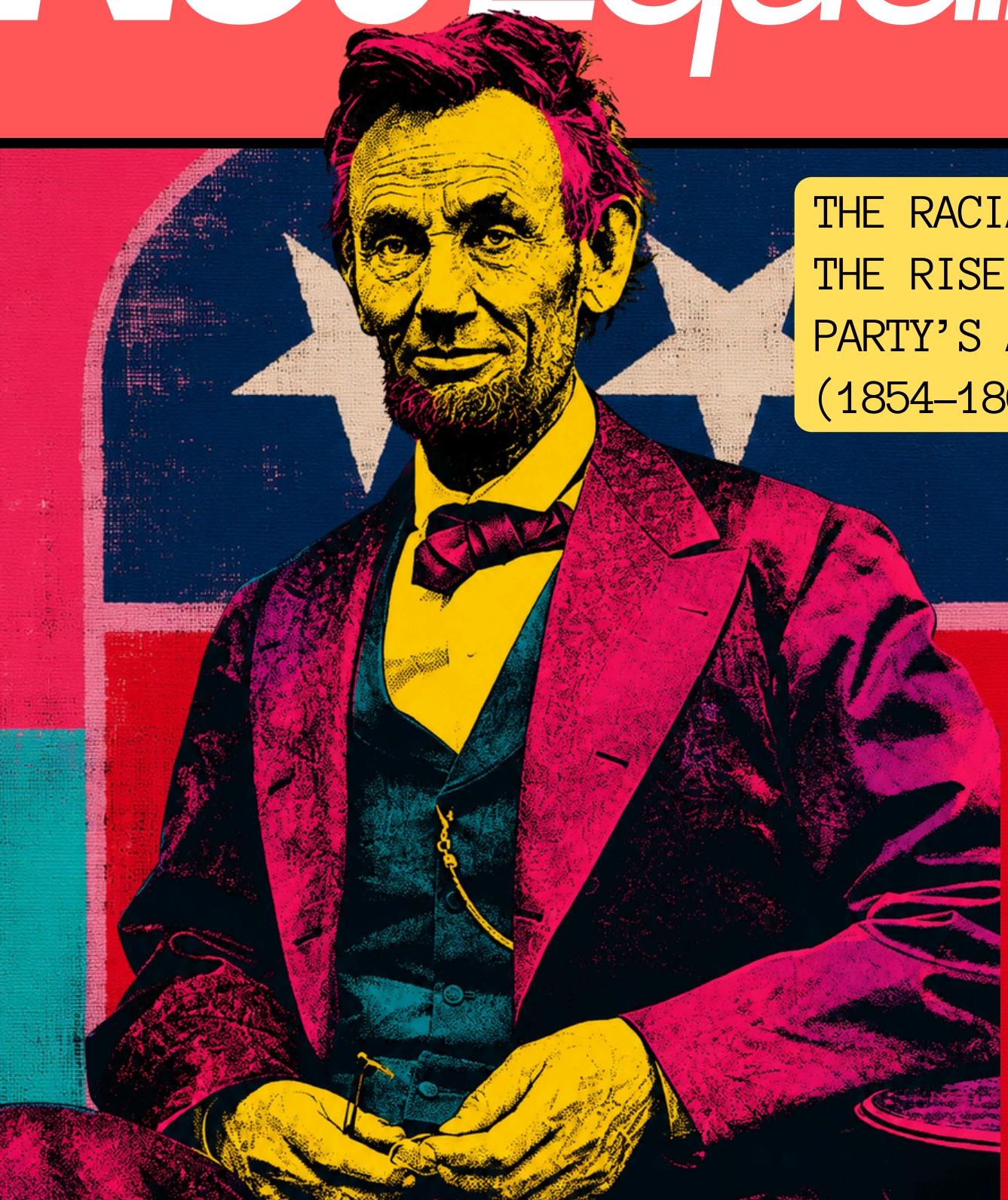
Freedom But Not Equality



THE RACIAL CONTRADICTIONS BEHIND THE RISE OF THE EARLY REPUBLICAN PARTY'S ANTISLAVERY MOVEMENT (1854–1865)

VISUAL ESSAY WITH EVIDENCE

Antislavery Did Not MEAN ANTIRACIST

It is easy to assume that white Americans who opposed slavery also supported Black freedom and equality. The history is more complicated.

Historian John M. Rozett, in “Racism and Republican Emergence in Illinois, 1848–1860,” explains that opposition to slavery grew from different moral, economic, political, and racial motivations.

THIS MEANS ABOLITION, OPPOSITION TO SLAVERY’S EXPANSION, AND SUPPORT FOR BLACK EQUALITY WERE NOT THE SAME POLITICAL POSITION.

SOME WHITE AMERICANS COULD OPPOSE SLAVERY AND STILL BELIEVE THAT BLACK PEOPLE SHOULD REMAIN OUTSIDE THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL LIFE OF THE NATION.

FREE SOIL...BUT FOR WHOM?

In 1848, voters considered the expansion of slavery while also voting on whether free Black people should be allowed to migrate into Illinois.

According to historian John M. Rozett, Illinois voters supported Black exclusion 50,261 to 21,297—more than 70 percent voting for exclusion.

Rozett examines historians who argue that some Free Soil supporters opposed slavery's expansion partly because they wanted western territories protected for white people and white labor.

For some white Northerners, keeping slavery out did not mean welcoming Black freedom in.



EVEN ABOLITIONISTS COULD RETREAT ON RACE

John Quist author of “Theodore Foster and the Development of Antebellum and Wartime Antislavery” uses abolitionist Theodore Foster to show just how complicated these political identities could become.

In the 1840s, Foster supported immediate abolition, Black male suffrage, equal citizenship, and rejected claims of natural Black inferiority.

He later joined the Free Soil and Republican movements and continued wanting slavery destroyed. But his racial politics changed.

By the Civil War era, Quist finds Foster increasingly accepting ideas of white superiority and Black inferiority, even while continuing to oppose slavery and support some Black political rights.

Foster demonstrates why opposition to slavery cannot, by itself, tell us what someone believed about Black equality.

THE REPUBLICAN PARTY INHERITED THESE CONTRADICTIONS

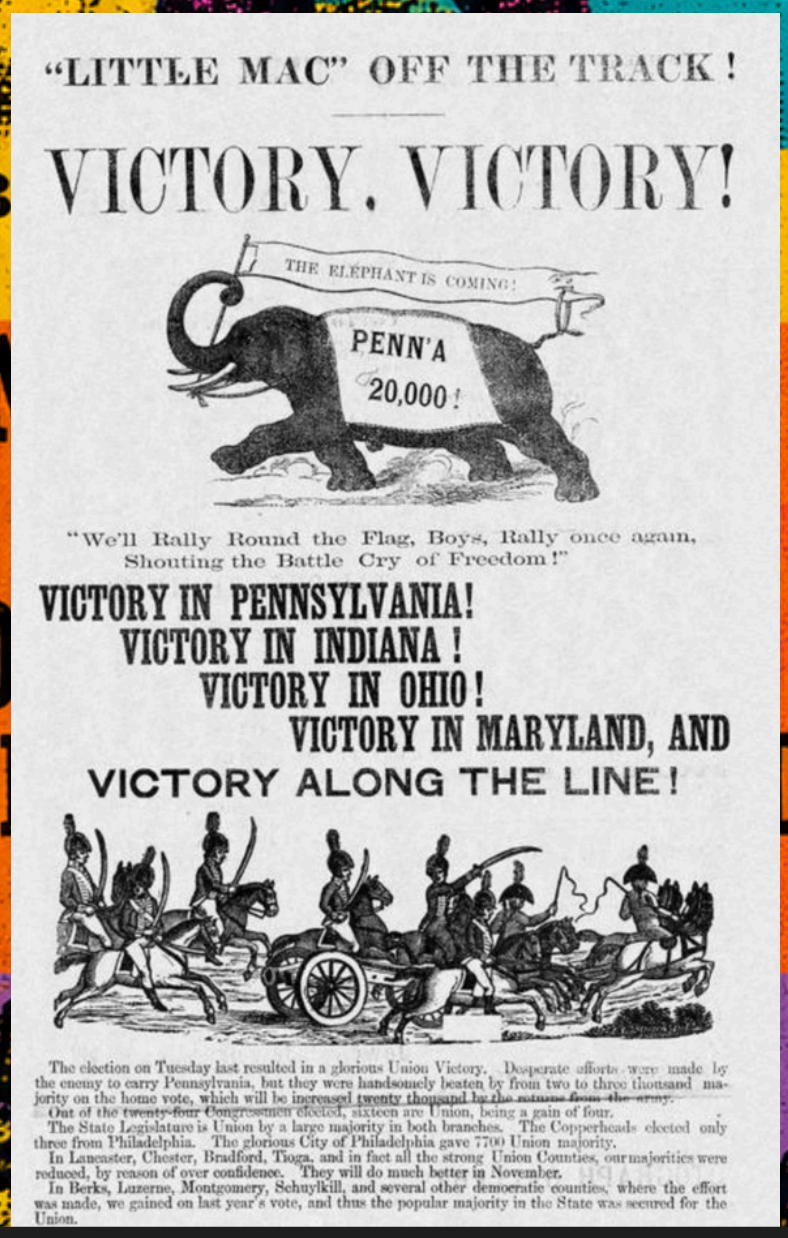
The Republican Party emerged in 1854, but it did not appear out of nowhere.

Historian John W. Quist, in “Theodore Foster and the Development of Antebellum and Wartime Antislavery,” traces how antislavery activists moved through the Liberty Party, Free Soil Party, and eventually the Republican Party.

These groups did not all want the same thing.

Some demanded abolition. Others focused on preventing slavery from expanding. And support for either position did not automatically mean support for Black citizenship or racial equality.

The new Republican Party united people against slavery’s expansion without resolving what freedom should mean for Black Americans.


“LITTLE MAC” OFF THE TRACK!

VICTORY, VICTORY!

THE ELEPHANT IS COMING!

PENN'A 20,000!

“We'll Rally Round the Flag, Boys, Rally once again, Shouting the Battle Cry of Freedom!”

VICTORY IN PENNSYLVANIA!
VICTORY IN INDIANA!
VICTORY IN OHIO!
VICTORY IN MARYLAND, AND
VICTORY ALONG THE LINE!

The election on Tuesday last resulted in a glorious Union Victory. Desperate efforts were made by the enemy to carry Pennsylvania, but they were handsomely beaten by from two to three thousand majority on the home vote, which will be increased twenty thousand by the returns from the army.

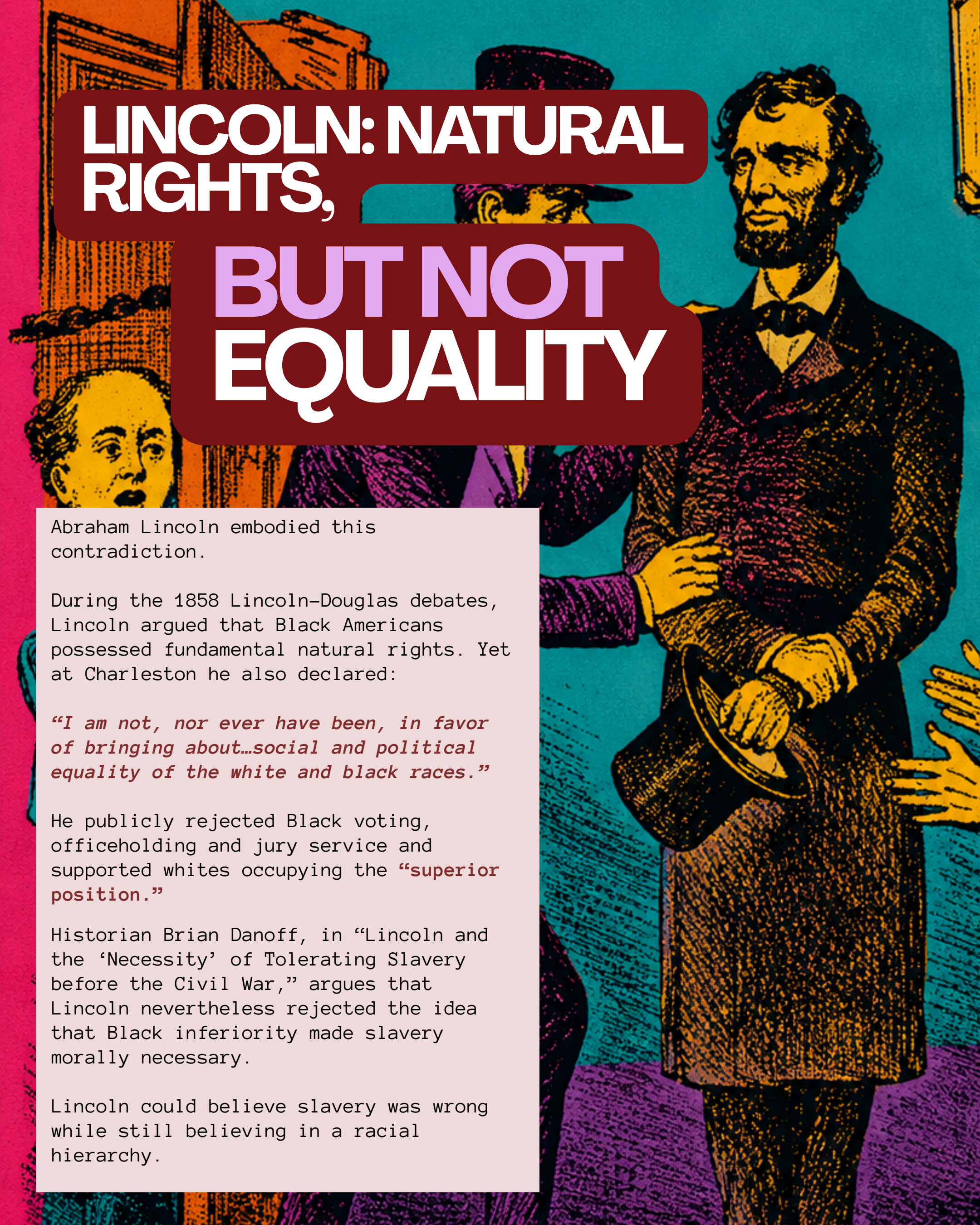
Out of the twenty-four Congressmen elected, sixteen are Union, being a gain of four.

The State Legislature is Union by a large majority in both branches. The Copperheads elected only three from Philadelphia. The glorious City of Philadelphia gave 7700 Union majority.

In Lancaster, Chester, Bradford, Tioga, and in fact all the strong Union Counties, our majorities were reduced, by reason of over confidence. They will do much better in November.

In Berks, Luzerne, Montgomery, Schuylkill, and several other democratic counties, where the effort was made, we gained on last year's vote, and thus the popular majority in the State was secured for the Union.

“Little Mac’ Off the Track! Victory! Victory!” Unknown cartoonist, Father Abraham, October 18, 1864, 3.



LINCOLN: NATURAL RIGHTS, BUT NOT EQUALITY

Abraham Lincoln embodied this contradiction.

During the 1858 Lincoln–Douglas debates, Lincoln argued that Black Americans possessed fundamental natural rights. Yet at Charleston he also declared:

“I am not, nor ever have been, in favor of bringing about…social and political equality of the white and black races.”

He publicly rejected Black voting, officeholding and jury service and supported whites occupying the **“superior position.”**

Historian Brian Danoff, in “Lincoln and the ‘Necessity’ of Tolerating Slavery before the Civil War,” argues that Lincoln nevertheless rejected the idea that Black inferiority made slavery morally necessary.

Lincoln could believe slavery was wrong while still believing in a racial hierarchy.

Fredrick Douglass SAW THE CONTRADICTION



Frederick Douglass recognized the difference between an antislavery politician and an abolitionist.

According to historian Sarah Fling of the White House Historical Association, Douglass supported Lincoln over his political opponents but remained deeply critical of Lincoln’s racial views.

When Lincoln promoted voluntary Black colonization in 1862, Douglass attacked the proposal in Douglass’ Monthly, accusing Lincoln of:

“pride of race and blood” and “contempt for Negroes.”

Douglass recognized the political importance of an antislavery president while still demanding something greater: Black freedom, citizenship and equality.



THE WAR THEN & THE CHANGED THE QUESTION

The Civil War pushed the debate beyond whether slavery should simply be contained.

THE EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION SHOWS THAT ON JANUARY 1, 1863, LINCOLN DECLARED ENSLAVED PEOPLE IN DESIGNATED AREAS STILL REBELLING AGAINST THE UNITED STATES TO BE FREE AND AUTHORIZED BLACK MEN TO ENTER U.S. MILITARY SERVICE.

The proclamation did not abolish slavery throughout the United States. That would require the Thirteenth Amendment.

But historian Lonnie Bunch, speaking with NPR about “What the Emancipation Proclamation Didn’t Do,” explains that the proclamation helped transform both the war and the federal government’s relationship to slavery. This highlights how the political debate had moved beyond where Republicans began in 1854

ENDING SLAVERY *DID NOT* END THE QUESTION

By the end of the war, Lincoln's own position had changed.

The National Park Service, in "Confronting a President: Douglass and Lincoln," documents how Douglass personally pressured Lincoln over unequal treatment of Black soldiers and continued demanding greater recognition of Black citizenship.

By 1865, Lincoln publicly supported voting rights for some Black men, particularly Black veterans and educated Black men, a significant shift from his public position in 1858, although still far from universal equality.

The destruction of slavery therefore raised a question the early Republican coalition had never answered uniformly:

Would Black freedom also mean Black citizenship and political equality?

The answer would shape the challenges of Reconstruction.



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