



Immigrant Voters, Party Politics, and Black Suffrage in Reconstruction Ohio

Jacob Mach
Purdue University

ABSTRACT

Throughout the 1860s, Ohio remained a top location for immigrants looking to settle inside the United States. Despite their numbers, their impact on Reconstruction politics, specifically in Ohio, remains understudied. Thus, fundamental yet important questions arise. What role did immigrant populations play in Reconstruction Ohio? How did immigrants' views on civil rights, African Americans, and suffrage impact their political allegiances? How did both parties attempt to entice voters to support their respective positions? This paper assesses the impact of foreign-born voters on early Reconstruction political culture in Ohio, with an emphasis on debates within Republican and Democratic circles concerning immigrants and their views on African American suffrage. The convergence of these groups and the rights desired by each created a uniquely precarious political atmosphere that forced both parties to come to terms with the potential political power of immigrants and African Americans.

Introduction

The Reconstruction era (1865-1877) presented Northern Republicans and African Americans with a unique opportunity to capitalize on the Civil War and pursue civil rights in a way that had not been possible in previous decades. This pursuit of rights did not take the same form throughout the North, however, and remained highly contested despite Radical Republican power. While Radicals experienced periodic success, specifically in the Northeast, African American suffrage remained controversial and faced intense opposition in nearly every state outside of New England (and even within New England). Ohio, with its strong cadre of Radical Republicans such as James Ashley and Benjamin Wade, emerged as a strong contender to legislate Black suffrage into state law. The politically divided state electorate and the high percentages of immigrant voters complicated this already explosive issue.

Throughout the 1850s, Ohio remained an enticing location for immigrants looking for land and economic opportunity outside the crowded cities of the East Coast. The presence of thousands of European immigrants whose votes would help to decide both elections and statewide referendums such as the Black suffrage amendment complicated the landscape of Reconstruction politics in Ohio.¹ Despite their numbers, immigrants' impact on Reconstruction politics, specifically in Ohio, remains understudied. This omission raises fundamental yet important questions about German and Irish immigrants' role in Reconstruction Ohio, particularly in the years leading up to the 1867 suffrage referendum. How did immigrants' views on civil rights, African Americans, and suffrage impact their political allegiances? And how did immigrants' political allegiances impact their views on suffrage? How did both parties attempt to entice voters to support their respective positions?

Reconstruction histories of both broader Reconstruction and Ohio politics fail to adequately address or explain the role of immigrant voters in party politics related to Reconstruction legislation.² This project, then, addresses these questions by elucidating the role that immigrants, specifically Irish and German immigrants, played in Ohio politics particularly between 1865 and 1867.³ Immigrant populations, specifically in larger cities such as Cincinnati and Cleveland, became essential voter bases during the 1860s, and both parties sought to bring them into their respective folds. Despite the overwhelming prevalence of Black suffrage debates throughout the period, both parties consistently targeted the state's German and Irish communities as examples of why African Americans should vote, and why they should not. Suffrage represented a key facet of citizenship highly desired by all groups, specifically African Americans and European immigrants. The convergence of these groups and the rights desired by each created a uniquely precarious political atmosphere that forced both parties to come to terms with the potential political power of immigrants and African Americans.

Through an analysis of party newspapers, speeches, and party leaders, this paper argues that both parties appealed directly to German and Irish voters to gain their support for or against the Black suffrage amendment. While Democrats emphasized the "Whiteness" of such immigrant populations and the threat that Black voters posed to hierarchical White society, Republicans appealed to equality before the law and republican values, values that benefitted the same European immigrants they attempted to win. While it is doubtful that immigrant voters decided the Black

suffrage referendum on their own, the fact that both parties specifically targeted such groups so purposefully throughout the election indicates their importance to electoral power in Ohio.

Pre-War Ohio and the Immigrant

Before analyzing the political battles of early Reconstruction, a brief review of the immigrant experience in pre-war Ohio will give greater context to the political atmosphere experienced by immigrant voters in Reconstruction. As war threatened to dissolve the Union, Ohio emerged as a political and demographic powerhouse and, more surprisingly, a popular destination for European immigrants, specifically German and Irish immigrants. Hundreds of thousands of Irish immigrants traveled to the US in the 1840s and 1850s driven by the debilitating potato famines; German immigrants followed suit, driven less by famine than by economic and political turmoil.⁴ By 1860 over 2,330,000 people called Ohio home including over 328,000 foreign-born immigrants, behind only Pennsylvania and New York in sheer numbers.⁵ Despite the continued popularity of the coastal states for immigrant populations, the “Old Northwest,” made up of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin, welcomed hundreds of thousands of immigrants throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. Robert Swierenga’s analysis of Northwest immigration suggests that foreigners, mostly German and Irish (but also a significant number of British immigrants) made up between seventy-nine and eighty-eight percent of the total migration into the five Northwest states between the 1840s and 1850s.⁶ Tens of thousands of immigrants traveled West from the East coast to settle in the Northwest, and many decided to set down roots in Ohio. German and Irish immigrants overwhelmingly dominated the Ohio foreign-born population, attracted by hopes of land and jobs, which many found in the canal building industry that blossomed in the 1830s.⁷ While German and Irish populations could be found in all of Ohio’s eighty-eight counties by 1870, the vast majority lived in the north-central and southwestern portions of the state, clustered around the two biggest cities in Ohio, Cleveland and Cincinnati. The counties of Hamilton (Cincinnati), Butler, and Montgomery as well as the counties of Lucas, Ottawa, Erie, and Cuyahoga (Cleveland) all had German- and Irish-born populations that represented over fifteen percent of the total county population.⁸ By 1860, they made up over ten percent of the state population and represented tens of thousands of voters. Not everyone welcomed their presence, their heritage, or their votes.

Nativism, in the form of the Know-Nothing Party and its offshoots, rose to meet the unending tide of European immigrants flooding into the United States during the 1850s. The movement received periodic attention for most of the twentieth century until Tyler Anbinder's general history of nativism in the 1850s. Nativism, defined by Anbinder as "purely anti-immigrant sentiment," fostered a significant following throughout the North. John Weaver and Dale Knobel highlighted the anti-Catholic tendencies of the movement which normally targeted both Irish and German Catholics.⁹ The Know-Nothings even ran Millard Fillmore for president in 1856; he won nearly 875,000 votes, and though he only won one state (Maryland), his campaign successfully prevented John C. Fremont and the Republican Party from winning the election. The Know-Nothing Party would shrink dramatically following the election, yet the influence of nativism, particularly on the Republican Party and Ohio party politics, would continue.

The Know-Nothings' brief existence ended with the emergence of the Republican Party, but the nativist movement continued to influence parties, elections, and voters for years to come. Stephen Douglas even branded the emerging Republican Party a "party of ethnic hatred and cultural tyranny" because of its many ties to nativism and the Know-Nothings.¹⁰ Republicans in the 1850s did not have a particularly strong relationship with immigrant communities. Many members viewed immigrants, the Irish in particular, as the political enemy, as most ended up the in "urban political machines of the Democratic Party" both on the East Coast and in larger cities across the North (like Cincinnati).¹¹ Democrats throughout the North used the nativist leanings of former Know-Nothings (many of whom turned Republican after the party splintered) to win even more immigrant voters. Ohio Republican Governor Salmon Chase felt the dual pressure of winning former Know-Nothing voters on the one hand and trying to attract immigrant voters (mainly German Protestants) on the other hand.¹² Republicans understood that distancing themselves from nativism remained a key facet of winning more immigrant votes, even as anti-slavery sentiments continued to overshadow nativism.

Carl Schurz, a German immigrant who became a potent and influential Republican political figure, wrote in 1859 about the importance of courting immigrant voters. Schurz deemed a proposed Massachusetts amendment that would require immigrants to wait an additional two years to vote both unimaginable and poorly timed. He asked Edward Pierce how the Republican Party hoped to gain German votes if they actively

worked to prohibit access to the polls. He closed by reiterating the stakes, not just in Massachusetts but across the North. "A change of a few thousands votes in Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois, Minnesota, Michigan, and even Ohio might throw those states into the hands of the pro-slavery party."¹³ The stakes were high, but with abolitionism on the rise, anti-slavery ideals overshadowed the potentially harmful nativist sentiments of former Know-Nothings. Thus, by the 1860 presidential campaign, Republicans across the North, particularly in Ohio, had secured strong numbers of German voters, as well as most of the holdouts from the now defunct Know-Nothing/American Parties, while focusing on anti-slavery politics, not nativism.¹⁴

Immigration in Reconstruction Political Culture

While Northern Radical Republicans eventually succeeded in their abolitionist goals, resulting in the Emancipation Proclamation and the Thirteenth Amendment, most understood that emancipation was only the first step. As the war ended and Reconstruction began, the status of African Americans in both the North and South became a matter of federal and state concern. Which rights would be extended to the newly freed Black population in the South? Would Black northerners be permitted to partake of these rights? Such questions dominated both national and state politics, specifically in the political battleground of Ohio, though other states such as Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and New York would face such questions as well.¹⁵ As home to many outspoken Radicals and Copperheads (or Peace Democrats), Black suffrage would be sure to excite the highly divided electorate.¹⁶ Additionally, since this debate necessarily involved discussions of rights (specifically the right of suffrage) recent immigrants were caught in the crossfire as both parties attempted to marshal support for or against Black suffrage.

In New York, the Freedman's Aid Union suggested that the Black population could vote at least as intelligently, if not more intelligently, than poor White voters in the North and South and argued that Black votes could counteract the poor, illiterate voters of the South. "We have said that the Black Freedman would be more likely to vote right than the ignorant and degraded White of New York or Charleston."¹⁷ Thus, Black voters would not only be able to keep pace with rebellious voters, but they would also vote Republican and directly oppose them, potentially offsetting the Irish vote.¹⁸ Various newspapers across the North continued this line of reasoning, including Republican papers in Ohio. The *American Presbyterian* framed its argument in favor of Black

suffrage not in terms of illiterate poor Whites versus freedmen like the New York Freedmen's Aid Society did, but that Black voters were necessary to overcome the "Irish Catholic vote" which would potentially add "nearly a million to the Protestant vote" across the country.¹⁹ In order to "frustrate the combinations of unprincipled politicians North and South, with ignorant, vicious, priest-ridden foreigners," the article continued, the North must do away with its racial prejudice against African Americans and give them the vote.²⁰

In Ohio, discussions of Black suffrage, immigrant populations, and Reconstruction dominated political discussion. Democratic papers in Ohio latched onto such arguments and used them to paint broadly about Republican goals during Reconstruction. "This is another among the many indications of the times," the *Dayton Daily Empire* read, "that the Negroes are to be used to neutralize and tender inoperative the Catholic vote in this country."²¹ Both party organs fixated on the topic and rallied to garner support, targeting immigrant populations in the process. Even in 1865, when no legislation concerning Black suffrage was on the table in Congress or the Ohio state legislature, the topic still dominated headlines. The duality of the discussion (Black suffrage in the South versus the North) also inundated the rhetoric because in 1865 only Radicals supported Black suffrage in the North. Even in the South, Congressional Republicans only succeeded in legislating Black suffrage after the 1866 elections in the Reconstruction Acts of 1867.²² Immigrant voters figured heavily in these debates, primarily in the form of comparison: if Irish or German immigrants could quickly gain the vote, what prohibits the Black man from voting? For some, the Black population was "better qualified to exercise the right of suffrage than the ignorant Irish and stupid Germans!"²³ The Republican *Lancaster Gazette* responded to Democrat critiques of a spring 1865 article which claimed that a "Negro has as much right to vote as an Irishman." While the editor did not retract his statement, he did make it clear that the paper bore no ill will to the Irish.²⁴ Democrat papers used statements to ridicule the Republican position on immigrants. "The Abolition press generally, hold that the Irish are an ignorant, priest-ridden people," the *Dayton Daily Empire* reported.²⁵ But such abstract claims were buttressed with more direct attacks on the records of Republican Congressman. Several papers targeted James Garfield, the Republican Congressman from the 19th district. In a speech given on July 4th, Garfield questioned the intelligence argument which many used to prohibit Black men from voting, saying that they may well "understand the nature of our institution better than

the equally ignorant foreigners.” Democratic organs used this as evidence of Republican distaste for immigrants, both Irish and German.²⁶

Yet despite Republican portrayal of the Irish as a useful and derogatory scapegoat (as well as Democratic exploitation of such stances) the need for immigrant support remained a key facet of Republican politicking, as it had during the turn of the decade and the emergence of the Republican Party. For example, the Republican *Cleveland Leader* responded to an article from the *Chicago Times* that attacked both the Irish lifestyle and the “virtue of Irish women.” The editor indicated that such treatment, though heinous, would likely not result in any significant loss by the Democratic Party whom the Irish voted for in overwhelming majorities in the city.²⁷ The issue also included a speech by a General Meagher given at the Irish Emigration Society in which he supported the extension of suffrage to African Americans, though the *Daily Empire* confidently maintained that there would be no Irish surge toward the Republican Party or Black suffrage.²⁸

While immigrant voters dominated headlines at times during the summer of 1865, the comments of Republican gubernatorial candidate Jacob Cox in his infamous “Oberlin Letter” and discussions of Black rights/Black suffrage would dominate the Ohio political campaign of that year. Hoping to quell Radical discussion of Black suffrage in 1865, Cox responded publicly to a letter asking about his position on Black suffrage by stating his opposition to such pursuits. Instead of quelling discussions, however, the “Oberlin Letter” made Black suffrage a key talking point throughout the 1865 campaign and would remain a key goal of Ohio Radicals.²⁹ The 1866 Congressional campaign, however, saw a resurgence of immigrant voters in the political debates across Ohio as both parties sought to mobilize immigrant communities for their respective platforms.

In Washington, DC, President Andrew Johnson remained hesitant to do anything to improve the conditions of free African Americans in either the North or South, despite the constant pressure from Radicals and a growing number of Republicans in Congress. “White men alone must manage the South,” he said in 1865. He remained more concerned about helping poor Whites in the South but this concern also applied to immigrant populations in the North as well.³⁰ As the relationship between Congress and the President began to deteriorate, Johnson contributed to the antagonistic portrayal of immigrants and African Americans in two important veto messages given to Congress in the early months of 1866. As Republican Congressmen worked to provide protections

for the freedmen (and convince conservative/moderate Republicans that such legislation was necessary), Johnson turned on the party of Lincoln. His vetoes of the “Civil Rights Bills” and the “Freedmen’s Bureau Bill” not only marked the beginning of the end for his relationship with the Republican Party, but also offered an executive statement on the rights of immigrants versus the rights of African Americans.³¹ His veto of the Freedmen’s Bureau argued that the federal government had never “founded schools for any class of *our own people* (italics mine), not even for the orphans of those who have fallen in the defense of the Union.” Thus, he rejected the use of federal funds to help the millions of freedmen, their wives, and children to rent or purchase homes when “millions of the White race who are honestly toiling from day to day” had never been given such assistance.³² While such shocking lack of historical awareness seems egregious in retrospect, his denunciations spoke for the entirety of the Democratic Party as well as some Republican conservatives. Congress did not override the veto until July and Ohio Republicans voted overwhelmingly to do so with only two abstentions (Hayes and Schenck).³³

The veto of the Civil Rights Bill clearly put White immigrants and Black Americans in direct competition for the protections and privileges of the US government. The proposed bill declared all “persons born in the United States,” without regard to race (except Indians not taxed) citizens of the United States, enjoying the same protections benefits before the law “as is enjoyed by White citizens.”³⁴ Johnson rejected such a sweeping piece of legislation, claiming that this discriminated against “large numbers of intelligent, worthy, and patriotic foreigners, and in favor of the Negro,” as the bill did not make immediate citizens of immigrants who had not yet achieved citizenship.³⁵ Furthermore, he claimed that while “persons of foreign birth...must undergo a probation of five years,” African Americans would stand to be made citizens immediately “by a single legislative enactment.”³⁶ This appeared to Johnson as government overreach that stood to markedly privilege former slaves over the same poor Whites that Johnson spent his political career championing. Despite his strong repudiation, Congress quickly passed the bill over his veto, 122-41 in the House and 33-15 in the Senate. Sixteen of the seventeen Ohio Republicans in Congress voted to override the President’s veto; only John Bingham did not cast a vote, as he objected on grounds that the bill remained unconstitutional in its scope.³⁷

Even with their professed devotion to poor Whites, Johnson and the Democrats gave Republicans ample opportunity to question their commitment to immigrants. The *Lancaster Gazette*

featured the German response to a less than laudatory Johnson speech given in Chicago during February 1866. When the German critique reached the newspapers, albeit a cautious and careful one (the resolution pronounced “the speech to be a departure from the dignity of the chief magistracy of the Nation”), Democratic papers, in particular the *Richmond Examiner* ridiculed the German coalition, referring to them as “greasy, swilling Germans.”³⁸ Republican papers highlighted such derogatory slanders as incredulous and defended both the honor and patriotism of the German population in the Midwest by highlighting both their admirable military service, and their “quite, inoffensive, law-abiding, and thrifty” lives.³⁹ While many German voters favored the Republican Party, particularly in the Midwest, their vote was particularly important given the overwhelming support of the Irish for the Democratic Party. Thus, Ohio Republicans, through the printed word, took any chance to defend German citizens against Democratic attacks, real or imagined. Much like Carl Schurz communicated in 1859, the *Cleveland Leader* reiterated the importance of the German Republican population, particularly in Cleveland, where thirty percent of the total population was born in Germany.⁴⁰ The article repudiated a decision made by Republican Congressman Rufus Spalding, representative from the 18th district which included Cleveland and Cuyahoga County, that directly affected the German population. Spalding removed a German editor, one August Thieme, from a patronage position in the Republican machine in Cleveland, and replaced him with his own brother, a slight, the paper suggested, that could have drastic consequences for the upcoming election.⁴¹ “Without the German vote we would not carry the city,” the article argued, “had it not been for the German vote, George W. Morgan would be Governor of Ohio to-day, instead of J.D. Cox.”⁴²

Such a statement reiterated the importance of the German immigrant vote, and the weight the community played in Ohio partisan politics. But did such warnings reflect the reality of the political situation? Although a definitive answer remains elusive, certain estimations can be made to bring the situation into greater clarity. Jacob Cox, the Republican candidate for governor in 1865, won the election by just under 30,000, a drop from the Republican dominance of the previous war time election where John Brough rode an avalanche of anti-Peace Democrat sentiment to a whopping 100,000 vote victory over Clement Vallandigham.⁴³ Using the data provided by the US Census of 1860 and 1870, there were roughly between 168,000 and 182,000 German-born Americans in Ohio at the time; over ten percent of whom lived in

Cuyahoga county, in or near Cleveland.⁴⁴ Using the voting data between 1860 and 1871, between fifteen and seventeen percent of the total population voted in the elections immediately following the two censuses. Using those figures, a rough minimum (26,072) and maximum (29,844) number can be obtained for determining the German vote in 1865.⁴⁵ The sentiments of the *Cleveland Daily Leader* and Carl Schurz do seem to hold truth; the German vote did prove important, if not essential, to electoral success in Reconstruction Ohio.⁴⁶

As the summer campaign heated up, the Democrats turned their efforts to chastising Republican treatment of the Irish, a smaller yet still significant immigrant community in Ohio. The *Cleveland Daily Leader* had been tracking the Fenian (Irish Independence) movement from late in 1865, preaching caution in the handling of the movement and the support (or lack thereof) that should be offered to them.⁴⁷ Republicans, including Radicals, remained cool on the idea of offering direct assistance to the movement, even as they offered words of encouragement. Irish Democrats rebuked such coolness, as reported in the Democratic *Daily Ohio Statesman*. A meeting of Irishmen in Washington repudiated the Radicals for ignoring the pleas of the Fenians, suggesting that Andrew Johnson was a true supporter of the movement and their struggle for freedom.⁴⁸ Republican attempts to cajole Irish votes based on appeals to political rights were also met by ridicule from Ohio Democrats. “The Irish are not *green*. Neither are they *Black*. They are *White*, and they vote the *White man’s ticket*.”⁴⁹ Clement Vallandigham, ardent Copperhead and White supremacist, whipped up fears of Black domination, when he claimed that if Black voters took part in elections, it would cease to be a White man’s government; “it must be either a Black man’s Government, or worse still, a mulatto Government.”⁵⁰ Still, Republicans refused to cede to the Democrats and appealed to Irish throughout the campaign, undoubtedly with little success. Yet their persistence speaks volumes about their desire to secure more of the immigrant vote. Various papers targeted the Irish, attempting to highlight the hypocrisy of the Democratic Party in the process. The *Jackson Standard* reminded the Irish that the “chief corner stone” of the Democratic Party was human bondage, arguing that they cared little for labor, whether Irish, Black, or other except for their votes on election day.⁵¹ The *Fremont Journal* relayed the statements of the Fenian circles of Chicago, whose resolutions called for the Irish in America to “assert their perfect freedom from party thralls and party allegiance” and “not be the dupes of any men or party organization which makes the political

degradation of any person a test of political fidelity.”⁵² Such statements gave hope to Republicans in Ohio that, small as it might be, the chance to win Irish votes remained possible.

Several Republican Congressmen also touched on the sensitive issues of immigrants, particularly regarding the Fenian movement during the 1866 campaign. Robert Schenck expressed his “sympathy with all the oppressed of every race and every country,” when referencing the Fenian Movement, though he admitted that the Irish of the 3rd District never voted for him except in “exceptional cases,” due to the pervading belief that the Democratic Party “sympathizes with the oppressed.”⁵³ He did suggest, however, that he had been working to build relationships with “organized associations and bodies of our Irish citizens” to develop better relationships with the community. James Ashley, candidate for the 10th District (northwest Ohio), ran on a platform that expressed limited support for the Fenian Movement. It borrowed from Fenian President Roberts who said that “we ask all Irishmen to extend their hand to every other people struggling for liberty,” referring to African Americans. Ashley continued, arguing that the “justice and protection” of American citizens (which now included Black people) could not be secured with the ballot.⁵⁴ Benjamin Wade carried on this theme of justice for all men, arguing that the Republican Party stood “for the equality of all men before the law.”⁵⁵

Despite the predictions of some Democratic organs, such as the *Ashland Union* which suggested that immigrant voters, particularly the German community, would desert the Republican Party and would result in their defeat in the election, Ohio Republicans sent the same number of Representatives to the House as they had in 1865, seventeen, to the Democrats two. The extent of the Republican victory remains debated. Reconstruction historians generally viewed the 1866 Congressional elections as a continuation of Republican dominance; yet Felice Bonadio argued the opposite, instead citing the dropping majorities as a sign of a “severe reduction” in Republican power in Ohio.⁵⁶ It is true that fourteen of the seventeen districts claimed by Republicans experienced a decrease in winning percentage compared to the 1864 elections. However, how does Bonadio define a “severe reduction?” The Republicans in the fourteen districts experienced an average decrease of 2.54% in their majorities. The Republican candidate in the 1st District (made up of Hamilton County which included Cincinnati) endured the highest decrease at 4.68%, though this makes sense because 1) Cincinnati was an historic Democratic stronghold and 2) Hamilton County boasted one of the

largest Irish populations in the state.⁵⁷ While in the 18th District Rufus Spalding saw a 4% decrease from his winning majority from 1864, he still managed to win over 64% of the vote; if that is to be considered a “severe reduction,” what kind of reduction would be needed to flip the district?⁵⁸ Regardless, the Republicans successfully ran a campaign which focused on the Fourteenth Amendment, growing animosity toward President Johnson, and support for Congressional Reconstruction.⁵⁹ As the debates of the campaign showed, Black suffrage and immigrant voters continued to play a large role in Ohio politics, whether Republican leaders wanted them to be or not. These debates would dominate the subsequent election and tilt the balance of power in Reconstruction Ohio.

The Election of 1867 and the Black Suffrage Referendum

Ohio’s state-level House and Senate approved a referendum for the 1867 state election to decide whether to remove the word “White” from the state’s suffrage laws. It was attached to the typical gubernatorial ballot that contained the candidates for state offices such as governor, lieutenant governor, treasurer, etc.⁶⁰ A successful vote, then, would grant legal access to suffrage for African American men in Ohio, something which the Republican Party explicitly called for in their 1867 state political platform.⁶¹ While the Republicans, led by radicals such as James Ashley, Garfield, and gubernatorial candidate Rutherford B. Hayes, based their campaign around the suffrage amendment and support for Congressional Reconstruction, the Democrats based their campaign around stopping the referendum by drumming up fears of Black domination, much like they had done for the previous several elections. Interpreting the 1866 elections as evidence of the electorate’s support for radicalism, Republican leaders hoped to capitalize on such support both in Congress and in Ohio. Congressional Republicans, led by Thaddeus Stevens and Charles Sumner, worked to transform Southern politics and society through the Reconstruction Acts. In Ohio, many of the same Congressional Republicans campaigned for the state suffrage referendum, well before any type of national amendment came before the floor of Congress.⁶² While historians remain divided over the factors that led to Republican support for Black suffrage, in Ohio at least, ideology and a sincere desire to ensure rights for African Americans seem to have played a significant role.⁶³ To improve their odds of maintaining electoral support, both parties targeted immigrant voters, who would serve as popular scapegoats for both sides as party leaders attempted to sway voters.

Republicans' approach toward immigrants took on a polarized tone, continuing the past years' approach to the community. This is best exemplified by two articles published nearly a month apart in the 1867 Republican *Jackson Standard*. In a January 10 article, the *Standard* author argued that "the negroes in our midst know how to vote as much as the railroad-Irish and beer-Drinking Dutch [German]." ⁶⁴ These derogatory stereotypes seem odd, given the professed importance of the immigrant vote in the state particularly for Republicans who the Democrats castigated as anti-immigrant. Yet Jackson County had an extremely small foreign-born population, with its combined Irish and German population representing only 4% or 767 of its nearly 21,000 residents by 1870; in fact, the county's Black population outpaced its German/Irish community with a population of 789. ⁶⁵ The *Standard* might have leeway to insult its immigrant population, but such statements were quickly couched, as a February 7 article showed. The editor in "Random Thoughts No. 6" discussed the importance of immigrants and their role in the US, highlighting the exemplary service of Irish soldiers like General Meagher and German leaders such as Carl Schurz, among others. "I am satisfied that the foreign population in this country are as industrious, honest, and patriotic," he wrote, "as the same number of people born on the soil, and are as much entitled to the right of suffrage as the natives." ⁶⁶ Other Republican papers highlighted the service of foreign-born citizens, particularly the German community, who fought valiantly across the country during the war. ⁶⁷

Countering Republican attempts to praise the German community, the Democrats latched upon a growing movement within Radicalism that threatened to dissuade German voters from the Republican Party: the temperance movement. "Just about election time, the 'German Beer Guzzlers' are petted and fawned by men seeking for votes," the *Daily Ohio Statesman* published. The "Puritan temperance of the Radicals," Democrats claimed, showed the true face of Republicans in their dealings with the German community writ large. ⁶⁸ Other editors claimed that German newspaper editors were switching course by asking their constituents to vote for the Democracy, "in order to defeat the puritanical spirit which is gradually taking possession of their party," even going as far as to claim that Carl Schurz himself was encouraging Germans to vote for Democrats in local elections. This was unconfirmed and ran contrary to Schurz campaigning and his principles. ⁶⁹

Despite these very real accusations, German Republican leaders stayed the course and promoted both the Republican ticket

and the Black suffrage referendum, although some required more coaxing than others. Frederick Hassaurek, a prominent German politician and Republican stalwart, lagged far behind the majority of Ohio's German Republican population on the issue of Black suffrage. While Carl Schurz supported the referendum from early on, Hassaurek originally supported the conservative Republicans and worked to block the referendum, eventually pushed to support it by the "trouncing" of other Ohio Germans.⁷⁰ His position seemed to have switched by June of 1867, when he spoke during the campaign about suffrage as a "civilizing agent," one that was necessary in order to sweep "away the dangerous effects of caste." While he did not mention Black suffrage specifically, he clearly indicated that the prejudice that held northern White voters needed to be swept aside.⁷¹ The *Columbus Journal* published an article defending Hassaurek, castigating a Democratic organ that included an excerpt of his speech, rendered nearly incomprehensible because of the accent attributed to Hassaurek in the article. "For what right has a 'Dutchman' to speak, or do any thing [sic] in politics except vote," the *Journal* responded sarcastically.⁷²

The battle for the German vote continued to wage in the waning months of the election. The *Statesman*, in quite remarkable fashion, published an article overviewing the abuse the Germans have taken throughout the campaign at the pens of Republicans across the country, no doubt ignoring the racially derogatory article published in their own paper two months prior, and proceeded to predict that Summit County (generally viewed as a Radical stronghold in the Western Reserve) and Franklin County (Columbus) would vote Democrat this fall and flee the Radical party.⁷³ The *Ashland Union* followed with similar predictions, arguing that the German population, awakened to the duplicity of the Radical cause, would turn against them and refuse to vote for the "ignorant and debased negroes" to be made voters.⁷⁴ Republican organs anticipated these maneuvers, however, and swiftly countered. "There will be a lively attempt to excite the prejudices of the Germans against the negroes, and thus defeat the suffrage question," a *New York Tribune* article cautioned, yet they remained optimistic that German Republicans would see through such arguments and stay loyal to the party.⁷⁵

As the election neared, both party organs turned to the suffrage issue in earnest. The *Delaware Gazette* set the parameters for the debate, arguing that the comparisons between the Black race and the White race were "contrary to the very essence of Republican doctrine," and advocated for laws such as the suffrage

referendum that “utterly ignore all differences and prejudices of race and apply to all men equally.” Furthermore, the paper cited the Democratic attempt to “disenfranchise loyal White soldiers” during the war, arguing that they would as easily “assail through prejudice the rights of Germans and Irishmen just as it now assails those of colored men.”⁷⁶ This “equality before the law” became a focal point for Republicans in their efforts to gain immigrant support of the referendum. Several papers ran an article from the *Irish Republic* in Chicago which struck out in support of Black suffrage, arguing “that while Irishmen of this country are enjoying the privileges of civil liberty and desirous of securing liberty to their own native land, they ought not to deny these privileges” to others. Furthermore, the Irish paper argued that the Democrats, who would “deprive the Black man of his full rights to ‘equality before the law’ would also deprive White men of those same rights did the opportunity offer.”⁷⁷

Despite these defenses, Democrats continued to place immigrant voters in competition with African Americans, insisting that 1) civil rights for Blacks would result in the cheapening of rights for immigrant Whites, and 2) that Black domination would result in such a referendum being passed. “They will Africanize Ohio, as Oberlin and Xenia are Africanized to-day,” Democrat E.T. Delaney said to a crowd in [unknown].⁷⁸ Additionally, Democrats across the states castigated Radicals such as Benjamin Wade, Rutherford B. Hayes, and others, who maintained that Black men deserved the right of suffrage and were equally capable as immigrants to utilize suffrage.⁷⁹ If these “inferior” men gained the ballot, Democrats asserted, their lack of knowledge and political know-how would surely doom the White race. Such race baiting proved especially effective on election day.

The 1867 election crushed Radical hopes of Black enfranchisement and marked the high tide of Radical support in the Buckeye State. While Hayes narrowly won the governorship, the suffrage referendum failed by nearly 40,000 votes, clearly indicating the feelings of White Ohioans on the suffrage issue.⁸⁰ Despite both Democratic and Republican newspapers suggesting that German voters hesitance to support the suffrage movement ultimately hamstrung the Republican Party, such reactionary judgements fail to incorporate a larger perspective.⁸¹ Allison Efford, in her analysis of both Cleveland and Cincinnati voters in 1867, argued that German voters supported the referendum in fairly strong numbers.⁸² Some generalizations can be made based on analyzing the vote at the county level. For example, in the seven counties with the highest percentage of German and Irish

immigrants, three voted in favor of the amendment while four voted against; three of the four counties in the northern portion of the state supported the amendment, while all three in the southern portion voted against. Additionally, all three counties that voted in favor (Cuyahoga, Erie, and Lucas) also voted for Hayes, the Republican candidate for governor.⁸³ While not precise calculations, these trends suggest that a considerable percentage of foreign-born voters (mainly Germans) did support both the suffrage referendum and the Republican candidates of the 1867 gubernatorial election.

Conclusion

In the end, can the suffrage referendum's defeat be laid at the feet of German and Irish immigrants? No, not anymore than the defeat can be laid on the over 10,000 Republicans who chose not to cast a vote on the referendum (while voting for Hayes) or who voted against the suffrage amendment. The racist rhetoric of the Democratic Party, combined with a general fatigue of Reconstruction issues by Ohio voters, doomed the referendum and the Republican Party in the later years of Reconstruction.⁸⁴ Both parties clearly sensed the importance of the immigrant vote for this election if the party organs and political rhetoric are any indication. The present analysis, then, suggests that parties in states with large foreign-born population, specifically Pennsylvania and New York, likely targeted these populations as well, requiring further research into the role of German and Irish born voters in the political battles of the Reconstruction North. Nevertheless, while the support of German and Irish immigrants was undoubtedly essential to the success of the referendum for Ohio Republicans, even overwhelming support from the immigrant community may not have been enough to overcome the racial animosity whipped up by Ohio Democrats to impede Ohio Republicans from capitalizing on the Radical moment, and the racism ever present in many individual Ohio voters. Ohio Republicans ultimately failed to build adequate support for the suffrage referendum, despite its wide-ranging efforts (which included coordinated efforts to gain the immigrant vote) by vigorous radical defenders, and significant support from papers and politicians.

¹ This project will look at both recent immigrants, and those who were classified as “foreign-born” yet had been naturalized or gained the ability to vote based on their time in the United States.

² For Reconstruction broadly considered, see John Hope Franklin, *Reconstruction After the Civil War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1961, 1994); Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Era of Reconstruction, 1865-1877* (New York: Alfred K. Knopf, 1966); Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988). For Reconstruction Ohio, see Felice A. Bonadio, *North of Reconstruction: Ohio Politics, 1865-1870* (New York: New York University Press, 1970); Sawrey, Robert D. *Dubious Victory: The Reconstruction Debate in Ohio* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1992).

³ While seemingly arbitrary, by focusing on politics after the war and leading up to the suffrage referendum during the fall elections of 1867, the strategy and tactics of both parties are more clearly seen and are (somewhat) removed from wartime politics which took on a much different tone.

⁴ Dale T. Knobel, “America for Americans:” *The Nativist Movement in the United States* (NY: Twayne Publishers, 1996), 45.

⁵ *Population of the United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864), 398. Ohio Immigrant population- 328,251 (German- 168,210; Irish- 76,825); PA immigrant population- 430,505 (German- 138,244; Irish- 201,939); NY Immigrant Population- 998,640 (German- 256,252; Irish- 498,072).

⁶ Robert P. Swierenga, “The Settlement of the Old Northwest: Ethnic Pluralism in a Featureless Plain,” *Journal of the Early Republican*, 9, No. 1 (Spring 1989), 73-74.

⁷ *Ibid*, 83; George W. Knepper, *Ohio and Its People* (Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1989 and 1997), 154.

⁸ *Ibid*; Swierenga, “The Settlement of the Old Northwest,” 84-85. *A Compendium of the Ninth Census* (June 1, 1970) (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872).

⁹ Knobel, *America for Americans*, 120-122; John Weaver, “Decline of the Ohio Know-Nothings, 1856-1860” *Cincinnati Historical Society Bulletin* 40 (1982), 235.

¹⁰ Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850’s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), xiv; Bruce Levine, “The Vital Element of the Republican Party:” Antislavery, Nativism, and Abraham Lincoln,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 1, No. 4 (December 2011), 482.

¹¹ Eric Foner, *Free, Soil, Free Labor, Free Man: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1970), 228-230); Edward L. Gambill, *Conservative Ordeal Northern Democrats and Reconstruction, 1865-1868* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1981), 6-7.

¹² Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 258-259; Foner, *Free Soil*, 248-249; Weaver, “Decline of Ohio Know-Nothings,” 238-239.

¹³ Carl Schurz letter to Edward L. Pierce, March 26, 1859, in Frederic Bancroft, ed. *Speeches, Correspondence, and Political Papers of Carl Schurz, Volume 1* (NY: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1913), 41-45). Accessed through HathiTrust

¹⁴ Frederick C. Luebke, ed., *Ethnic Voters and the Election of Lincoln*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), 13-15; Bruce Levine, “The Vital Element of the Republican Party:” Antislavery, Nativism, and Abraham Lincoln,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 1, no. 4 (December 2011), 486; Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 258-259, 265; John Weaver, “Decline of the Ohio Know-Nothings;” 243.

¹⁵ See James C. Mohr, *Radical Republicans in the North: State Politics during Reconstruction* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

¹⁶ Radical Republicans (such as James Ashley and Benjamin Wade) remained committed to defeating the South whatever the cost and generally supported emancipation; Copperheads (such as George Pendleton) remained hostile toward emancipation, called for an end to the war, and generally harbored pro-Southern sympathies.

¹⁷ *The Freedmen's Record* (the *Freedmen's Journal*), June 1, 1865. An article reprinted from the *New York Independent* in both the *Holmes County Farmer* and *Dayton Daily Empire* communicated the same- even if Blacks were as "ignorant and uneducated as the Irish Catholics," they should be allowed the vote; *Holmes County Farmer*, August 3, 1865; *Dayton Daily Empire*, July 28, 1865.

¹⁸ *Holmes County Farmer* (D), June 08, 1865.

¹⁹ *Urbana Union*, July 12, 1865; *American Presbyterian* (Philadelphia), January 26, 1865.

²⁰ *Urbana Union*, July 12, 1865; *American Presbyterian* (Philadelphia), January 26, 1865.

²¹ *Dayton Daily Empire*, July 28, 1865.

²² See Michael Les Benedict, *A Compromise of Principle: Congressional Republicans and Reconstruction, 1863-1869* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1974), 218-230 and 243.

²³ Article from the *New Hampshire Statesman*, in the *Ashland Union*, June 21, 1865

²⁴ *Lancaster Gazette*, June 22, 1865; *Lancaster Gazette*, September 14, 1865.

²⁵ *Dayton Daily Empire*, August 16, 1865.

²⁶ *The Spirit of Democracy*, September 6, 1865; *Ashland Union*, September 20, 1865.

²⁷ *Cleveland Leader*, August 15, 1865.

²⁸ *Dayton Daily Empire*, August 16, 1865.

²⁹ See Chapter 1 of Jacob Thomas Mach "'Having Given Them Bayonets, We Will Not Withhold the Ballot'- Republicans and Black Suffrage in Reconstruction Ohio, 1865-1867." MA Thesis, Bowling Green State University, 2020. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

³⁰ Foner, *Free Soil*, 180.

³¹ Michael Les Benedict, *A Compromise of Principle: Congressional Republicans and Reconstruction, 1863-1869*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1974), 162-165.

³² "Veto Message on Freedmen and Refugee Relief Bureau Legislation," February 19, 1866,

<https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/february-19-1866-veto-message-freedmen-and-refugee-relief>.

³³ "Voting to Override the Pres. Veto on the Freedmen's Bureau Bill," July 16, 1866; <https://www.govtrack.us/>.

³⁴ "Civil Rights Act of 1866," accessed November, 2021, <https://loveman.sdsu.edu/docs/1866FirstCivilRightsAct.pdf>.

³⁵ "Veto Message on Civil Rights Legislation," March 27, 1866, accessed October 2021, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/march-27-1866-veto-message-civil-rights-legislation>.

³⁶ "Veto Message on Civil Rights Legislation," March 27, 1866, accessed October 2021, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/march-27-1866-veto-message-civil-rights-legislation>.

³⁷ Benedict, *Compromise of Principle*, 160; "Voting For to Override Pres. Veto on the Civil Rights Bill," April 9, 1866, <https://www.govtrack.us/>.

³⁸ *Lancaster Gazette*, April 5, 1866; *Fremont Journal*, May 18, 1866.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ By 1870, at least 24% of the population of Cuyahoga County, where Cleveland was located, was born in Germany. *A Compendium of the Ninth Census* (June 1, 1970) (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872).

⁴¹ *Cleveland Daily Leader*, June 30, 1866; “Waetcher und Anzeiger,” accessed November 2021, <https://case.edu/ech/articles/w/waechter-und-anzeiger>.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ *Annual Report of the Secretary of State to the Governor of the State of Ohio for the Year 1887* (Columbus: Columbus Printing Company, 1887), 151-152.

⁴⁴ In 1870, 19,934 German-born people lived in Cuyahoga, which represented 10.89% of the total population of 182,897 German-born people living in Ohio. *A Compendium of the Ninth Census* (June 1, 1870). (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872).

⁴⁵ Demographic information from the Eighth and Ninth US Censuses, voting data gained from *Tribune Almanac 1861-1871*; *The Tribune Almanac and Political Register* (New York: The Tribune Association). HathiTrust.

⁴⁶ For an extended analysis of German-Republican support during the 1860 Lincoln campaign, see Frederick C. Luebke, ed., *Ethnic Voters and the Election of Lincoln* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973). Allison Efford in *German Immigrants, Race, and Citizenship in the Civil War Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013) suggests that while more Germans may have voted Democrat, significant numbers did vote Republican, 10.

⁴⁷ *Cleveland Daily Leader*, December 27, 1865; *The Cleveland Leader*, September 29, 1865; *Cleveland Daily Leader*, June 27, 1866.

⁴⁸ *Daily Ohio Statesman*, August 7, 1866. This of course runs counter to reality of Johnson’s actions, as he refused to give any aid to the June 1866 raid into Canada, see Mitchell Snay, *Fenians, Freedmen, and Southern Whites: Race and Nationality in the Era of Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 44.

⁴⁹ *The Vinton Record*, August 9, 1866.

⁵⁰ “Clement Vallandigham speech at Rossville in Butler County,” (October 4, 1866) in *Speeches of the 1866 Campaign- In the States of Ohio, Indiana and Kentucky* (Cincinnati Commercial, 1866), 42.

⁵¹ *The Jackson Standard*, August 9, 1866; *The Jackson Standard*, August 16, 1866; *The Weekly Perrysburg Journal*, August 17, 1866.

⁵² *Fremont Journal*, August 10, 1866.

⁵³ Major General Robert C. Schenck at Dayton, Ohio, on August 18, 1866 in *Speeches of the 1866 Campaign- In the States of Ohio, Indiana and Kentucky* (Cincinnati Commercial, 1866), 12.

⁵⁴ James Ashley, Speech at Toledo on August 22, 1866, in *Speeches of the 1866 Campaign- In the States of Ohio, Indiana and Kentucky* (Cincinnati Commercial, 1866), 18.

⁵⁵ Benjamin Wade (speaking in Ottawa, Putnam County on behalf of James Ashley), September 11, 1866 in *Speeches of the 1866 Campaign- In the States of Ohio, Indiana and Kentucky* (Cincinnati Commercial, 1866), 31.

⁵⁶ For the traditional view, see Eric L. McKittrick, *Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960; Bonadio, *North of Reconstruction*, 62-65.

⁵⁷ According to the 1870 census, nearly 25% of Ohio’s Irish born population lived in Hamilton County, in or around Cincinnati, and they voted overwhelmingly Democrat; see 9th US census. For more information about Cincinnati’s strong Democratic leadership, see Mach, Thomas. “Gentleman George” Hunt

Pendleton: Party Politics and Ideological Identity in Nineteenth-Century America (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2007).

⁵⁸ Spalding's majority dropped from 68% in 1864 to 64% in 1866; see *The American Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events of the Year 1867* (New York: D. Appleton and Company). In neighboring 19th district, James Garfield saw his majority drop from 74% to 71%.

⁵⁹ See Benedict, *Compromise of Principle*, 188-209 and Sawrey, *Dubious Victory*, 89.

⁶⁰ During an election year, most partisan papers would include the statewide candidates (the full list included eight races: Governor, Lt. Governor, Judge of Supreme Court, Auditor of State, Treasurer, Attorney General, Comptroller of Treasury, and Board of Public Works; this did not include the other local elections for each county; for example see *The Fremont Weekly Journal*, September 20, 1867.

⁶¹ Exact details on the Black population are difficult to definitively show; in the 1860 census, there were 36,660 African Americans in Ohio; by 1870, there were over 63,000. If the referendum were to pass, most likely a few thousand votes could be added to the roll. *A Compendium of the Ninth Census* (June 1, 1870) (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872); for Republican platform information, see *The American Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events of the Year 1867* (New York: D. Appleton and Company), 604.

⁶² The Fifteenth Amendment would not be officially discussed in Congress until 1868. Prior to that year, most Republicans, even those that in theory supported Black suffrage, believed that suffrage should remain in the purview of the states, not the federal government. See Benedict, *Compromise of Principle*, 325-336.

⁶³ See LaWanda and John Cox, "Negro Suffrage and Republican Politics: The Problem of Motivation in Reconstruction Historiography," *Journal of Southern History* 33 (1967): 303-330.

⁶⁴ *The Jackson Standard*, January 10, 1867.

⁶⁵ *A Compendium of the Ninth Census* (June 1, 1870) (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), 80-83; Jackson County was 23rd in total population of German/Irish immigrants; it was also one of thirteen total counties where the Black population outweighed the German/Irish immigrant population.

⁶⁶ *The Jackson Standard*, February 7, 1867.

⁶⁷ *The Hancock Jeffersonian*, May 31, 1867; *Wyandot Pioneer*, July 11, 1867.

⁶⁸ *Urbana Union*, July 17, 1867; *Daily Ohio Statesman*, July 15, 1867.

⁶⁹ *Daily Ohio Statesman*, July 24, 1867; *Cadiz Sentinel*, September 4, 1867. The two German newspapers quoted in these articles were the *Boston Pioneer* and the *Pittsburgh Volksblatt*.

⁷⁰ Alison Efford, *German Immigrants, Race, and Citizenship in the Civil War Era* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 124-125.

⁷¹ *Morning Journal* (Columbus), June 20, 1867

⁷² *Morning Journal* (Columbus), July 26, 1867; the article referenced is from the *Daily Ohio Statesman* June 21, 1867. The first lines of the speech read, "I jüst speaks somedinks mit you. We makes a pooty good dictet to-day, fon de convention don't it?"

⁷³ *Daily Ohio Statesman*, August 19, 1867. The prediction in Summit County would prove wrong on all accounts; the county not only voted strongly for Hayes, but it also voted in favor of the suffrage referendum. Franklin County, on the other hand, which had voted Democrat for several years, would continue in that fashion in 1867.

⁷⁴ *Ashland Union*, August 21, 1867.

⁷⁵ *Western Reserve Chronicle*, September 4, 1867.

⁷⁶ *Delaware Gazette*, September 6, 1867.

⁷⁷ The *Irish Republic* article was included in both *The Highland Weekly News*, October 10, 1867 and *The Fremont Weekly Journal*, October 4, 1867.

⁷⁸ *Daily Ohio Statesman*, October 8, 1867.

⁷⁹ *Democratic Enquirer*, September 26, 1867.

⁸⁰ *The Tribune Almanac and Political Register, 1868* (New York: The Tribune Association), 45-46.

⁸¹ For example, see *Daily Ohio Statesman*, November 1, 1867; *The Wyandot Pioneer*, November 21, 1867; December 5, 1867 (fuller article)

⁸² Efford, *German Immigrants*, 126-127.

⁸³ The seven counties were Hamilton, Montgomery, and Butler (southern half) and Cuyahoga, Erie, Lucas, and Ottawa (northern half). The overall vote in these seven counties was 38,739 votes "For" (45.2%) and 46,908 votes "Against" (54.8%).

⁸⁴ See Sawrey, *Dubious Victory*, 142.

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