

# ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

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## Copperheads

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In 2013, Ron Maxwell's *Copperhead* opened in theaters throughout the country to little fanfare. Sidney Blumenthal excoriated the movie in the *Atlantic Monthly* as "propaganda for an old variation of the neo-Confederate Lost Cause myth." Blumenthal rightly pointed out that the film minimized the importance of race and slavery to northern Democratic political thought, but he wrongly implied that Copperheads were not principled politicians. He writes, "In the year of the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, *Copperhead* presents us with a false depiction of the Copperheads as principled men of peace instead of what they were—often violent and always racist defenders of slavery, secession, and the Confederacy." If by "principled men of peace" Blumenthal means pacifists, then he is right. But pacifists are not the only principled advocates for peace. Copperheads opposed the Civil War because they believed it was unjustified and being waged in an unconstitutional manner. Moreover, they came to believe that the benefits of winning were not worth the cost.<sup>1</sup>

*Copperhead* was not a particularly good movie. The melodramatic, anti-Lincoln dialogue was stilted and difficult to stomach after a while. Yet Blumenthal's critique of both the Copperheads and *Copperhead* is not entirely fair, nor as historically grounded as he would like his readers to believe. Blumenthal depicts the Copperheads as whiners who overreacted to a few minor infractions of the Lincoln administration. Sure, a few newspapers were shut down. But it was not so bad—nothing too out of the ordinary. In fact, Blumenthal maintains, the Democrats were the instigators, not the victims. Citing historian David Grimsted, Blumenthal writes, "Before and during the Civil War, waves of mobbing crested across the country. Not a single one of those recorded involved abolitionists attacking individuals of opposing opinions. Not one. That did not occur. That is not how abolitionists behaved."<sup>2</sup>

This is wishful thinking. The problem here is that Blumenthal cites a book that covers the period 1828 to 1861, not during the Civil War. The reality is that before the

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<sup>1</sup> Sidney Blumenthal, "Romanticizing the Villains of the Civil War," *theatlantic.com* (July 22, 2013) <http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2013/07/romanticizing-the-villains-of-the-civil-war/277969/> (accessed March 3, 2015);

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.; David Grimsted, *American Mobbing, 1828–1861: Toward Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

war and after the war, the majority of mob violence in the United States was directed at abolitionists and/or African Americans. But during the war and in the wake of Lincoln's assassination, northern Democrats were the principal recipients of the mobs' wrath. "Our cause is going right," boasted Tennessee abolitionist William G. "Parson" Brownlow to Republican vice presidential candidate Andrew Johnson in October 1864. "A McClellan man cant make a speech any where in this District without being mobbed." Sometimes these mobs were headed by federal soldiers, which made them all the more dangerous. Examples like these abound. The Copperheads thus had a point when they complained in their 1864 presidential platform about the loss of civil liberties, the denial of the right to vote, and the abrogation of the Bill of Rights. Many of them really did endure such violations of their constitutional rights during the four years of war. It is little wonder that Democrats in the Pennsylvania legislature sought to enact a law in 1864 entitled "An Act Providing for the Protection of Property against Destruction by Mobs," although the Republican majority in the state senate defeated the bill.<sup>3</sup>

While Maxwell's movie may not be the most accurate portrayal of northern Copperheads, his interpretation of the war is not as far off as Blumenthal would have his readers think. On matters of race, Maxwell's film falls squarely within the libertarian and Lost Cause traditions and is thus lacking in historical reliability. But in other areas, aspects of the Copperhead interpretation of the war have gained a prominent place in Civil War scholarship in recent years. Historians today have increasingly adopted an antiwar interpretation of the Civil War. As one scholar recently wrote in an article called "The Antiwar Turn in Civil War Scholarship" in the *Journal of the Civil War Era*, "The Civil War emerging from this new scholarship is just another messy, ghastly, heartless conflict between two parties who were both, to some degree, in the wrong. Historians writing in this vein underscore the war's bleakest facets while exposing the tragedies underlying even the most uplifting moments. There are few winners and fewer heroes, little glory and scant justice." Civil War historiography has become, in Mark E. Neely, Jr.'s apt phrase, "a cult of violence."<sup>4</sup>

But even beyond this metainterpretation of the war, recent scholarship examining the specific policies of the Lincoln administration has offered interpretations more sympathetic to wartime Democratic views. In *Abraham Lincoln and Treason in the Civil War: The Trials of John Merryman*, Jonathan W. White critiques Lincoln for signing the Habeas Corpus Act of 1863—a law that offered protection to civilians who were arrested by the military—and then promptly ignoring it. In *Emancipation, the Union Army, and the Reelection of Abraham Lincoln*, White reveals the Lincoln Administration's strong

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<sup>3</sup> William G. Brownlow to Andrew Johnson, October 12, 1864, in Leroy P. Graf, et al., eds., *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, 16 vols., 1986 ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1967-2000), 7:23; *Journal of the Senate of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, of the Session Begun at Harrisburg, on the Fifth Day of January, 1864* (Harrisburg: Singerly & Myers, 1864), 758. On mob violence in the wake of Lincoln's assassination, see Jonathan W. White, "A Terrible Loss," *The American Scholar* 84 (Spring 2015): 31-41.

<sup>4</sup> Yael A. Sternhell, "Revisionism Reinvented?: The Antiwar Turn in Civil War Scholarship," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 3 (June 2013): 249; Mark E. Neely, Jr., *The Civil War and the Limits of Destruction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 198-219.

and deliberate strategy for silencing anti-emancipation speech among soldiers (and some civilians).<sup>5</sup>

William A. Blair offers a similar interpretation in *With Malice Toward Some: Treason and Loyalty in the Civil War Era*. Writes Blair, “Numerous examples indicate an excessive use of force against so-called treasonous behavior, yet supporters of the administration shrugged such things off as necessary actions to save the nation and as the just desserts for traitorous behavior, imperfectly defined.” Among the meddling of the administration Blair examines is the suppression of Democratic voters in states throughout the nation. Harold Holzer’s prize-winning *Lincoln and the Power of the Press: The War for Public Opinion* confirms the Lincoln administration’s iron fist against antiwar editors at various points in the war. Writes Holzer, “Following Bull Run, the Lincoln Administration turned its attention not only to forging weaponry and raising more troops, but also to quelling home-front newspaper criticism that the president, his cabinet advisors, and, more surprisingly, many Northern newspaper editors, believed was morphing from tolerable dissent into nation-threatening treason.” While Lincoln may have “believed a free press [was] ‘necessary to a free government’” before the war began, “outright rebellion . . . altered his thinking on the subject.” Mobs, incidentally, can claim much of the credit for suppression of the Democratic press between 1861 and 1865.<sup>6</sup>

One hundred and fifty years after the war, it seems, some Copperhead views have become ascendant. Their antiwar interpretation of the conflict and their critiques of the Lincoln administration are quickly becoming the orthodoxy among scholars, gaining traction outside of the southern agrarian, neo-Confederate, and libertarian traditions.

In 1861, the Democratic Party was thrust into an unfamiliar position—the minority party in Congress, while also being ousted from the White House. During the secession crisis and early in the war, many northern Democrats gave full-scale support to Abraham Lincoln and the Union war effort. Behind their national leader, Senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois, many Democrats professed nonpartisan allegiance to the Union and the fight to preserve the nation. But Douglas died in June 1861, and as election season approached that autumn, Democrats girded for partisan battle, just like they had done in the years before the war. Republicans, of course, thought this was scandalous. But the pattern was set: during the next four years of war, the election calendar would proceed just as it had in peacetime, and Democrats would challenge

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<sup>5</sup> Jonathan W. White, *Abraham Lincoln and Treason in the Civil War: The Trials of John Merryman* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011), 64-89; Jonathan W. White, *Emancipation the Union Army, and the Reelection of Abraham Lincoln* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014), 38-97, 117-25.

<sup>6</sup> William A. Blair, *With Malice Toward Some: Treason and Loyalty in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 2; Harold Holzer, *Lincoln and the Power of the Press: The War for Public Opinion* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), 335-6. Civil War-era Peace Democrats would surely nod their heads in agreement could they read the newest biography of Edwin M. Stanton, William Marvel’s *Lincoln’s Autocrat: The Life of Edwin Stanton* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), which offers a scathing critique of Lincoln’s secretary of war.

Republican incumbents without reservation. Political life would endure, and two-party competition would function in wartime as it had in peace.

Republicans charged the Democratic Party with disloyalty for maintaining party competition and opposing their war policies. Republicans often equated loyalty to the Union with fidelity to the Republican-led Union war effort, but the Democrats would not adhere to the Republican Party's agenda. As the Republicans turned to a policy of confiscation and then emancipation, in 1862, Democrats realized that their goal of "the Constitution as it is and the Union as it was" could not be sustained if the Republicans stayed in power and won the war on Republican Party terms. This explains why so many Democrats opposed the Union war effort as it was waged. Few Democrats ever really supported southern secession (as many Republicans charged). Rather, they loathed those they perceived as the extremists on both sides—southern fire eaters and northern abolitionists. But because the Union war effort seemed to be approaching the agenda of the abolitionists, Democrats opposed the terms by which the Lincoln administration waged the war.<sup>7</sup>

Today the term "Copperhead" is generally used to refer to the antiwar/peace wing of the Democratic Party. But all Democrats were considered "Copperheads" by Republican stump speakers and editors during the war. For several generations, historians adhered to the Republican-nationalist viewpoint—that the Democrats were disloyal traitors both to the war effort and the Union itself.

Two influential studies published in 1942 upheld the Republican Party's view of their Democratic opponents. Wood Gray's *The Hidden Civil War: The Story of the Copperheads* found that Copperheads obstructed Republican policies from the beginning of the war. Gray dismissed any support that Democrats gave to Republican war policies as insincere, concluding that "it is hard to find much good in the leaders of the peace movement" because "many of them were willing to sacrifice the Union rather than permit the carrying out of a policy that had been adopted against their wishes, and they seemed incapable of looking beyond party victory or defeat." Northern Copperheads, according to Gray, were willing to "connive" with Confederates for political gain. Finally, Gray argued that the Democrats masqueraded as men of principle when they were really just men of prejudice. "It is a mark by which they may be known that they appeal always to the basest and most selfish instincts, and call pandering to such motives wisdom." Published during World War 2, one reviewer stated that *The Hidden Civil War* "should be read by every citizen and by every official."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> On the origin of the Democratic slogan "the Constitution as it is and the Union as it was," see Clement Laird Vallandigham, *Record of Hon. C.L. Vallandigham on Abolition, the Union, & the Civil War* (Columbus OH: J. Walter & Co., 1863), 234.

<sup>8</sup> Wood Gray, *The Hidden Civil War: The Story of the Copperheads* (New York: Viking Press, 1942), 63, 70, 224; ; John D. Barnhart, "Review of *The Hidden Civil War*," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 29 (December 1942): 437.

George Fort Milton's *Abraham Lincoln and the Fifth Column* similarly criticized Democrats who opposed the Union war effort. Many "secret bands of traitors" spread throughout the Midwest during the summer of 1861 "with a full panoply of oaths, grips, recognition signs—and determination to aid the Confederate cause." Milton, who despised both the Radical Republicans and the Copperheads, argued that the Copperheads conspired for Confederate success. In 1862, "the antiwar forces . . . became embarrassingly dangerous to the Administration," but fortunately by the end of 1864, the leaders of the Fifth Column had become the "chief contrivers of their own undoing." Because of the Copperheads' own timidity and weakness, federal authorities "foiled the[ir] plots, seized the chief conspirators, and brought the secret orders to an inglorious end."<sup>9</sup>

Beginning in the Vietnam era, historians began to reevaluate the "disloyalty" of the Democratic Party, pointing out that Democrats adhered to long-standing constitutional and economic positions, and that they had been in some cases illegally oppressed by the Lincoln administration. As antiwar protestors in the late 1960s and early 1970s gained national prominence and political legitimacy, attention again fell to the Democratic Party during the Civil War. Several leading political historians came to the conclusion that the Democrats really were a loyal opposition. Historian Richard O. Curry, for example, called the term "Copperhead" an "opprobrious epithet" and "virtually a blanket indictment" that was "calculated to cast doubt upon the loyalty of Democrats who opposed the war policies of the Lincoln Administration."<sup>10</sup>

In an article entitled "Congressional Democrats, 1861-1866," Leonard P. Curry argued that to equate all Democrats with Copperheads was "an accurate reflection of Republican propaganda but bears little resemblance to reality." Using parliamentary procedures, Democrats could have prevented a quorum in the Senate and therefore thwarted the passage of any legislation they deemed objectionable. But rather than adopt this partisan approach, Democrats in the Senate "made no real effort to thwart the majority will," and in fact, voted in favor of many bills that were strictly Republican measures (this was true of war measures as well as economic and other nonmilitary legislation). Democrats in the House were more obstructionist than their counterparts in the Senate, but this was, in large part, because Republicans in the House were "considerably more radical by persuasion than their counterparts in the Senate." Curry concluded that partisan disagreement between the Democrats and Republicans in Congress should not "be allowed to obscure the broader picture of the mass of legislation on which members of both parties were in general agreement."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> George Fort Milton, *Abraham Lincoln and the Fifth Column* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1942), 19, 36, 117-18, 240.

<sup>10</sup> Richard O. Curry, "Copperheadism and Continuity: The Anatomy of a Stereotype," *Journal of Negro History* 57 (1972): 30. See also Richard O. Curry, "The Union as it Was: A Critique of Recent Interpretations of the Copperheads," *Civil War History* 13 (March 1967): 25-39.

<sup>11</sup> Leonard P. Curry, "Congressional Democrats: 1861-1863," *Civil War History* 12 (September 1966): 213-5, 226-7.

Scholars in the 1960s revived the reputation of the Democratic Party in other ways as well. In an influential article, “Party Politics and the Union and Confederate War Efforts,” Eric L. McKittrick contended that party competition gave the North an advantage over the Confederacy (which did not have a robust two party system) by mobilizing and sustaining “energy” in the government, drawing out political talent, moderating state rights tendencies, checking personal politics, putting partisan friends in useful places (through patronage), making the opposition manageable for the president, and expressing political ideas. In each of these ways, McKittrick suggested that Jefferson Davis was at a disadvantage to Lincoln, who could find benefit in “the exigencies of party politics.”<sup>12</sup>

The work of Frank L. Klement has been the most influential in rehabilitating the Copperheads. In a trilogy of books, as well as several important articles, Klement strove to dismantle several myths about the Copperheads, including that a dangerous Democratic conspiracy existed in the Midwestern states that Ohio congressman Clement L. Vallandigham was disloyal, and that Democratic secret political societies threatened to destroy the Union from behind the battle lines. In Klement’s view, Republican military and political leaders exaggerated the scope and danger of Democratic secret societies for political gain, sometimes even fabricating the evidence against them.

In *The Copperheads in the Middle West*, Klement argued that many Midwestern Democrats held southern Democratic racial and economic attitudes because of their southern roots. When the war came, sectional, political, and socioeconomic divisions between Democrats and Republicans in the Midwest deepened, and many Republicans began to associate Democratic opposition with treason. As Democrats voiced antiwar sentiments—denouncing the tremendous cost of the war, the draft, and emancipation—Republicans responded by claiming that Democrats were using Union military setbacks for political gain. Beginning with the major Union victories in the summer of 1863, then the fall elections that year, and finally culminating in the November 1864 presidential election, the influence and power of the Copperheads diminished. Leaderless and internally divided, “midwestern Copperheadism died a tortuous death” in the final months of the war. Nevertheless, Klement concluded that the Democratic opposition during the Civil War was a legitimate, loyal opposition. “Throughout the war the Copperheads always expressed great faith in democratic processes, in the law, and in the Constitution. As constitutionalists and conservatives, they had no course but to bow to the election returns.”<sup>13</sup>

In his second book, *The Limits of Dissent: Clement L. Vallandigham and the Civil War*, Klement challenged the view that Vallandigham was a “minion of Jeff Davis and a

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<sup>12</sup> Eric L. McKittrick, “Party Politics and the Union and Confederate War Efforts,” in *The American Party Systems: Stages of Development*, ed. William Nisbet Chambers and Walter Dean Burnham (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 117-51 (quotations from pp. 119, 131, 133).

<sup>13</sup> Frank L. Klement, *The Copperheads in the Middle West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 241-3.

traitor,” and a politician “devoid of patriotism and devoted to self-interest.” Instead Klement argued that Vallandigham was a conservative spokesman for “most Midwestern Democrats” who was “able to put their thoughts, hopes and fears into words.” Democrats in the Midwest who admired Vallandigham were merely trying to stop the social revolution that was taking place during the Civil War—the transformation of “the federal union into a ‘new nation,’ giving industry ascendancy over agriculture, extending rights to the black man, ending the upper Midwest’s chance to play balance-of-power politics, and threatening civil rights and personal freedoms.” Vallandigham, in Klement’s account, was a man deeply devoted to traditional precepts of Jacksonian Democracy, including egalitarianism, white supremacy, and opposition to monopolies. A principled politician, Vallandigham never “overstepped the limits of dissent.”<sup>14</sup>

In his third book, *Dark Lanterns: Secret Political Societies, Conspiracies, and Treason Trials in the Civil War*, Klement argued that Democratic secret societies were largely “paper” organizations. Republicans in the 1860s put dozens of Democrats through military trials on charges of conspiracy, but these trials, according to Klement, were examples of “fantasy passed off as fact, a travesty of justice, [and] a political stratagem made respectable by historians.” Democratic secret societies were not made up of traitors who sought to destroy the Union. Rather, Klement argued that they were auxiliaries of the Democratic Party that attempted to protect members from Republicans in power who were infringing on the loyal opposition’s political and civil rights.<sup>15</sup>

In *A Respectable Minority: The Democratic Party in the Civil War Era, 1860-1868*, Joel H. Silbey sought to offer a useful categorization for the various constituencies within the Democratic Party. All of Silbey’s Democrats were motivated by “a commitment to certain deeply ingrained traditional Democratic beliefs” that informed their actions and opinions during the war. They all believed that Lincoln’s expansive constitutionalism, revolutionary social policy, and centralization of the federal government were “strangling” the Constitution and Union. Nonetheless, the Democratic Party could not agree on the best way to defeat Lincoln at the polls. “Purists” (those commonly known as Peace Democrats or Copperheads) believed that war could not restore the Union. Furthermore, they were more interested in principle (traditional party beliefs) than popularity. “Legitimists” (party moderates), on the other hand, preferred a peaceful settlement of the war through negotiation if it were possible, but would settle for war if necessary. Purists and Legitimists battled each other “for both the soul of the party and the future of the country.” According to Silbey, Purists “had no patience” for the Legitimist position, and intraparty conflict forced the two factions to compromise in 1864 on a losing ticket: a pro-war candidate for president who stood on a peace platform.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Frank L. Klement, *The Limits of Dissent: Clement L. Vallandigham & the Civil War* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1970), 1, 319-21.

<sup>15</sup> Frank L. Klement, *Dark Lanterns: Secret Political Societies, Conspiracies, and Treason Trials in the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 217.

<sup>16</sup> Joel H. Silbey, *A Respectable Minority: The Democratic Party in the Civil War Era, 1860-1868* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), ix-xii, 89-111, 137.

Intraparty divisions and compromises, according to Silbey, made it nearly impossible for Democrats to appeal effectively to non-Democratic voters. Thus, since they were unable to attract any new voters, the Democrats lost in 1864 and remained a minority party. The Democrats did not lose the presidential elections of the 1860s because they were weakened during the war, however. On the contrary, Silbey argues that northern voter behavior had been set by the voter realignment in the 1850s; the party faithful kept voting, it just so happened that Democrats were now the minority. And because the Democrats' "own principles and commitments" would not allow them to moderate for electoral success, the party would not become the majority. They were a "respectable" and loyal minority.<sup>17</sup>

In recent years, the revisionism of the 1960s and 1970s has begun to face several challenges. While still seeing the Democrats as loyal, Mark E. Neely, Jr., argues forcefully against McKittrick's notion that the two-party system aided the Union war effort. Neely concludes *The Union Divided: Party Conflict in the Civil War North* by arguing "that political competition did not *help*, let alone afford some 'decisive' advantage to the North."<sup>18</sup>

The strongest critiques of the Klement thesis come from Jennifer L. Weber, Robert H. Churchill and Stephen E. Towne. In her elegantly written *Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln's Opponents in the North*, Weber argues that "most Copperheads were not traitors. . . . Their efforts may have been misguided and at times damaging, and they may have been blind to or ignorant of the consequences of their actions, but the vast majority were loyal to the Union." Nevertheless, Weber contends that the power of the Peace wing of the party "was broad, and so influential by August 1864 that it very nearly took over the Democratic Party," and that secret societies posed a "real" threat and "danger" to the Union. In this book, Weber relies heavily on letters that Republican leaders received from northern civilians in which the writers claimed that their neighbors were disloyal.<sup>19</sup>

Weber dismisses Klement's work as "a good source for basic factual information" but concludes, "I wholly disagree with Klement's interpretation and conclusions about the danger these organizations posed to the government." Curiously, Weber's footnotes suggest that she did not examine the military tribunal records at the National Archives that were a cornerstone of Klement's "basic factual information." Several scholars have faulted Weber for the lack of rigor in her research. Historian Robert M. Sandow charged her with putting "old wine in a beguiling new bottle," while Bryon Andreason stated that her critique of Klement was rooted in "decades-old secondary works rather than on any analysis of new evidence or new analysis of old evidence." In a similar vein, Thomas E.

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<sup>17</sup> Joel H. Silbey, *A Respectable Minority: The Democratic Party in the Civil War Era, 1860-1868* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1977), ix-xii, 89-111, 137.

<sup>18</sup> Mark E. Neely, Jr., *The Union Divided: Party Competition in the Civil War North* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 118-40, 193-4.

<sup>19</sup> Jennifer L. Weber, *Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln's Opponents in the North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 6-7, 10, 128.



Rodgers wonders why “Weber never addresses . . . the core of Klement’s research on major conspiratorial organizations, or his evidence of government officials’ fabrications.” Weber, according to these views, accepts Republican accusations of Democratic disloyalty too uncritically.<sup>20</sup>

Published about the same time as Weber’s *Copperheads* was Robert H. Churchill’s *To Shake Their Guns in the Tyrant’s Face: Libertarian Political Violence and the Origins of the Militia Movement*. Churchill’s book covers roughly two hundred years of American history, arguing that the Sons of Liberty, a Copperhead secret society in the Midwest, fell within a broader libertarian tradition in American politics. Most members of the Sons were rural yeomen from southern Indiana who sought to protect themselves from federal encroachment upon their liberty. Many of these farmers were willing to take up arms against federal authority in defense of their rights. The leaders of the Democratic Party, however, “were not willing to act as revolutionaries.” Moreover, Churchill argues that most Democrats were not aware of the plot to overthrow the government. Still, he maintains that the Sons could not claim to be part of a “purely political” organization. “By preparing to take up arms to defend their right to vote,” writes Churchill, “Democrats embarked on a revolutionary course. However legitimate such a revolution might have been under the doctrine of popular sovereignty, it placed the order outside the bounds of normal electoral politics.”<sup>21</sup>

Where Weber’s *Copperheads* lacks in research depth, Stephen E. Towne’s *Surveillance and Spies in the Civil War: Exposing Confederate Conspiracies in America’s Heartland* is extraordinarily rich and impressive. Based in a wide array of archival sources, Towne details the Union military’s intelligence gathering operations in the Midwest (and beyond, to some extent), concluding “unequivocally that during the Civil War secret political organizations with ties to elements in the Democratic Party arose that conspired to obstruct the federal government’s war effort.” Towne’s research describes state and federal efforts to suppress dissent among Union soldiers, to stifle draft resistance, and to thwart the activities of disloyal Democratic conspirators who hoped to incite insurrection in the North. The book is forceful challenge to the Klement thesis, but it should be noted that Towne’s research is firmly rooted in records that reveal the perspectives of governmental authorities and Unionist civilians.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 243; Robert M. Sandow, “Review of *Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln’s Opponents in the North*,” *Pennsylvania History* 77 (Winter 2010): 93; Bryon Andreason, “Review of *Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln’s Opponents in the North*,” *H-CivWar* (published July 2007); Thomas E. Rodgers, “Copperheads of a Respectable Minority: Current Approaches to the Study of Civil War-Era Democrats,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 109 (June 2013): 126.

<sup>21</sup> Robert H. Churchill, *To Shake Their Guns in the Tyrant’s Face: Libertarian Political Violence and the Origins of the Militia Movement* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 107-43; Churchill, “Liberty, Conscriptation, and Delusions of Grandeur: The Sons of Liberty Conspiracy of 1863–1864,” *Prologue* 30 (Winter 1998): 295-303.

<sup>22</sup> Stephen E. Towne, *Surveillance and Spies in the Civil War: Exposing Confederate Conspiracies in America’s Heartland* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2015), 5.

The most important movement in the study of Copperheads in recent years has come in the broadening of studies beyond the Midwest. Weber's book examines Peace Democrats throughout the North. Other recent studies have focused exclusively on Copperheads in communities, states or other regions. Writing in a more moderate anti-Klement vein than Weber, Churchill and Towne, Matthew Warshauer's study of Copperheads in Connecticut concludes, "The Democratic peace movement in Connecticut was no fringe action perpetrated by a small group and exaggerated by Republican fears. Rather, it was a tangible, sustained threat that hampered the Union war effort by politicizing every aspect of the conflict." Still, by pointing out that secret societies did not appear to exist in the Nutmeg State during the Civil War, Warshauer acknowledges that the Peace Democrats were not part of "some sort of conspiratorial-minded plot to overthrow the government."<sup>23</sup>

Several recent studies have examined the antiwar movement in Pennsylvania. The most important, Robert M. Sandow's *Deserter Country: Civil War Opposition in the Pennsylvania Appalachians*, adheres to the Klement thesis, arguing that Peace Democrats in central Pennsylvania were neither disloyal nor dangerous. Rather, Sandow contends that they were a loyal opposition whose views of the war were rooted in longstanding Democratic political principles and social values. "Members of rural communities were accustomed to controlling their own social and civic affairs and resented the intrusion of outsiders," writes Sandow. "Their localism and sense of economic marginalization reinforced wartime patterns of opposition."

As was common throughout the North, Pennsylvania Republicans accused their Democratic neighbors of disloyalty and sedition. Sandow describes several instances of mobs attacking editors as well as Union soldiers arresting civilians for treason. Democrats from several counties were even tried before military tribunals for anti-draft activities and suspicion of membership in traitorous secret societies. According to Sandow, however, these Republican accusations of disloyalty in central Pennsylvania were careless and exaggerated. In fact, Sandow argues that Weber relies too uncritically on a provost marshal's report in *Copperheads*, saying that she "paraphrased [Richard I.] Dodge closely, including the imaginative figures and the assumption that resistance was 'reportedly organized and armed.'"<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Matthew Warshauer, "Copperheads in Connecticut: A Peace Movement That Imperiled the Union," in Andrew L. Slap and Michael Thomas Smith, eds., *This Distracted and Anarchical People: New Answers for Old Questions about the Civil War Era North* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 80. For discussion of Peace Democratic women throughout the North, see Nina Silber, *Daughters of the Union: Northern Women Fight the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), chap. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Robert M. Sandow, *Deserter Country: Civil War Opposition in the Pennsylvania Appalachians* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 59, 81, 213. See also Richard A. Sauers and Peter Tomasak, *The Fishing Creek Confederacy: A Story of Civil War Draft Resistance* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2012), and Jonathan W. White, "Remembering the Fishing Creek Confederacy," *Pennsylvania Heritage* 40 (Summer 2014): 6-13. The classic work on Pennsylvania is Arnold Shankman, *The Pennsylvania Antiwar Movement, 1861-1865* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1980).

Scholarship on the Copperheads today is splintered between those who adhere to Klement's interpretation and those who reject it. Moving forward, historians should pursue more local, state and regional studies, as well as modern biographies of significant figures. These studies ought to be grounded in archival materials created by the Democrats themselves, rather than in letters sent to state and federal authorities in which civilians accuse their neighbors of treason. Republicans, after all, tended to see all Democrats as disloyal, and they often believed that Democrats were members of secret traitorous societies throughout the North. Researchers should continue to test the evidence. This is difficult work, to be sure, since secret societies generally acted in secret, and source material is often scarce. Large manuscript collections of Democrats are also not as readily available as those of their Republican counterparts. Nevertheless, these are avenues worthy of continued exploration.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, it is worth noting that study of the Peace wing of the Democratic Party has had a peculiar feature to it. Rarely do historians use historical epithets to categorize or describe historical groups (we would never, for example, study a racial or ethnic minority and refer to them by a derogatory slur of a bygone era). The fact that scholars still use the word "Copperhead" reveals the lasting strength of the Republican interpretation of the war. As historians continue to develop more precise understandings of who the Peace Democrats were and what they stood for, they should do so with more weight placed on the Democrats' own terms, rather than on Republican rhetoric and accusations. Perhaps then we might finally be able to move away from using the pejorative term "Copperhead" in historical scholarship.

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<sup>25</sup> One modern biography is Thomas S. Mach's *"Gentleman George" Hunt Pendleton: Party Politics and Ideological Identity in Nineteenth-Century America* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2007).