierce's visit that, while in Detroit, the former president had been "closeted with a select circle who are known to be doubtful in their loyalty." The libelous piece concluded with the stunning allegation, "Our opinion is that Franklin Pierce is a prowling traitor spy." Like all Michigan Democrats who read the story, Hopkins was incensed. Unlike those other Democrats, however, and despite the earlier warnings of his friends, Hopkins decided to gain a measure of personal revenge.¹²

Hopkins's plan was to create a fake letter, written by an "anonymous" member of the Knights of the Golden Circle, that mentioned "Pres^{dt} P—," a clear allusion to Franklin Pierce, thus purportedly tying him to the society. Dated October 5, 1861, Hopkins's cryptic invention was filled with blanks and riddled with "secret" code and innuendo. Had it been real, it would have been solid proof of treasonous activities. The cornerstone of Hopkins's plot was his conviction that once the phony letter had been successfully "leaked" into the hands of Detroit's Republican newspaper editors, they would immediately print the correspondence (along with howling editorials) as proof positive of Democratic involvement in the Confederate-leaning secret societies. Once the letter was published, Hopkins planned to step forward and publicly reveal that he had, in fact, penned the letter as an intentional hoax, thereby exposing his Republican adversaries in Detroit as naive but vicious dupes who would believe and print anything anti-Democratic, no matter how outlandish. As Hopkins himself later wrote, "It would be sent to one of the treason-shrieking presses and when exploded would produce much fun."¹³

Unfortunately for Hopkins, his prediction that Detroit's Republican newspapers would immediately print the letter turned out to be dead wrong. Initially, Hopkins mailed his creation to a Detroit businessman named Mills who, not knowing what to do with it, showed the letter to Henry Walker, the *Free Press's* senior editor. The men took the letter to the Detroit postmaster, who then gave it to the editors of Detroit's two Republican papers, the *Advertiser* and the *Tribune*. At last Hopkins's letter had wound up where he intended it to go. Rather than publish it, however, the two editors quietly passed the letter to Federal marshals, who instructed Detroit sheriff Joseph P. Whiting to investigate. Whiting was able to track the letter back to North Branch and to Dr. Hopkins. Meanwhile, the authorities had also forwarded the letter to Secretary of State William Seward. Seward considered the letter legitimate and ordered the immediate arrest of Hopkins. Hopkins and two friends were soon arrested by Michigan authorities and in a matter of days, Dr. Hopkins found himself sitting in a dank jail cell at Fort Lafayette, situated in the middle of New York harbor.¹⁴

Hopkins never dreamed that his scheme would backfire to such a degree. On November 29, Hopkins wrote a remorseful letter from his cell to Seward admitting that he had authored the "anonymous"

letter, but that his "act of inconsiderate folly" was nothing more than a foolish attempt "to play off a practical joke upon the Detroit press."¹⁵

In the meantime, Seward had already written to Pierce informing him of the anonymously written letter, noting with just a hint of smugness how "it would appear that you were a member of a secret league the object of which is to overthrow the Government. Any explanation upon the subject which you may offer would be acceptable." That Seward would even ask for a formal reply from Pierce outraged the former president, for such a request clearly insinuated that Seward did indeed give the letter some credibility, thereby questioning Pierce's loyalty and commitment to the Stars and Stripes. Pierce's reply to Seward was blistering, first questioning "how any person could give credence to or entertain for a moment the idea that I am now or have ever been connected with a secret league" and then wondering how the extract of Hopkins's letter, which Seward had included, could serve "as a sufficient basis for an official communication." Pierce considered the extract to be nothing more than "the vagaries of an anonymous correspondent" whose words were "incoherent and meaningless," and that the whole affair was a supreme insult considering that it had been officially "sent for explanation to one who during his whole life has never belonged to any secret league, society or association."¹⁶

Upon receiving Hopkins's mea culpa and Pierce's terse reply, Seward realized he had been deceived, yet chose to hide that fact from all concerned. He sent another letter to the still-fuming Pierce, this time downplaying the whole matter as nothing more than a minor misunderstanding and claiming that his initial communication had simply been poorly worded by an incompetent State Department clerk. While this second letter to Pierce did concede that the anonymous letter writer had been detected and that he had admitted his deed, it still did not contain any formal acknowledgment from Seward that the letter's implied allegations against Pierce were bogus. That omission prompted a second burst of vitriol from Pierce, but there the matter seemed to end. Seward simply filed Pierce's letter away and did nothing further. Hopkins was released from prison on February 22, 1862, after signing parole papers pledging he would "render no aid or comfort to the enemies in hostility to the Government of the United States." He returned home to Michigan chastised and contrite. No more letters passed between Seward and Pierce either.¹⁷

Yet to the utter surprise of all concerned, and much to the dismay of Seward, Hopkins's hoax letter was published in the *Detroit Tribune* in March 1862 and quickly reprinted throughout the country. Obviously not realizing that the letter was a fake and with elections looming, Republican editors thought ample political points could be scored by again raising the Democrat-Golden Circle specter. Meanwhile, Pierce was indignant that such a ridiculous insinuation against him was now public, forcing him to take steps that would clear his good name. On March 24, 1862, Pierce wrote to Senator Milton S. Latham of California, a close friend, asking that the Senate pass a resolution demanding that all of the Seward-Pierce correspondence be made public. In due course, the Senate passed the resolution, ultimately forcing Seward to relinquish all of his correspondence with Pierce. The secretary suffered some fleeting public embarrassment and Pierce had his name restored, though his criticism of the Lincoln administration never waned.¹⁸

Detroit's "Hopkins Hoax" quickly became a footnote in Civil War history and was soon forgotten; however, the fear of pro-Southern secret societies fomenting anti-Union and anti-draft sentiment never lost steam throughout most of the Old Northwest up through Lincoln's reelection in November 1864. By 1864, a Union pamphlet from the Bureau of Military Justice put forth that the Sons of Liberty had essentially replaced the KGC and was active throughout the lower Midwest, though to a less extent in Michigan. Its "temple" headquarters in Michigan were reported to be in Detroit, and the organization allegedly had twenty thousand members in Michigan, which was probably a vast overstatement. For the most part, the facts of the Hopkins Hoax case prevented the success of any future Republican assertions of "secret societies" embedded in Michigan. The issue seemed to die down in Detroit and Michigan as 1862 and 1863 wore on, but concerns about "secret societies" were replaced by a new political and highly public controversy: the use of blacks as armed soldiers in the ranks alongside white men.¹⁹



OTHER than the fear of black men taking what were viewed as white jobs, no issue generated more political or racial controversy among Northerners than the question of whether black men should be allowed to serve in the Union army as armed soldiers alongside whites. At the beginning of the conflict, leading men of both the North and

the South had seemed to agree that this would be a white man's war. At least as far as being a musket-carrying soldier went, for to put a black man in a blue uniform and give him a musket would imply a level of equality with whites that many were unwilling to acknowledge. Moreover, Lincoln did not want to offend the sensibilities of border states such as Kentucky, which had remained loyal to the Union, prompting the president to opine that arming blacks would cause fifty thousand bayonets that were for the Union to immediately turn against it. Performing heavy manual labor, however, was another story. In July 1862 Congress had authorized the army to employ blacks strictly as laborers at the rate of \$6 per month. When the highly racist *Free Press* was then asked by a reader if the paper objected to blacks being used by the army for building entrenchments, digging latrines, cooking, or other forms of drudgery, it responded with a full-throated no. "What we are opposed to," it explained, "is the support by the government of negroes in idleness, the putting of negroes in the ranks beside white troops, and any scheme of general emancipation, which will commit the country to an abolition policy and entail upon the people enormous taxation to colonize the slaves."²⁰

As Detroit was a primarily Democratic town, most people seemed to care little about the nobility of blacks serving in the Union army, a topic that was a clarion call for the abolitionist movement. Certainly one of those most interested was Henry Barns, British-born editor of the Republican and pro-Lincoln *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune* who, as a forceful abolitionist and committed supporter of the Underground Railroad, took a very favorable view of efforts to raise a black regiment in Michigan after hearing the vociferous appeals of Detroit's black leaders. In February 1863, only one month after the Emancipation Proclamation had gone into effect, Congress had passed the Negro Regiment Bill, authorizing colored infantry regiments. Soon thereafter, Barns began continually editorializing in support of a black Michigan regiment in the Union army, for he was quite aware that Detroit and Michigan had been slower than some other eastern states in mobilizing support for raising a new black regiment. The paper pointed out how the young nation's two greatest generals to date, George Washington and Andrew Jackson, had never shown any reluctance to use black troops in their respective wars. Furthermore, it noted how England and France, possessors of the two greatest

European armies, thought it no disgrace to utilize black men and accorded them the same respect as their white troops.²¹

Certainly no support for such a venture would be forthcoming from the *Free Press*, which typically vilified the African race as comprised of shiftless men "who do nothing but steal and fight." In an April 1863 editorial, Barns lamented that two hundred black men in Detroit had already enlisted in the Fifty-fourth Massachusetts Colored Infantry, which had become the first black regiment formed in the North. Of this, the *Free Press* sarcastically approved, for every local black enlisting in an out-of-state regiment meant one fewer black living in Michigan. Still, Barns would not be deterred. He appealed to Governor Austin Blair for approval to raise a regiment of colored men; however, Blair lacked the authority to approve Barns's request because Michigan had revised its militia act in 1862 so that only white men could serve. Though he was a staunch Radical Republican, Blair was also likely aware that arming blacks in spring 1863, only a few months after the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect, would be seen as further proof that the war had been transformed into a crusade against slavery, which might have led to even more civil discord. Undaunted, Barns turned to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton and therein found his ally. Stanton informed Blair on July 24, 1863, that the War Department was "very anxious that such regiments should be raised," thus giving Blair the go-ahead to approve Barns's plans.²²

Barns accepted a commission as colonel in the army and earnestly began the recruitment of his new regiment in Detroit on August 12, 1863. As had been the case just over a year earlier with Detroit's Twenty-fourth Volunteer Infantry, Barns appealed to the patriotism of Detroit's Common Council, urging it to offer a \$50 "bounty," or cash bonus, to each colored man who enlisted in the new regiment. He pointed out that given Detroit's Federal enlistment quota, which still existed in part, each black man who enlisted meant one less white man having to serve. In addition, Barns also knew that paying a bounty would stem the flow of Michigan blacks toward out-of-state recruiters. The council was a Democratic stronghold, however and, not surprisingly, denied Barns's request, as did the state of Michigan when Barns came calling to it for some type of bounty. Predictably, Barns's recruitment efforts had little success at first. His potential black recruits, many of whom had families to feed, realized that if

they were indeed going to volunteer, why not do so in a regiment where a significant cash bounty was available?²³

Meanwhile, the *Free Press* went apoplectic at the prospect of such a regiment coming into existence in Michigan in any manner. In an editorial pertaining to Barns's plea to the Common Council, the *Free Press* angrily asserted that there was a "peculiar fitness of things" in Barns having been chosen to lead the new colored regiment. After all, it charged, under Barns's leadership, the *Advertiser and Tribune* had "educate[ed] negroes to *hate* white men, and what, therefore, could be more fit than his selection to be the head of a regiment of negroes to *kill* white men." The *Free Press* referred to Barns as the regiment's "nigger-head" and claimed that his entire motive in building the new regiment was personal financial gain, not patriotism. Almost shrieking, the paper declared that Barns could have enlisted or even formed a white regiment at any time in the past, but now he was strictly playing "a game for plunder, for patronage, for commissions, for contracts . . . for party favorites and to organize and arm a skeleton regiment of whatever negroes can be collected here or from Canada" since so many local blacks had already enlisted in other states' regiments.²⁴

Barns's recruitment continued slowly throughout the fall with Detroit's Republican and Democratic newspapers exchanging barbs about the viability and legitimacy of Michigan's first colored regiment every step of the way. Until they were at full strength and ready to muster into the Union army, the new recruits spent their days drilling at the hastily erected Camp Ward, which was named for Detroit industrialist and leading Republican Eber B. Ward. The camp was part of the Union Army Barracks complex located on the city's east side at the present-day site of the now-closed Duffield Elementary School, the same grounds occupied by 1862's Banks Barracks.²⁵

It was a cold and miserable early winter for the men of the First Michigan Colored Infantry. Nevertheless, their dreary Thanksgiving season at Camp Ward was brightened for one day at least when they were paid a surprise visit by sixty-six-year-old Sojourner Truth, by then a well-known black antislavery activist. Truth, whose birth name was Isabella Baumfree, had been in Battle Creek, Michigan, where she had gathered up a bountiful Thanksgiving feast for the men of the First as well as much-needed supplies. It was quite a welcome surprise when her carriage drove into the camp laden with boxes and packages containing all manner of delicacies for "the boys." The

men were promptly ordered into line for the presentation, which was made by Truth, who then gave a speech glowing with exhortation and best wishes. At its conclusion, the men of the First responded with cheers that could be heard from one end of the camp to the other.²⁶

After Truth's visit, Barns took 250 of his unformed men and the regiment's band on a "grand tour" of southern Michigan in December 1863 in an attempt to rally support and find recruits for his cause. Upon their return, the shoddy construction of their Camp Ward barracks, initially built for temporary use, became painfully evident with the onset of what was a bitterly cold winter. The persistently leaky roofs, lack of flooring, and crevices in the walls large enough to let snow in prompted heated debates about the quality and condition of the regiment's housing. Surgeon Charles Tripler, conducting a formal inspection, described the barracks at Camp Ward as "wretched" and generally unfit for humans to live in. "There is not a barn or pigsty in the whole city of Detroit that is not better fitted for human habitation," argued the *Advertiser and Tribune*. The paper also reported, "Fifty men are at present suffering from the effect of having been frozen in their quarters, and that too while fires were burning." The insinuation disingenuously put forth by the *Free Press* was that the regiment had been given substandard shelter due to its racial makeup.²⁷

When they were off duty, many of the black soldiers desired to go into town and enjoy refreshments or a meal at Detroit's various saloons and eateries. Despite the fact that many of these taverns had previously refused to serve blacks, the soldiers believed their new blue uniforms entitled them to a measure of respect that had previously been denied them. For added protection and even influence, many of the unformed men would go out in groups, even taking their arms. This prompted considerable tension and consternation throughout Detroit, especially in the nearby (east side) German part of town, where disdain for blacks was almost equal to that found among the Irish. Fights sometime ensued, and regardless of who was at fault, the *Free Press* continued its anti-black narrative. It bitterly complained that colored soldiers in uniform could be "found parading the streets with arms, to the great annoyance of peaceable citizens," sarcastically defending the white citizen "who may not have sufficient of the necessary ingredients in his organization to make him worship these African gods either singly, or in squads."²⁸



Joseph R. Smith, Sr. (U.S. Army
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In overall charge of handling such military concerns was the regular army's military commander for Detroit, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Rowe Smith Sr., a sixty-one-year-old "gruff spoken and severe looking, one-armed veteran." After delving into this troublesome matter, Smith concluded there was indeed some merit to what the *Free Press* was reporting. Four days after the *Free Press's* commentary appeared, Smith wrote to Colonel Barns informing him, "Complaints are too frequent, of the rival demonstrations of the colored soldiers, with arms in their hands, threatening, and attacking colored and white citizens, especially the latter." Smith warned that unless Barns maintained tighter control of his men, "collisions must ensue, which will cause bitter blood between the white and colored soldiers and citizens." Obviously fearing civil disturbances, Smith ordered that for the sake of "public peace and good order," Barns's men should no longer wear their side arms to town. The colonel's small patrols of one noncommissioned officer and three or four men could wear side arms, but in no instance should they carry muskets.²⁹

Smith's orders seemed to put an end to the issue, allowing the regiment's recruiting to be finally completed soon thereafter. On February 17, 1864, its 895 young black men were formally mustered

into the U.S. Army as the 102nd U.S. Colored Infantry. Though now proudly wearing the blue uniform of the Union army, these black men still felt the direct sting of government-sponsored racism, for while their white brothers-in-arms were paid \$13 per month, General Orders No. 163 dictated that "persons of African descent" who enlisted were to be paid at the rate of only \$10 per month. Adding insult to injury was the fact that \$3 of that amount was to be deducted from their pay for uniform costs, even though white soldiers had to bear no such fee.³⁰

The newspaper war in Detroit regarding these black troops continued unabated. The *Advertiser and Tribune* attacked the *Free Press* on March 7, alleging that from day one, its policy toward Michigan's only colored regiment had been "base and shameless"; that it had "abused its officers, vilified its members and slandered its friends." Worst of all, "outrages" upon the troops had been presented by the *Free Press* as outrages committed by the black men. The *Free Press*, in short, had "drawn upon an imagination, fertile in the false but barren of truth, for material with which to vilify the objects of its traitorous malice."³¹

On March 28, just a little over a month after its formal mustering into the Union army, the new black regiment marched down Jefferson Avenue to the Michigan Southern Depot at the corner of Brush Street, with none of the fanfare or accolades that had been accorded to the white Michigan regiments. There the soldiers awaited the arrival of the train that would take them to Annapolis, Maryland, and then on to the theaters of war in South Carolina and Florida. Most of the men and many of their white officers could hardly wait to leave Detroit, for as one white officer later wrote, "It was a happy day for us when we left old Camp Ward, with its many unpleasant associations. . . . We are now far removed from all those pernicious Copperhead influences which have so long injured us as a regiment." The very next day after the regiment went to war the *Free Press* fired its final racist volley against Michigan's first and only colored regiment: "Its departure secures the peace and tranquility of our city."³²

CHAPTER FOUR

“One of the most melancholy spectacles it was ever our lot to witness”

Anxiety over the Draft and Its Consequences in Detroit

The Union armies both east and west were able to procure all the soldiers they needed throughout the first year of the war through the volunteer system, despite the fact that some initial grumbling was heard by the fall of 1861, once it became apparent that the war was going to last well beyond the ninety days initially expected. That change in perception also prompted an increase in Michigan’s political partisanship that peaked in the fall of 1862 when President Lincoln announced his preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. Such an occurrence was neither surprising nor unexpected. While Republicans could point with pride to the fact that Lincoln had carried seven midwestern states in the 1860 presidential election, including Michigan, which had been virtually conceded by Democrats from the start, it was also true that his margin of victory had been relatively slim; he garnered only 53 percent of the vote. It was also the case that Democratic strength throughout the 1850s had been relatively strong, as early settlement by upland Southerners had given the Democrats a strong advantage over the old Whig Party.¹

In an action that was never adequately justified, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton ordered all recruiting offices closed in April 1862 on his belief that the war would soon be over and thus no more men were needed. By late June, Union general George McClellan’s recently failed Peninsula Campaign in Virginia clearly showed that was not the case and only highlighted the need for more men. By the summer of 1862, however, patriotic war fervor was diminishing, if not exhausted, prompting the need to again raise voices in favor of the war