



Introduction

The legacy of slavery continues to haunt the national conscience, and questions surrounding race remain among the nation's most intractable challenges. Despite – or indeed because of – the dramatic transformations that American society has undergone in recent decades, along with concomitant changes in the historical profession and historical scholarship, any attempt to understand the nation's past, or present, revolves more than ever around the study of slavery and its destruction, and scholarly interest in these topics shows no signs of abating. Slavery, it is well understood, was not tangential to – or somehow an aberration of – the American experience. It was central, and its overthrow precipitated a fundamental reordering of every aspect of US society. Nothing was immune to slavery's – or emancipation's – consequences. Paradoxically, while notions of race, as the historical record has amply demonstrated, are “constructs” that evolve over time, racism and racist thinking also appear to be immutable elements of modern society. To this day, Americans continue to grapple with slavery's bitter legacy. They probably always will.

As part of the effort to understand that legacy, this book examines the destruction of slavery in the lower Mississippi valley – the vast geological basin drained by the Mississippi River and its main tributaries and distributaries south of the confluence with the Ohio River – during and immediately following the US Civil War. Beginning with Abraham Lincoln's election as president in November 1860 and ending with final ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment in December 1865, it focuses on the four states of the region that seceded from the Union and joined the Confederate States of America – Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee. In particular, this study places special emphasis on the parts of those states where slavery and plantation agriculture predominated, including west and central Tennessee, the southeasterly half of Arkansas, and the western half of Mississippi, as well as almost all of Louisiana. Of these states, only Mississippi did not abolish slavery during the war or experience wartime Reconstruction. The lower Mississippi valley encapsulated the destruction of slavery in the rebellious states as a whole, something that can be said of no other part of the Confederacy.

Even taking into account D. W. Meinig's observation that "[m]ost geographic regions are abstractions and approximations," this book considers the lower Mississippi valley as a distinct geopolitical entity.¹ From this vantage point, it integrates into a coherent narrative the military experience, political developments in the four states and Washington, DC, and the undermining of slavery "from the bottom up" in examining what was undoubtedly the greatest social revolution in US history. The lower Mississippi valley boasts of a universe of scholarship on various aspects of the Civil War and the destruction of slavery, and scholars have long understood the centrality of the region to the war's outcome and to slavery's downfall. Considering how much has been written on the lower Mississippi valley during the war, it seems remarkable that no single book examines the ending of slavery in this distinct and vitally important region. This book attempts to fill that gap.²

While framed as a chronological narrative, this book puts forward two overarching themes. First, it argues that the multidimensional nature of emancipation and abolition in the lower Mississippi valley elucidates the various means by which slavery was brought to an end in the United States. Second, it contends that the destruction of slavery in the United States was even more contingent than previous scholarship has allowed for, and that the exigencies of war, emancipation, and wartime Reconstruction in the states of the lower Mississippi valley proved integral to this process. The first theme pulls together the myriad strands of a story with which scholars of emancipation are familiar, while the second offers a revision of what might be considered the standard account of the destruction of slavery in the United States.

¹ Meinig, *The Shaping of America*, xvii. Although Americans during the nineteenth century employed the term Mississippi valley imprecisely, they had a general awareness of the area as a distinct geographical region.

² One crucial exception is Armstead L. Robinson's 1977 dissertation, "Day of Jubilo." The story of this work is legendary in the scholarship on emancipation. The book that was eventually published posthumously (in 2005) was very different from Robinson's dissertation, though the lower Mississippi valley figures prominently in both works. Robinson's *Bitter Fruits of Bondage* takes a much more expansive view of the Mississippi valley than does mine, incorporating almost the entire area from the Appalachian Mountains to Texas. It also focuses most of its attention on the first two years of the war, until the Confederacy's 1863 military losses at Vicksburg and Chattanooga. While the ending of slavery is obviously critical to Robinson's analysis, he examines the (lower) Mississippi valley as a means of demonstrating that class conflict among white Southerners over slavery was the primary cause of Confederate defeat. As will be seen, my examination of the lower Mississippi valley seeks to explain how the formal abolition of slavery came about. Ironically, Robinson's dissertation probably had a more profound impact on the scholarship on slavery, emancipation, and the Civil War than did the book when it finally appeared. Nonetheless, all of this scholarship since the late 1970s owes a tremendous debt of gratitude to Robinson's truly pathbreaking dissertation.

The first theme maintains that the lower Mississippi valley experienced all of the five major dimensions of wartime emancipation and abolition. First, parts of all four states witnessed the liberating of slaves by Union military forces – or *limited military emancipation* – under various Federal edicts prior to Lincoln's issuing of the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863. Although circumscribed in theory, such emancipation was widespread in practice. Second, the freeing of all slaves in designated geographical areas – or *universal military emancipation* – under the Emancipation Proclamation took place throughout all of Arkansas and Mississippi and most of Louisiana, including parts of all three states that Union military forces controlled when the proclamation was issued. Third, the region experienced *exclusions* from the proclamation, including southern Louisiana and all of Tennessee, as a concession to southern Unionists in those states who were attempting to organize loyal governments. Fourth, *state-level abolition*, as part of wartime Reconstruction, occurred in Arkansas and Louisiana in 1864 and in Tennessee in early 1865. These actions provided constitutional sanction to the freedom former slaves had gained via military emancipation, and they abolished slavery as an institution, something the Emancipation Proclamation could not do. Finally, *Federal civil authority* definitively ended slavery. Mississippi essentially abolished slavery under Federal dictate after the war, while the Thirteenth Amendment prohibited any state to reintroduce slavery. Other Confederate areas experienced one or more of these dimensions of emancipation, but none experienced all of them. It would not be an overstatement to say that the destruction of slavery in the South as a whole can be understood by looking at the lower Mississippi valley.³

The second theme, which requires greater elaboration than the first, seeks to revise the conventional narrative that explains how the Civil War was transformed, for most Northerners, from a war to preserve the Union into one both to preserve the Union and to end slavery. It also calls for a deeper appreciation of the difficulties that were involved in translating military emancipation – or the freeing of slaves as a *consequence* of suppressing the rebellion – into the political

³ Possible exceptions to this generalization include the Virginia–West Virginia situation and Kentucky. Although Virginia established a Unionist government that abolished slavery and was instrumental in creating the state of West Virginia, wartime Reconstruction in that state was of far less significance than in the lower Mississippi valley. Because Kentucky (which was excluded from the Emancipation Proclamation) did not abolish slavery during the war, and was not required to abolish slavery as a condition for restoration to the Union (since it did not secede), slavery only ended in the state with final ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment in December 1865. During the war, Kentucky experienced other modes of Federal emancipation particular to its circumstances: in April 1864, the War Department approved an order allowing for the recruitment of male slaves in Kentucky (thereby emancipating them) with their owners' permission; in March 1865, Congress approved a resolution freeing the wives and children of black soldiers and future recruits, a policy that was enforced widely in Kentucky. These measures still did not abolish slavery in the state. *Freedom: BME*, 193, 196–97.

objective of abolishing slavery as an institution (which also includes state means, not just the Thirteenth Amendment). These difficulties, this book further suggests, were rooted in the shortcomings of abolitionist thought and the antislavery movement in general. Historians of the Civil War and emancipation have traditionally immersed themselves in the “war-for-Union to war-for-freedom” narrative. Yet they have generally demonstrated less awareness of the problem – which became a central one for antislavery advocates during the war – of transforming military emancipation into constitutional abolition. Whereas developments throughout the slave states contributed to the advent of universal military emancipation, the lower Mississippi valley was at the epicenter of the transformation of military emancipation into constitutional abolition.

The “standard” account of how the Civil War became a war to end slavery focuses overwhelmingly on the process by which Lincoln came to issue the Emancipation Proclamation. Historians have traditionally viewed the proclamation, quite correctly, as one of the truly transformative moments in US history. It is almost impossible to overstate the proclamation’s significance to the outcome of the war and to Americans’ historical consciousness. Yet many historians equate *emancipation* with *abolition*, or they presuppose that the former inevitably led to the latter.⁴ Despite excellent work on the Thirteenth

⁴ The scholarship on the destruction of slavery is so vast that it would be impossible to cite the many works that demonstrate this emphasis on the Emancipation Proclamation over constitutional abolition. While there are some exceptions, the equating of military emancipation with abolition, or the assumption that abolition inevitably followed the proclamation, pervades the literature. The same is true of the scholarship on Lincoln, which almost by definition highlights the proclamation. Standard accounts of the ending of slavery in the western hemisphere, which are essential to any understanding of the destruction of slavery in the United States, include Blackburn, *American Crucible*; Davis, *Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation*; and Drescher, *Abolition*. Older works on the proclamation or on Federal wartime antislavery policy that emphasize emancipation include Franklin, *Emancipation Proclamation*, and Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*. The more recent, generally excellent, scholarship on emancipation or abolition in the United States also displays this tendency to accentuate the proclamation, and military emancipation generally, over constitutional abolition. Works that situate the long-term project of ending slavery in the United States in hemispheric perspective include Berlin, *Long Emancipation*; Hahn, *Political Worlds of Slavery and Freedom*; Rael, *Eighty-Eight Years*, esp. chap. 7; and Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause*. Recent works on wartime emancipation and the destruction of slavery, or on Lincoln and emancipation, that devote most of their attention to the proclamation include Blair and Younger, *Lincoln’s Proclamation*; Blair and Broomall, *Rethinking American Emancipation*; Finkelman and Kennon, *Lincoln, Congress, and Emancipation*; Foner, *Fiery Trial*; Guelzo, *Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation*; Holzer and Gabbard, *Lincoln and Freedom*; Holzer, Medford, and Williams, *Emancipation Proclamation*; Masur, *Lincoln’s Hundred Days*; Medford, *Lincoln and Emancipation*; Medford, “Day of Jubilee”; Oakes, *Freedom National*; and Williams, “Under Cover of Liberty.” In one of the essays in Holzer and Gabbard, *Lincoln and Freedom*, Herman Belz perhaps comes closest to pinpointing the difficulty of transforming military emancipation into constitutional abolition. However, even in this essay, Belz tends to equate emancipation with abolition, and he takes the idea of abolishing slavery by

Amendment by Michael Vorenberg, Leonard L. Richards, and Rebecca E. Zietlow, historians of emancipation tend to relegate the formal abolition of slavery almost to an afterthought.⁵ They may disagree on *how* the shift to

amending the Federal Constitution almost as a given. (Belz, “Constitution, the Amendment Process, and the Abolition of Slavery.”) The legal historian Gerald T. Dunne goes so far as to suggest that the Thirteenth Amendment was “largely unnecessary,” owing to the Emancipation Proclamation and “state action at the grass roots” (Dunne, “Reconstruction Amendments,” 179). As arguably the most authoritative recent account of the wartime destruction of slavery, Oakes’s *Freedom National* deserves special commentary. Oakes devotes approximately 80 percent of his nearly 500 pages of text to the year and a half leading up to the proclamation and to its implementation, and 20 percent to the almost three years that were subsequently needed to abolish slavery. Oakes includes two incisive chapters that trace the challenges of abolishing slavery after the proclamation had been issued, but by far his focus is on the proclamation as the culmination of Union military emancipation policy that began, he posits, at the very start of the war. Although I disagree with Oakes’s contention that Republicans, including Lincoln, were generally committed to a war against slavery right from the start, my intellectual debt to his extraordinary work will be obvious. In *The Second Founding*, Eric Foner makes the distinction between military emancipation and constitutional abolition, though mostly to show why an abolition amendment to the Federal Constitution was necessary. Foner also notes, however, that the Emancipation Proclamation “did not mean the end of Lincoln’s quest for state-by-state abolition,” both as a means of winning the war and abolishing slavery in the seceded states (23–28; quotation, 27). A central theme of Chandra Manning’s *Troubled Refuge* is the contingent nature of wartime emancipation and the possibility of slavery surviving the war. There have been many instances throughout history, Manning notes, in which slavery was critically weakened during war only to survive and become even stronger. Ironically, Manning may take this argument a bit *too* far in maintaining that it was not the Thirteenth but the *Fourteenth* Amendment that finally guaranteed the demise of US slavery, since, as she observes, “it is far more difficult to enslave a citizen than a noncitizen.” She continues: “the Fourteenth Amendment helped to ensure the permanence of emancipation in the United States, in contrast to most instances of wartime emancipation throughout world history, which more often resulted in reenslavement or the perpetuation of slavery” (282). For recent overviews on the scholarship on emancipation and abolition, see Brooks, “Reconsidering Politics in the Study of American Abolitionists”; Emberton, “Unwriting the Freedom Narrative”; and Kolchin, “Reexamining Southern Emancipation.” Kolchin correctly notes the difficulty of pinning down the precise “moment of emancipation,” but he then jumps ahead from the proclamation to the Thirteenth Amendment. Although Kolchin allows for “self-emancipation” and slave flight throughout the war, abolition seems to follow emancipation almost inevitably. “If the Emancipation Proclamation indicated an intent to move toward emancipation,” he writes, “the Thirteenth Amendment appeared almost an afterthought by the time it was ratified, endorsing what had already occurred in fact” (9–10). While there are certainly exceptions, the scholarship on the destruction of slavery focuses overwhelmingly on the Emancipation Proclamation, assumes slavery was doomed following Union military victory, and treats the abolition of slavery as a virtual formality. If slavery were indeed dead by the time the Thirteenth Amendment was finally ratified, it was only because of the fierce struggle over its fate – driven, as this book will show, by the fear that it might very well survive Union military victory – in the nearly three years between January 1, 1863, and December 1865.

⁵ Vorenberg, *Final Freedom*; Richards, *Who Freed the Slaves?*; and Zietlow, *Forgotten Emancipator*. In contrast to Oakes, Vorenberg focuses overwhelmingly on the amendment

a war for freedom came about (witness the endless debate over “who freed the slaves?”), but they generally concur that such a shift took place. To be sure, some of them challenge this narrative. Gary Gallagher, for instance, claims that the war always remained a war primarily for Union for most Northerners, while James Oakes’s monumental *Freedom National* contends that Republicans began acting against slavery almost immediately.⁶ Nonetheless, historians largely adhere to this “war-for-Union to war-for-freedom” trajectory, even if they differ on the impulses behind it. Placing far more emphasis on the proclamation than on later developments, they almost assume that once Lincoln issued it, pending Union military victory, slavery was doomed.⁷

following its December 1863 introduction into Congress, devoting approximately 20 percent of its 250 pages of text to the amendment’s antebellum and wartime background. This observation is offered as a basis for comparison, not as criticism. Vorenberg provides a number of key insights that I have used and expanded upon in my analysis. My debt to his work will also be obvious. Although Richards takes greater account of the amendment’s background than does Vorenberg, Richards seems to assume the preexisting idea of a Federal abolition amendment, something, as Vorenberg shows, very few Americans subscribed to before the Civil War. Zietlow’s study of Ohio US Representative and Radical Republican James M. Ashley, who shepherded the Thirteenth Amendment through the House, provides an example of one of the rare Republicans or antislavery advocates who called for such an amendment before the war. See also Samito, *Lincoln and the Thirteenth Amendment*.

⁶ Gallagher, *Union War*.

⁷ Mention must also be made of the groundbreaking work of the Freedmen and Southern Society Project, which has produced the multi-volume, documentary editing series, *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861–1867*, along with the similar scholarship, both before and after it, that cast emancipation as a social revolution. While these works hardly ignored official policy, laws, and the like, they were more concerned with emancipation as a social and historical *process*, one in which the slaves themselves played a central role, than with policy. The starting point for this view is Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, but see also Aptheker, *Negro in the Civil War*. Important titles of the post–World War II period include Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*; McPherson, *Negro’s Civil War*; Quarles, *Negro in the Civil War*; and Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*. No attempt is made here to cite the vast body of local or community studies on the ending of slavery that this previous scholarship has inspired, but important works along these lines for the South (and the nation) as a whole include Foner, *Reconstruction*; Hahn, *Nation Under Our Feet*; and Reidy, *Illusions of Emancipation*. Reidy has further questioned approaches to emancipation that are framed around the “linear” evolution of policy. This viewpoint fits within his larger argument that individuals experienced both time and place in essentially malleable and radically different ways amidst the upheaval and strife of war. “As I argue throughout this book,” Reidy writes (371, n. 38), “understanding emancipation as a linear succession of official actions obscures more than it illuminates.” While I do not disagree with Reidy’s key insight that individuals experienced time differently under different circumstances, the account presented here, admittedly, is firmly rooted in the “linear” evolution of policy. The classic account of the slaveholders’ response to emancipation for the South as a whole is Roark, *Masters without Slaves*. Finally, in the vast literature on the Confederacy, important recent works that attribute its failure to the crisis over slavery include Levine, *Fall of the House of Dixie*; McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*; and Robinson, *Bitter Fruits of Bondage*.

Yet this fixation on the Emancipation Proclamation has led to historical misunderstanding. Although scholars have long recognized the many limitations of the proclamation, they have not fully appreciated its most important shortcoming or the implications thereof. Even allowing for its unquestioned legality and full implementation, the proclamation did not – *could* not – abolish slavery as an institution. It was a military directive that freed certain slaves. Among the many questions it left unanswered, it said nothing about how slavery would factor into the rebellious states' return to the Union. It was also entirely silent on the future of slavery. The proclamation could have freed every single slave in the seceded states and yet still have left slavery legally in place. Because of the proclamation's inability to end slavery as an institution, there remained the possibility of the seceded states being restored to the Union without having to abolish it, and of slavery therefore surviving the war. If such a possibility seems remote in hindsight, it was not so to many contemporaries, both for and against abolition. (As often noted, the vast majority of the Confederacy's 3.5 million slaves were still enslaved when the war ended.) Assuming slavery's destruction to be inevitable after the proclamation, and upon Union victory, historians have overlooked the significance of the shift to constitutional abolition – and thus have missed an important part of the story.

As historians have well understood, Republicans were committed to the eradication of slavery after January 1, 1863, and many before then. Yet it was not at all clear how – or whether – Lincoln's emancipation policy would be turned into abolition. This situation, in many respects, was a logical outgrowth of the prewar antislavery movement. For all of the abolitionists' success before the war in shaping northern public opinion on the enormity of slavery, they had never really developed any concrete, coherent plan for how to end it. Neither had the advocates of an antislavery Constitution – or what historians call “antislavery constitutionalism” – made much headway in devising a strategy to eliminate slavery in the states under peacetime conditions. The principle of “freedom national” – the idea that slavery, as a strictly local or state institution, enjoyed no legal existence wherever Federal authority prevailed – had gained widespread support before the war. Yet even this idea offered no way to end slavery. Indeed, the so-called Federal consensus – which may well have been the most sacrosanct constitutional principle before the Civil War, and to which even most abolitionists subscribed – held that because slavery was a state matter, the Federal government possessed no authority to act against it in the states. Only a *state* could abolish slavery. Lincoln himself swore by this principle and only deviated from it near the end of the war. It is perhaps ironic that wartime military emancipation, however inadvertently, exposed this essential flaw in the entire abolitionist project.

Abolitionists and many Republicans saw the start of the war as a golden opportunity to challenge slavery, but they still faced seemingly insurmountable obstacles in turning this goal into reality. Abolitionists had talked for decades

about freeing slaves in any potential civil war. Yet in response to the age-old question “What is to be done?,” antislavery advocates had no plan. While considering Reconstruction legislation early in the war, Republicans began to debate the fate of slavery, but they made little progress. So long as the war was about preserving the Union, in any event, the question of slavery’s fate was moot. Once Lincoln issued the proclamation, the general presumption remained that the *states* would abolish slavery. They would perhaps accomplish this task as part of the process of state restoration, under the auspices of Federal legislation, though even then Republicans continued to disagree on the basis for such legislation. Many contemporaries simply assumed that the fate of slavery would be postponed until the rebellion had been defeated. Owing to traditional notions of federalism, including the Federal consensus (from which even rebellious states evidently benefitted), most opponents of slavery held that abolition by *state* means, carried out in conjunction with the other practical considerations relating to state restoration, was a more viable method of ending slavery than by a Federal mandate imposed on the states against their will.

Moreover, as Michael Vorenberg has demonstrated, few Americans before the Civil War, and for the first two years during it, would have supported the idea of abolishing slavery – or carrying out any social reform – by amending the Federal Constitution. This document, as the work of the “Founders,” was generally thought to be beyond substantive revision. Overturning this mindset would take time and was itself a product of the war. Plus, with fifteen slave states, there was no hope of such a measure ever being ratified. In a few instances in the decades before the war, abolitionists had suggested a Federal abolition amendment. But this idea was a pipedream – so outlandish, even by abolitionist standards, that it stood no chance of implementation. Once the war began, many antislavery proposals were put forward, both before and after the Emancipation Proclamation, to end slavery – so many as almost to preclude any consensus from developing. Debate over the fate of slavery in any prospective postwar settlement further intensified after the Union victories at Vicksburg and Gettysburg. Even after the various proposals to make emancipation universal coalesced into a Federal abolition amendment in early 1864 (the “Thirteenth Amendment”), many of the amendment’s supporters harbored grave doubts about its prospects for success. Neither did they necessarily view it as a substitute for state action. The idea of the amendment as a stand-alone measure giving constitutional sanction to the proclamation, overriding state concerns, has become essential to our understanding of the destruction of slavery, but it does not accurately convey how most contemporaries saw the problem of securing universal emancipation.⁸

⁸ Americans’ aversion to the idea of amending the Constitution before the Civil War is an important theme in Vorenberg’s *Final Freedom*, but see esp. 5–7. For one suggestion

The transformation of military emancipation into constitutional abolition, I argue, was as fraught with difficulty – and as historically contingent – as had been the transformation of a war to preserve the Union into a war of universal military emancipation. The shift from “war-for-Union to war-for-freedom” was not a one-step process but rather a two-step process: war for Union to Emancipation Proclamation, and Emancipation Proclamation to constitutional abolition. The second step of this process was as essential to ending slavery as had been the first. However, the first – for various reasons, including the story of how the Emancipation Proclamation was adopted and the slaves’ role therein, and the lionization of Lincoln as “the Great Emancipator” – has traditionally received much more scholarly attention. By contrast, the excellent recent work on the Thirteenth Amendment tends to accentuate the circumstances surrounding the amendment itself, once it had been introduced into Congress, rather than its antecedents or background. There is clearly something missing in the standard account of the destruction of slavery. The Emancipation Proclamation freed slaves but did not abolish slavery as an institution. That was an entirely different problem, as was that of state restoration. In much the same way that the abolitionists had devised no viable plan to end slavery before the war, the path from military emancipation to constitutional abolition was not nearly as clear, direct, or inevitable for contemporaries as later generations have assumed.

If this shift from military emancipation to constitutional abolition was more the product of wartime contingencies than of theories antislavery advocates had developed before the war, I further contend, it also pivoted on the lower Mississippi valley. The abolition of slavery as a wartime political objective arose as a direct consequence of Federal military success in the region during the first half of 1862. Since the start of hostilities, northern policymakers and other interested parties had debated the problem of “state restoration,” which involved the myriad practical difficulties – in addition to ending slavery – that would have to be addressed in restoring the rebellious states to the Union. Congress had considered legislation regarding these matters in early 1862, and halting initiatives had been undertaken in Virginia and North Carolina. By June, however, Federal military forces had conquered and occupied New Orleans and southern Louisiana; Memphis, Nashville, and much of west and central Tennessee; and parts of northern and eastern Arkansas. Federal military success in the western theater made concrete the abstract problem of state restoration even as the fate of slavery further complicated it.

before the war, Oakes, *The Crooked Path to Abolition*, 176–80. Again, James M. Ashley is something of an outlier here. Indeed, Ashley was also one of the few northern antislavery political leaders who rejected the idea of the Federal consensus before the war and argued that the Constitution already empowered the Federal government to abolish slavery in the states, a position he would have to reconcile with the Thirteenth Amendment itself. Zietlow, *Forgotten Emancipator*, 89.

Following these military gains, amorphous Unionist movements in Louisiana and Tennessee began to take shape. They included slaveholders and antislavery advocates as well as Unionists of various stripes and even former secessionists. The failure of what many Northerners had believed was latent southern Unionism to seize the initiative has long been recognized as a key factor in Lincoln's decision to issue the Emancipation Proclamation, although Lincoln eventually excluded southern Louisiana and Tennessee from the proclamation. Initially, Unionists in each of these two states worked together toward state restoration, and their primary goal throughout 1862 was to initiate reorganization efforts before the Federal government became fully committed to destroying slavery. However, the proclamation drove a wedge into southern Unionism, dividing Unionists in both states into proslavery and free-state factions.

Throughout 1863 and most of 1864, rival Unionist factions in Tennessee and Louisiana vied for control of the state restoration process. Free-state forces attempted to organize state governments and write free-state constitutions, while "conservative Unionists" undertook to restore their states to the Union under their antebellum constitutions in hopes of preserving slavery. Seeking to gain legitimacy, both sides repeatedly appealed to Lincoln and to Congress. Although Republicans and other antislavery advocates had already begun to link abolition to state restoration by early 1863, the contest over state reorganization in the lower Mississippi underscored the essential limitations of military emancipation, and thereby helped to catalyze the freeing of slaves into constitutional abolition. With conservative Unionism as a viable political alternative and the survival of slavery a distinct possibility, Republicans eventually developed a consensus around incorporating immediate abolition into the process of state restoration. If the Federal government could not abolish slavery in the states, it could require rebellious states – as a result of the specific circumstances of civil war – to enact free-state constitutions. The situation in the lower Mississippi valley was not the sole factor in this transition. However, owing to the strategic significance of the lower Mississippi valley and to Federal military success there, and because state restoration efforts had advanced further there than anywhere else in the rebellious states, the region assumed special salience in the debate over wartime Reconstruction and in establishing the abolition of slavery as an essential requirement for restoring the seceded states to the Union. Wartime Reconstruction in the lower Mississippi valley, in short, forced northern antislavery advocates to resolve the fundamental problem that had plagued the antebellum abolitionist movement almost from its very inception.⁹

⁹ James Oakes observes in *The Crooked Path to Abolition* (194): "Lincoln's sustained efforts to get states to abolish slavery, *after* the Emancipation Proclamation had been issued, remains one of the least-understood features of his presidency." I would argue that the