

ABSTRACT

THESIS: Ensuring Loyalty: Black Recruitment in Civil War Kentucky

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This thesis examines Kentucky's military recruitment records, relative to the similarly populated states of Michigan and Wisconsin, to gauge the state's loyalty to the Union cause during the American Civil War. Beginning in 1861, and progressing until the end of the war in 1865, this work focuses on how preserving slavery consistently motivated white Kentuckians to volunteer for the Union army. Despite concerns regarding abolition, white Kentuckians generally felt the federal government could ensure state sovereignty and protect the institution of slavery. The best example of this belief was Kentucky's reaction to the Emancipation Proclamation and black recruitment in 1863. Despite arguments posed by contemporary historians, these measures generally encouraged rather than discouraged Kentucky unionism. Hoping to prevent black recruitment by supplying enough white volunteers to fill its quota, Kentucky exhausted its white manpower in 1863. This is primarily why Kentucky ended the year with a 59 percent service record while Michigan and Wisconsin's had 43 and 42 percent respectively. Consequently, Kentucky's recruitment fell during 1864 and 1865 which has led many historians to argue emancipation and black recruitment damaged the state's loyalty. The significance of this thesis is that it counters these scholarly claims by arguing Kentucky's faltering white volunteerism embodied its exhaustion rather than a diminished sense of unionism.