

# Norwegian Immigrants in the American Civil War

## *Reasons for Enlistment according to the America Letters*

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Photograph of veterans of the Wisconsin 15th Regiment at Camp Randall in 1917.

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# Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to investigate the reasons for enlistment among the Norwegians in America before the Civil War. Another aim was to investigate a part of the Norwegian-American history that has not been examined to any great extent. There has been written a lot about the Norwegians in the American Civil War, but there has been little or no research on the question why they enlisted. Previous scholarly works seem to have left this question out of their analysis. Therefore, it seems appropriate to answer this question.

The method applied for this thesis was a qualitative study of the letters written by the Norwegians in America, the so called America letters. The thesis focused on reasons for enlistment within the letters in order to find any common ground between the enlistees. The result of the study was four main reasons were found in the letters. The reasons were: Ideological, Economical, Religious, and a Sense of Duty. Under each of these main reasons are sub-reasons as well.

One or several of the main reasons were evident in each of the letters, and must therefore be considered as evidence for why the Norwegian immigrants decided to take up arms for their newly adopted country. The letters written by the soldiers represent a subjective view on the times they lived in. Therefore they cannot be trusted as one hundred percent true. However, they are the closest one can get to the events that are being discussed in this thesis. For this reason, examining the letters in order to find out why the enlistees volunteered seems to be the closest one can get to the truth.

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# Table of Contents

|  |      |
|--|------|
| Norwegian Immigrants in the American Civil War.....                                      | III  |
| Abstract: .....  | V    |
| Table of Contents .....  | VIII |
| 1 Introduction .....   | 1    |
| 1.1 Introduction: .....  | 1    |
| 2. Theory and Method: .....  | 2    |
| “Blood Sacrifice” .....  | 2    |
| Fighting prejudice .....   | 5    |
| The Whiteness Theme .....  | 11   |
| Whiteness in politics: .....   | 13   |
| A strong sense of nationalism combined with economic bonuses .....                       | 14   |
| Segregation and assimilation.....  | 15   |
| Why Rasmus B. Anderson is important to this thesis: .....                                | 17   |
| The Slavery issue’s impact on Andersen, a religious reason for enlisting:.....           | 18   |
| Chapter 2: Four Reasons for Enlisting. ....  | 25   |
| Note on Heg before the reasons: .....  | 25   |
| 1. Sense of Duty: Paying Back For the Freedom Given To Them.....                         | 25   |
| 1.1. A Debt to Pay .....   | 26   |
| 2. Ideological Reason: Connection between Enlistment and the Free Soil Party Ideals..... | 28   |
| 2.1 The Slavery Issue. ....  | 30   |
| 2.2 Becoming true Americans. ....  | 34   |
| 3. Religious Reasons for Enlisting. ....   | 36   |
| 3.1. The Religious Scene in the Northwest before the Civil War. ....                     | 36   |
| 3.2 The Slavery Issue, a religious Reason for Enlisting: .....                           | 40   |
| 4. Econmic Reasons for Enlisting. ....   | 46   |
| 4.1 What were the economic advantages enlistees would get? .....                         | 46   |
| Chapter 3: Conclusion .....  | 51   |
| Summary of the Thesis Question/Problem, Main Findings and the Discussion:.....           | 51   |
| How Do the Results Fill In, Advance, or Contradict Previously Reported Research? .....   | 53   |
| In What Ways Are the Results of this Thesis Useful for the Field? .....                  | 54   |
| In Which Direction Should Further Research Go? .....                                     | 55   |



|                                |    |
|--------------------------------|----|
| Bibliography.....              | 56 |
| Primary Sources: .....         | 56 |
| Letters:.....                  | 56 |
| Memoirs: .....                 | 58 |
| Rosters:.....                  | 58 |
| Adjutant General Reports:..... | 58 |
| Secondary Sources: .....       | 58 |
| Books:.....                    | 58 |
| Articles: .....                | 60 |
| Web sites: .....               | 60 |



# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction:

From 1865 to 1925, the historiography of the Norwegian-American' involvement in the Civil War has been dominated by what Orm Øverland labels as filiopietistic writings.<sup>1</sup> Although this kind of inaccurate writing created a form of Norwegian-American ideology, it also left many questions unanswered, because its focus was on telling a story of the greatness of the Norwegian people in America, rather than analyzing their reasons for doing what they did. What this thesis will do is to analyze and interpret the letters written by those who left Norway and came to America and subsequently enlisted as Union soldiers in the Civil War. The analysis of these "America letters" is aimed at finding out why the Norwegians voluntarily enlisted for military duty in the Civil War. This analysis has been missing from most studies in Norwegian-American history. There are many reasons for this, but Orm Øverland says that it is in part because of the primary material are in a language that is inaccessible for most U.S. scholars.<sup>2</sup> The Civil War was an American war, and the immigrants' contribution was usually invisible in scholarly work on the war. Therefore, it was up to those who were not scholars, but rather interested amateur historians to write about the Norwegians who participated in the greatest war fought on American soil. This this thesis will do a qualitative study of the letters from those who fought in Civil War in order to answer the thesis question of why they enlisted.

With regard to enlistment, Øverland says little about why the Norwegian immigrants volunteered to fight. However, his theory regarding homemaking myths serves this thesis as a way of looking into what at least the immigrant leaders, those at the top of the immigrant communities, thought would happen if the Norwegians sacrificed themselves in an American War. By becoming visible in the theater of war, no one could deny that the Norwegians fought just as well as the Americans and defended American ideals, such as liberty, equality and republicanism. However, since the Norwegians were a relatively small group, they had to do something noticed as large in order to show their support for the Northern cause, preserving the Union, and abolishing slavery. The most famous example of this is the creation of the 15th Wisconsin Infantry Regiment. According to Øverland, it should come as no

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<sup>1</sup> Orm Øverland, *Immigrants Minds, American Identities: Making the United States Home, 1870-1930*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 8.

<sup>2</sup> Øverland, *Immigrants Minds* (2000), 90.

surprise that “immigrant leaders saw an obligation to make the loyalty and sacrifice of immigrants visible and in doing so to promote the view of immigrants as Americans, not foreigners.”<sup>3</sup>

Jon Gjerde points to another reason why immigrant leaders saw the need to show Americans that the Norwegians had the same universal set of values that the American ideology was based on. Gjerde says that values like liberty, equality, and republicanism were values that were open not only to Norwegians, but to all European immigrants. For this reason, Gjerde seems to say that the Norwegian immigrant leaders had the idea that complete assimilation was not necessary, but the Norwegians had to show openly that they were ready to defend these American civic values.<sup>4</sup> One could argue that the Norwegians “punched above their weight” in terms of enlistment. However, the individual reasons for enlisting varied greatly, so to find a common ground becomes very hard. On the other hand, this thesis bases its arguments on having read the letters from the Civil War soldiers.

However, one cannot rely solely upon eyewitness accounts in these letters. Therefore one must weigh, their subjective accounts, against theories that have been put forward by scholars who have written critically about this subject. When examining the letters four main reasons for enlisting can be traced. The reasons will be listed and examined in detail after the theory and method chapter. By employing mainly Øverland’s sacrifice theory and Odd S. Lovoll’s theory on assimilation, an argument can be made that the Norwegians did have some common reasons when enlisting voluntarily in the Union Army.

## **2. Theory and Method:**

### **“Blood Sacrifice”**

The theory that probably fits this thesis best is Øverland’s sacrifice theory. The theory argues that Norwegian immigrants made a blood sacrifice in order to become “proper” Americans. The Norwegian immigrants at the time realized that they had to make a contribution to the war effort in order to ascend into the cultural elite in America. America in the years before the Civil War was a racist society. The logic of racism at the time did not only distinguish between groups of what is today considered white people as well. The “proper” whites were the Anglo-Americans. Richard D. Alba discussed this kind of racism between white people as

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<sup>3</sup> Øverland, *Immigrants Minds* (2000), 91.

<sup>4</sup> Jon Gjerde. *The Minds of the West; Ethnocultural Evolution in the Rural Middle West, 1830-1917*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 4-9.

well as “normal” racism. In his article, “The Transformation of Ethnicity,” Alba establishes a hierarchy among the white people (or peoples) of America in the years of immigration from before the Civil War. He places the White Anglo-Saxon Protestants at the top. Under them are the Scandinavians, the Germans, and the western European immigrants. At the bottom, those who emigrated last to America, the eastern Europeans and southern Europeans.<sup>5</sup> Those at the top were the descendants of the colonial immigrants who had made America into a nation which was completely different from the old world in terms of government, freedom and equality. However, the equality aspect was not for those who came from other nations. The Norwegians were Caucasian, but not “proper” whites in the eyes of the Anglo-Americans.

Before the Civil War, mass immigration had not yet begun, when compared to later waves. The first Norwegians came to America in 1825. The waves of immigration from Norway to America in the 1850s would eventually end up in the ranks of the Union Army as well. Therefore, the Norwegians who came before the Civil War are a part of the “old” immigrants to the United States. However, the Anglo-Americans were the largest ethnic group in America, and were therefore the ones you wanted to identify with if you sought acceptance as a first class citizen. Øverland writes that in Richard Henry Dana’s *Two Years Before the Mast*, published in 1848, Europeans and Euro-Americans are referred to as “whites” or “white men.” In 1859, a new edition came out and the phrases regarding “whites” or “white men” had been changed to the “English race” and the “Anglo-Saxon” in order to exclude the Irish. This was done because of the high numbers of Irish immigrants to America. In order to categorize the immigrants, the Irish were not included as part of the Anglo-Saxon race and therefore placed below them. The Norwegian homemaking mythology argued that the Norwegians were “whites” because of their close historical ties to Anglo-Americans. The Vikings had discovered America, and there had been close contact between Norwegian and Danish Vikings, and the Anglo-Saxons in early middle ages. Thus, they argued for the special relationship between the white Americans and the white Norwegians.<sup>6</sup> It seems that the Norwegians wanted to attach themselves to the “ruling” ethnic group in America by distancing themselves from other immigrants like Irish Catholics, who were extremely unpopular when they entered the American ports.

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<sup>5</sup> Richard D. Alba. *The Transformation of Ethnicity among Americans of European Ancestry: The Transformation of White America*. (Yale University Press. 1990), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Paraphrasing Øverland’s *Immigrant Minds* from 2000, no specific pages, but rather a summary of the myths he presents in his theory.

Another scholar who has looked at the attempt to establish an ancient relationship between Norway and America is Odd S. Lovoll. In his book, *The Promise of America: A History of the Norwegian-American People*, Lovoll writes that many Norwegians who went west to America were very mindful of their Viking ancestry. By following in the footsteps of those shrouded in mystery and myth in the sagas, the Norwegians “treasured the comparison.”<sup>7</sup> However, not many of the letters before the Civil War seem to mention the bond between themselves and their Viking heritage. In fact, it seems that Colonel Hans C. Heg was the only one who used this historical connection when trying to recruit soldiers. In 1861, the Norwegian-American newspaper *Emigranten* printed this quotation from Heg,

“Come, then, young Norsemen, and take part in defending our country’s cause, and thus fulfill a pressing duty which everyone who is able to do so owes to the land in which he lives. Let us band together and deliver untarnished to posterity the old honorable name of Norsemen.”<sup>8</sup>

Here we can see how Heg tried to inspire Norwegians to enlist for military service as he invoked the traditions of old. Some of the immigrants from Norway formed their own regiment, the Wisconsin 15th Regiment, under the command of Col. Hans Christian. Heg. This thesis takes a closer look into the many reasons why they fought and attempt to find some common ground for why these immigrants took up arms for their new country.

One series of letters follow a young man’s journey from Finnmark in the most northern part of Norway to the battlefields of the American south. His journey is long and full of trials. His reasons for enlisting are simple. They were money and adventure. Upon his arrival in Wisconsin he hears of Col. Heg and decides to join his regiment due to problems with finding steady work. He also writes that this is a good way to explore the country and have an adventure. Naïve yes, but believable. He has no prospects of inheritance and thus must make his own way on life. As an enlisted man, he is provided with food and clothing. He is paid well and is promised that the war will be over in a couple of months. In hindsight, it is easy to think of those who enlisted as naïve, but one has to take not account the world

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<sup>7</sup> Odd S. Lovoll, *The Promise of America: A History of the Norwegian People* (University of Minnesota Press. Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1984), 7.

<sup>8</sup> Theodore Blegen, *Norwegian Migration to America: the American Transition* (Northfield: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1940), 391.

they entered as emigrants from a backwards country in the icy north of Europe. Many letters describe coming to America as horrible, but there is a belief that once they reach their family or friends in western Wisconsin, Iowa or Illinois, things will improve. For some it did, for others it did not. Their writings give the reader an image of their life in America as very hard and dangerous. As frontier folk, they encountered Native Americans. One account tells us of Indians attacks at night where they stole their livestock and even some of the women. On top of this, war was on the horizon and the fear of a possible draft was a very real fear.<sup>9</sup>

While on the one hand we have these types of letters, on the other hand, we have those who seem nearly unaffected by current events. They write about their life and only mention the draft as something that they hope will pass by them in silence. They seem to not care about what was going on. This should be viewed as evidence for the diversity among the Norwegian immigrants. While we have those idealistic men and women who vocally oppose slavery and enlist in the army, we also have those who simply try to make do with what they have at their farm. They will write long letters and mention the war in passing only. Some almost disinterestedly dismisses it as something that does not affect them. When working with letters and other primary sources, it is tedious to read again and again about the animals and the harvests. Sometimes a series of letters from the same author is easier to analyze because you get a better image of what kind of man this is. For example, Mons Grinager's letters is such a source, his letters span from when he first arrived in America in 1853 to Island No. 10, Tennessee in 1862. The letters from the Olsen Dokken brothers, Lars and Knud, are also examples of this. Bersven Nelson from Finnmark, Norway, as noted earlier, wrote directly about why he enlisted in his series of letters.

### **Fighting prejudice**

Why the immigrant leaders saw it necessary to make the sacrifice of the Norwegian people in America visible was the fact that they were still by 1861 seen by the Americans as foreigners, not Americans. The leaders of immigrant communities may have seen the trend that immigrants who did their fair share of work were not given the recognition they felt they deserved. When the war came, these leaders - who probably had their sight set on a political career in the future - saw the need to make the contribution of the Norwegian-Americans visible. Øverland says that immigrant leaders were not without assistance because even some

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<sup>9</sup> Letter from an unknown Norwegian in Dodge County, Minnesota. Not signed, but dated September 1862.

From Norwegian National Library's database: Det Løfterike Landet.

presidents of the United States had on occasion written or spoken in praise of foreign-born citizens. So, if these presidents did so in order to secure the vote from a particular group of immigrants is not unlikely. Abraham Lincoln himself praised the Norwegians in Illinois when he said “Yes, I know the Norwegians from Illinois, most of them have made their way up, and no immigrants have served America as well as them.”<sup>10</sup> He said this to a Norwegian painter who also fought in the Union Army in the Civil War. The painter was a man named Ole Petter Balling. According to a source signed only with the name Øverland (not Orm) from 1898, Balling was invited to the White House to paint a portrait of the President. It is important to include this quote from Lincoln because it demonstrates that Norwegians were not an unimportant group of immigrants, but on the contrary, had made themselves known through a willing heart to fight in a war that was not theirs to begin with. On the other hand, the Norwegians were not seen by everyone as Lincoln did. A Norwegian, Ole Munch Ræder, had been sent to America to make an official report on the conditions of the Norwegians in America. Travelling with Ræder was the Swedish and Norwegian consul general Adam Løvenskjold. According to Lovoll, Ræder reports in a varied and objective manner, but Løvenskjold saw the Norwegian immigrants in a more negative light. Løvenskjold reported that Norwegian immigrants enjoyed little respect, were slovenly and ignorant. These circumstances led Americans to call them, ‘Norwegian Indians.’<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, a member of the Wisconsin legislature had said “that he would rather vote for a Negro, than for a Norwegian.”<sup>12</sup> Fifteen other negative accounts of the conditions of the Norwegians in America were given by Priest J.W.C. Dietrichson who made it clear that the streets of America were not paved with gold as many claimed. Many Norwegian-Americans opposed these reports and one should take note of this because these negative reports might have been an indirect reason why so many from Wisconsin volunteered to fight in the Civil War. It may have been in the interest of the Norwegian state to discourage further emigration due to the fear that “everyone” would leave the country in search of something better. In some ways, they were right to do so because many failed in their pursuit of happiness and were left

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<sup>10</sup> D.U. Øverland, «Grant og hans Generaler,» *Folkebladet*, unknown date, 1898. 228-229

<sup>11</sup> Bayrd Still, Norwegian-Americans and Wisconsin Politics in the Forties, *Norwegian-American Studies*, Vol. VIII, Norwegian-American Historical Association Database, p. 58-65. Direct link: [http://www.naha.stolaf.edu/pubs/nas/volume08/vol08\\_5.htm](http://www.naha.stolaf.edu/pubs/nas/volume08/vol08_5.htm) , p. 58.

<sup>12</sup> Bayrd Still, Norwegian-Americans and Wisconsin Politics in the Forties, *Norwegian-American Studies*, Vol. VIII, Norwegian-American Historical Association Database, p. 58-65. Direct link: [http://www.naha.stolaf.edu/pubs/nas/volume08/vol08\\_5.htm](http://www.naha.stolaf.edu/pubs/nas/volume08/vol08_5.htm) , p. 58.



desolate. On the other hand, the Norwegian immigrants joined together and formed a “correspondence society” whose purpose, according to Lovoll was “to systematically correct the erroneous information concerning political as well as religious conditions in America, and in regard to Norwegians who have come here.”<sup>13</sup> These continuing attempts to defend their situation in America resulted in an open letter which was printed in *Morgenbladet* on April 1, 1845. This would become known as the Muskego Manifesto. Muskego, Wisconsin is one of the Norwegian settlements which deserve recognition because of its successes. Muskego was an important stopover point on the way to the west. It was the place of the first Norwegian newspaper in America. Lovoll includes a passage from the Muskego Manifest that sums up the Muskegonites’ belief in America, which may be seen as a precursor to reasons for volunteering to defend it in the Civil War:

We harbor no hopes, of acquiring wealth, but we live under liberal government in a fertile land, where freedom and equality prevail in religious as well as civil affairs, and without any special permission we can enter almost any profession and make an honest living; this we consider to be more wonderful than riches, for by diligence and industry we can look forward to an adequate income, and we thus have no reasons to regret our decision to move here.<sup>14</sup>

These words of freedom and equality show that a particular process of Americanization had begun. Although this was as early as 1845, the letters of Mons Grinager shows the same kind of language. Grinager would become a Captain in the Wisconsin 15th Regiment. In 1856 he writes from Decorah, Iowa to his brother in Norway. He writes to him about the political affairs in America and how the two major parties differ. After spending some time on the slavery issue and that the Republican Party is the one closest to “the common folk back home” and that they want to abolish slavery. He says that if the new territories in the west, Kansas and Nebraska, become slave states, “the Republicans will not tolerate it. Liberty and equality are their motto.”<sup>15</sup> Here a connection between the two letters

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<sup>13</sup> Odd S. Lovoll, *The Promise of America: A History of the Norwegian People* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1984), 72.

<sup>14</sup> Odd S. Lovoll, *The Promise of America: A History of the Norwegian People* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1984), 72.

<sup>15</sup> Mons H. Grinager and wife to Grinager’s brother Thorstein, December 16, 1856. In *The Letters of Mons H. Grinager: Pioneer and Soldier. We Fear a Civil War*, ed. C.A. Clausen. (Oslo: National Library Database, 1970), 29-77. Online link:

can be seen. Although written eleven years apart, the message of freedom and equality stands firm and nothing is more American than these two words. The method Lovoll uses, include personal stories that show the individual immigrant in America as a part in a larger context. This is what this thesis aims at as well, but relates it toward enlistment rather than assimilation. This method Lovoll uses seems to be more qualitative in nature, rather than quantitative, because seems to focus to a larger extent on the people behind the statistics. For this reason, Lovoll's method for using personal stories to examine a larger issue than the people themselves fits this thesis as well.

This paper will examine the reasons for why the Norwegians volunteered to fight in the American Civil War. In other words, it will analyze primary sources, the America letters. By doing this, the reasons for why so many volunteered to fight will become many. Therefore, it seems reasonable to divide the various reasons into two main categories and several sub categories. The two main categories have been labeled personal reasons and collective reasons. The personal reasons mostly deals with the letters and therefore they are the writers own opinion on why he wanted to join the war. For example, Ager seems to say that all Norwegian-Americans fought in order to rid the country of slavery and he presents the soldiers as crusaders in a holy war. His most notable work regarding the Norwegian immigrants in the Civil War is Colonel *Heg and his Boys* from 1916.

The most famous group of Norwegians who fought in the war was Colonel Heg's regiment, the Wisconsin 15th Regiment. This group has been written about ever since the war and will also be included in this paper. The reason is that it consisted of nearly ninety percent Norwegians. Therefore, one cannot exclude them when writing about this particular subject. On the other hand, it is important to find other regiments and companies in the Union Army that consisted of Norwegians in order to broaden the picture and get a better overview of the situation. This is where the 2<sup>nd</sup> Minnesota Volunteer Regiment comes in. In this regiment, more specifically in company D to be precise, Norwegians numbered forty percent of the soldiers, but this company is referred to as "mostly Swedish"<sup>16</sup> in a narrative of the Third Regiment in Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars, 1861-1865. Published in 1891 in St. Paul, Minnesota, this was prepared and published under the supervision of The Board of Commissioners appointed by the Act of the Legislature of Minnesota on April 16, 1889.

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[http://www.nb.no/emigrasjon/vis\\_data\\_brev.php?lang=nor&dok\\_id=31347&fulltekst=URN:NBN:no-nb\\_emidata\\_1273](http://www.nb.no/emigrasjon/vis_data_brev.php?lang=nor&dok_id=31347&fulltekst=URN:NBN:no-nb_emidata_1273) (accessed April 30.2013)

<sup>16</sup> Minnesota State. The Board of Commissioners. *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars, 1861-1865*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. St. Paul, Minn: Electrotyped and printed for the State by the Pioneer Press Company, 1891.) 149.

General C.C. Andrews talks about recruiting in the autumn of 1861 “when people were still feeling the thrilling influence of the battle of Bull Run.”<sup>17</sup> As we can see, right from the start we are given a reason why people volunteered. On the same page, the General goes on by stating the salary which was offered to the recruit that signed up, “he was promised a bounty of one hundred dollars. The pay of the private soldier was thirteen dollars a month, as fixed by act of August 6, 1861, besides his ‘rations’ or subsistence; and in addition, clothing of the value of forty-two dollars per annum.”<sup>18</sup> The economic advantage of enlistment is evident here, but also in several other letters from the soldiers. This will be further discussed in chapter two.

The Battle of Bull Run was a Confederate victory, but it seems to have created a wave of republican fervor among all Northerners including the Norwegians and increased northern enlistment, as General Andrews writes. This tells us that since the Norwegians mostly resided in the northern states, they were caught up in this wave of enlistment. Thus explaining the General’s remarks the people influence if the Battle of Bull Run. However, these statements were made when the war had already started. In order to get a better picture of why the Norwegians enlisted one has to take a step back and look at the years leading up to the war. By looking at the letters from the period before the war, one can see that some Norwegian immigrants did have an idea of what was going on politically in their newly adopted country. This is also where the role of Norwegian newspapers comes in. In 1847, the first newspaper in Norwegian first came into print. Named *Nordlyset*, “*The Northern Light*”, it was started in Racine County, Wisconsin. It stated that it was a regular newspaper, but it also participated in political questions, since it sided with the Free Soil Party, against slavery.<sup>19</sup> This connection between the Norwegians and the Free Soil Party will be examined further with the aid of Eric Foner who has written a book about the Free Soil Party, titled *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War*.<sup>20</sup> By doing this, we can establish the connection between the Norwegian immigrants, through their seemingly pro-Free Soil ideology, up to the formation of the Republican Party in 1856, and to their subsequent enlistment for the impending war. Since the war was fought between North and South, it was also to some extent a war between two political parties, The Republican Party

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<sup>17</sup> *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars, 1861-1865* (1891), 147.

<sup>18</sup> *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars, 1861-1865* (1891), 147.

<sup>19</sup> Martin Ulvestad. *Nordmænde i America, dere Historie og Rekord*. (Waukun: Astri my Astri Publishing, 2011), 274.

<sup>20</sup> Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995)

and The Democratic Party. Most Norwegians in the North did vote Republican from 1856 and up to the war, and it is therefore important to see if one can find any evidence for a collective mindset among the Norwegians that made them go in the direction of Republicans, rather than Democrats, in addition to the fact that they lived in the area that became ground zero of Republican fervor.

The letters from Norwegians in America to Norwegians in Norway are the main primary sources of this paper. They provide a personal opinion on what was going on at the time. As the only way of communication, they consist of what we have to think of as an image of what was of utmost importance to the writer. Therefore, many letters talk about life on the farm and family life in general. However, sometimes they tell us about how they perceive the things around them that are bigger than themselves, such as the slavery debate and the imminent war. The examples are many, but maybe the best is from Mons Grinager, who wrote from Decorah, Iowa, to his brother Thorstein in Hadeland on December 16, 1856. After describing the political scene in the nation at the time, we can read between the lines that he supports the Republicans and writes that “they are pledged to oppose slavery – even at the price of blood if they can find no other way of checking this brutal and unchristian system. The fear exists that there will be a terrible civil war.”<sup>21</sup> Upon reading this, the image of a proud man with ideals slowly takes shape. When the war broke out, Grinager became a Captain in the legendary Wisconsin 15th Regiment under Colonel Heg. No letters, except those of Heg himself, gives such an image of a man quite out of the ordinary, because he takes a firm political stance and because of his knowledge about the politics of the United States at the time. As early as 1856, he feared a war over the slavery issue, and although not alone in his fears, no other letter read for this thesis has said it so explicitly. Grinager may be one of the few who joined the Union Army for ideological reasons or what he saw as his duty. On the other hand, we have a letter from an unnamed Norwegian in Dodge County, Minnesota, who writes to Norway in 1862. It seems that he has not volunteered, and now he fears the draft. He laments to the recipient of the letter, “Godt har Du, som kan være hjemme i fredelige Norge.” (You are well off, you who can be at home in peaceful Norway.)<sup>22</sup> He writes about the terrible conditions in America and how much he fears to be dragged into the

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<sup>21</sup> Mons Grinager and wife to his brother Thorstein, December 16, 1856, *The Letters of Mons C. Grinager: Pioneer and Soldier*, ed. C.A. Clausen. [http://nabo.nb.no/trip? b=EMITEKST&urn=%22URN:NBN:no-nb\\_emidata\\_1273%22](http://nabo.nb.no/trip? b=EMITEKST&urn=%22URN:NBN:no-nb_emidata_1273%22) (Active link last accessed: January 18, 2013)

<sup>22</sup> From A Norwegian in Dodge County, Minnesota (1862). *Det Løfterike Landet Database*: Active link last accessed: January 18, 2013  
[http://historievg3.cappelendam.no/c308131/tekstoppgave/vis.html?tid=342653&strukt\\_tid=308131](http://historievg3.cappelendam.no/c308131/tekstoppgave/vis.html?tid=342653&strukt_tid=308131)

war. This letter seems to correspond more with the observations made by Priest Dietrichson, as said earlier.

By comparing these two letters that so clearly differ from each other we can see that it is not easy to find any common ground among people. Although from Minnesota, this last letter writer has clearly not been caught up in the fervor that hit his state, which General Andrews talked about. Questions as to why not to join need to be answered as well as why to join. Since this Minnesota man fears a draft, he must be eligible to go to war. The answer as to why he did not join may also be found in the narrative of General Andrews. This is will be discussed further in chapter two.

### **The Whiteness Theme**

As noted earlier, the Norwegian immigrants were not viewed as “proper” whites by the Anglo-Americans when they first arrived in the U.S. David R. Roediger writes about whiteness in his book from 1991, *The Wages of Whiteness*<sup>23</sup> revised and republished in 1999. Some key terms are put forward that according to Roediger presents an intriguing variation on the theme of American exceptionalism. First, “white slavery” which according to Roediger was the most frequent metaphor used to describe white workers’ oppression. “Slavery of wages” was second, and “wage slavery” was the third most used.<sup>24</sup> These terms give an interesting perspective to the Norwegian immigrant experience at the time when seen in relation to Løvenskjold’s remarks mentioned above. If one were to connect a term like “White nigger” with “Norwegian Indians,” one has to remember that the Norwegian immigrants were being called “Norwegian Indians” by some Anglo-Americans, according to Løvenskjold. This might be evidence of a form of racism between whites. The Anglo-Americans who were the descendants of the Pilgrims were the “proper” Americans, at least in their own eyes. Immigrants such as the Norwegians were not proper whites according to the dominant Anglo-American culture in the decades leading up to the Civil War. This may not have been a reason for many Norwegians to enlist, however it seems very plausible that the immigrant leaders saw the need to create Norwegian or Scandinavian regiments in order to rid themselves of these terms, which in effect placed the Norwegians in America just above the black slaves in cultural terms. Therefore, it seems fitting to include Roediger’s whiteness theory when

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<sup>23</sup> David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, rev ed. (Verso: New York, 1999.)

<sup>24</sup> Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness* (1999), 72.

discussing enlistment among the Norwegian immigrants as a way for them to become “more white” or “whiter.”

As for the term “slavery wages,” that also can be seen as a reason for enlistment. Not only did they receive better wages, but it might have been easier as a foreigner to seek employment after having served the U.S. in the war. When applying this term put forward by Roediger, one can see another reason for enlisting. Not only would the enlistees get a decent wage and bounty, but if they survived the war, the fact that they would become veterans might have been something they saw as beneficial in the future.

There seems to be little doubt that these terms point to themes that have something to do with the eternal battle between capitalists and workers. The Norwegians who emigrated were for the most part working class people. For the Norwegian immigrants who eventually settled in the Midwest, it must have seemed logical for them to support the party that would take care of “their” goals and rights in America. At first this was the Free Soil Party, which eventually would merge with other parties and become the Republican Party in 1856. As someone who was considered as just above the black slaves, and not even close to “proper” white people, the Norwegians may have seen the need to show support for a party that would take care of the working class of America. Also, in order to ascend into the “proper” white middle class of America, they had to do something that would get the attention of the “proper” white Americans. The Civil War may have provided just such a chance. The leaders of the Norwegian immigrant communities in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Illinois saw the need and when the war started in 1861, their chance had come.

There seems to be two ways to look at white slavery, one is to consider white slavery from a proslavery perspective, the other is to consider it from an antislavery perspective, according to Roediger.<sup>25</sup> The first way to look at it would be to say that white slavery was twice as bad or cruel as the “normal” Southern style slavery because it entailed that the white man, who was above the black man in every way, would experience slavery as twice as bad because the black man was better off as a slave.<sup>26</sup> In other words, according to this view, to get rid of white slavery was to not only accept slavery, but to gather under the banner supporting Southern slavery. George Henry Evans would not accept this. His radical antislavery sentiments would have been well received by the Norwegian immigrants who

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<sup>25</sup> Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness* (1999), 74-78.

<sup>26</sup> Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness* (1999), 76.

seemed to have been firmly planted on the antislavery side in the debate regarding the question of slavery. This is evident in several letters from the Norwegians who served in the Union Army. These letters will be examined later in the paper. Evans is someone Roediger devotes quite a lot of space to because of his attacks on slavery. For Evans, all kinds of slavery should be exterminated, and the black slaves should be free and have the same kind of freedom as whites.

### **Whiteness in politics:**

It is impossible to discuss the slavery issue without taking into account the political scene in America in the decades leading up to the Civil War. The Democratic Party was by far the largest party at the time, but when the Republican Party entered the political scene the Norwegians who previously had voted Democratic or Free Soil seem to have flocked to the Republican banner. In terms of voluntary enlistment, the Norwegian support for the Republican Party is of monumental importance. Especially for the famous Norwegian volunteer, Hans C. Heg, who, being a firm abolitionist and a Republican as well, took command of the Wisconsin 15th Infantry Regiment. According to Roediger, Evans's views became the official positions of the Republican Party,<sup>27</sup> and for this reason, the issues of whiteness and white slavery are important in terms of why many Norwegians volunteered for duty as Union soldiers when the war broke out. Also, there can be little doubt that when land-hungry Norwegian farm workers came to America and were given a chance to vote, many probably voted for the party that promoted slogans such as "Free Soil," "Vote yourself a farm," "free labor," and "free white labor."<sup>28</sup> When war broke out, Lincoln would eventually make it about slavery and the Norwegians were as stated earlier, firmly on the abolitionist side in the conflict. If one combines Roediger's whiteness theme with the rise of the Republican Party on the political scene, one could begin to explain why many Norwegians saw fit to take up arms in order to defend their newly adopted country, and also use this sacrifice as a means to climb the social ladder as well. These themes discussed so far will be used as a foundation for the analysis of the letters. When considering motivations for enlistment, it has seemed most useful to employ Øverland's blood sacrifice theory.

This thesis has so far presented a theory that may explain in general terms why immigrants like the Norwegians volunteered in such high numbers compared to how few they

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<sup>27</sup> Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness* (1999), 80.

<sup>28</sup> Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness* (1999), 80-81.

were in America. In order to be more specific, one needs to turn to their words. Some of the letters confirm Øverland's theory on blood sacrifice, while others say just the opposite. Some of the volunteers enlisted for reason bigger than themselves, while others enlisted for more "selfish" reasons. One needs to put quotation marks on the word "selfish" because it seems hardly selfish to be willing to lay down your life in the service of a country that is not your native country. However, in some of the letters a word like selfish may be used because it seems as if they have little or no thoughts regarding the issues for why the war was being fought. On the other hand, selfish or not, the Norwegian-Americans who decided to enlist seem to have one thing in common: They viewed America as their home, and many of them had become more and more nationalistic.

### **A strong sense of nationalism combined with economic bonuses**

In her book, *Ethnicity on Parade*, April R. Schultz writes about the how the Norwegian-American was created through celebration.<sup>29</sup> The celebration itself is of little use for this thesis, but her theory on how the Norwegians chose which stories to remember from Norway is useful for this discussion. She says that the imagined heritage from the Vikings left a permanent mark on the Norwegians. A strong sense of nationalism though myths of bold sacrifice and blood is what people may think of when talking about the Vikings. This is relevant to this thesis because many of those who left for America chose to take with them these ideas as they volunteered to fight for their newly adopted country. Since some of the Norwegian immigrants had not been welcomed with open arms, they had to do something drastic to become visible to the Americans, but still not lose their Norwegian heritage. The dangers of employing theories like this is that one could lose the individual stories in the letters because simply by being a Norwegian, one could fall into a trap by saying that all the Norwegians who fought went to war with their Viking heritage in mind. However, one can use this to show that the immigrant leaders used every means necessary to get Norwegians to enlist.

According to Lovoll, an enlistment poster to "the Norwegian Regiment," the 15th Wisconsin Regiment offered "\$170 Cash in extra Bounty" on February 26, 1864.<sup>30</sup> Whether or not this was an act of desperation to get more Norwegians to join the cause is uncertain, but

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<sup>29</sup> April R. Schultz, *Ethnicity on Parade: Inventing the Norwegian-American through Celebration* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994)

<sup>30</sup> Odd S. Lovoll, *Det Løfterike Landet* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1997), 90.



it could be to avoid a draft. If a state did not fill up the quota, a general draft would be issued, which is what the previously noted letter from the unknown Norwegian in Dodge County in Minnesota feared. These enlistment posters, as Lovoll presents in his book are of importance to this thesis because they offered large sums of money in the form of the bounty. The bounty was a sum of money the recruit would receive upon enlisting to a regiment. The one Lovoll uses encourages Norwegians to join the Scandinavian regiment, which offered 170 dollars to each man who enlisted. It seems as if these bounties increased as the war went on, because if we compare this poster from 1864 with what Bersven Nelson received when he enlisted in 1861, he received a lesser bounty. Another poster, such as the one calling for volunteers from Madison, Dane County, says that the volunteer will get the highest bounty and pay. It does not say how high it will be, but it does say that the drafted man gets only eleven dollars a month and no bounty. However, it does say which is of interest for this thesis is that drafting will begin after August 15, but the year is missing from the poster.

If there was a wave of nationalism among the Norwegians in America at the time, these promises of cash bounty and a higher monthly salary would be tempting, since many posters say that the draft will commence. One needs only to apply some logic to make sense of the motivations for joining because many probably had need for some extra money. Also, if they were already passionate for the cause, these “bonuses” was in probability the ultimate incentive to enlist. The argument of this thesis is that the nationalism for America the Norwegians had adopted, combined with economic bonuses would probably get many to enlist voluntarily. However, unlike Lovoll who says that the economic advantage one would get from enlisting only fueled the nationalism that was already there, this thesis explores whether or not the money was the main reason behind enlisting and the ideological reason was a bonus.

Chapter two will examine the letters from those who enlisted. A list of four main reasons for enlisting will be put forward with several sub-reasons. This method of listing makes it easier to understand the complexity of such a decision because as many letters show, there were more than just the man who went to war that would suffer. Their families were dependent upon having the man at home, but the money he would receive could help them with whatever financial situation they were in.

### **Segregation and assimilation**

When European immigrants of the last century settled down in this country, most of them immediately made a sort of protective adjustment to the new environment by forming

contiguous settlements, each with a definite national flavor. The Norwegians went even further than that.<sup>31</sup> Munch quotes Blegen who said that the Norwegian settlers not only sought out other Norwegians, but also strove to settle among Norwegians who were from the same small town or valley they themselves came from in Norway.

According to Munch, some Germans, Swiss, and Irish immigrants follow the same pattern, but what sets the Norwegians apart and maybe explains why they did settle in such a fashion, was the geography of Norway. Norway is a country of mountains and fjords. For this reason, people who came from places deep in the fjords were mostly cut off from the rest of the country. This resulted in compact townships that were probably very closely knit together. For this reasons, they might have sought out people from the same places in America as well. Munch puts forward two types of growth of a settlement. One is intensive growth while the other is labeled as extensive growth.

### **1. Intensive Growth:**

Munch says that this type of growth seems to be a more increased merging of the settlement. By this he says that the Norwegians did not merge with other immigrant groups, but rather sought an “extermination of foreign elements within the restricted area of the settlement.”<sup>32</sup> The result of such a growth is less contact with other immigrant groups and society in general. Munch sees this as a “protective form of adjustment.”<sup>33</sup>

### **2. Extensive Growth:**

This form of settlement growth involves a stronger form of expansion into nearby areas. Munch states that this form of growth is more liberal in nature because of its admittance of other immigrant groups into the settlement. In other words, extensive growth is more open toward outside influence, and therefore is more open for assimilation into society in a larger sense. For the Norwegians, it would give them a chance to become more American, but it could also entail a disintegration or loss of their heritage from the old country.

Munch ties these two types of growth to the previous statement that the Norwegians did not only settle among other Norwegians, but sought to settle among their own “clan” of Norwegians. By going through what he calls a “life cycle,” from intensive to extensive

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<sup>31</sup> Munch, *Segregation and Assimilation* (1954), 109.

<sup>32</sup> Munch, *Segregation and Assimilation* (1954), 110.

<sup>33</sup> Munch, *Segregation and Assimilation* (1954), 110.

growth, he uses two settlements as examples of how the Norwegians from eastern Norway and western Norway settled in two distinct settlements in Wisconsin. The eastern Norwegians founded a settlement in the north central part of Vernon County, Wisconsin, while the western Norwegians settled in the south central part of the same county. Both of them were founded in 1850 and they were both spin-offs from the settlement at Koshkonog in Dane County. With the city of Viroqua in the middle, a trading center was provided to both groups, which was dominated heavily by Old Americans, or Anglo-Americans.

### **What has this got to do with enlistment?**

The Fifteenth Wisconsin Infantry Regiment commanded by Colonel Hans C. Heg, was predominantly a Norwegian regiment. Its birth was out of necessity as the immigrant community saw it. They could not let the Germans and Irish form regiments that had a distinct national character without doing something themselves. In order to gain more prominence among the Anglo-Americans who dominated social life in all aspects, they had to make a contribution so visible that it would be no doubt that the Norwegian-Americans were just as American as any other immigrant group.

### **Tying settlement growth to Enlistment and the creation of the Wisconsin 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment:**

One way of looking at the formation of the 15th Wisconsin is to look at it like a settlement being founded, like the two Vernon County ones. The regiment seems to have sought to eliminate foreign elements by emphasizing the relationship between Norway and the United States. Companies were given names like Odin's Guards and St. Olaf's Rifles, which can be seen as a merge between Norway and the U.S. because it had elements from the older Norse heritage, but the language was English. One can view its formation as going through Munch's "life cycle," only much faster. The regiment was formed by Norwegians, but it was formed to fight an American war. For this reason, one can connect Munch's types of growth by saying that it started with an intensive type of growth because it was a Norwegian regiment, but took on a more extensive type of growth because it was open to other immigrant groups and Americans as well.

### **Why Rasmus B. Anderson is important to this thesis:**

In his article *Rasmus B. Anderson, Pioneer and Crusader* Paul Knaplund writes: "In any "Who's Who" of Norwegian-Americans, Professor Rasmus Bjørn Anderson will always hold

a prominent place.”<sup>34</sup> Anderson was the main mythmaker concerning the Norwegians’ historical claim to a home in America. His dream was to advance the Norwegian culture in America by showing that the two countries were related in terms of history, its peoples, and government. His family came to the U.S. in 1836. By 1865, approximately 78,000 Norwegians had emigrated from Norway to America.

Several factors had worked to Anderson’s favor in regards to this dream, for this thesis it seems reasonable to look into the fact that the Civil War had strengthened the position of the Norwegians in America.

The 15th Wisconsin and the ultimate sacrifice of Colonel Heg had provided the Norwegians with a military history on the American continent and a hero to be worshiped in the shape of Heg. According to Hustvedt, “there existed among the Norwegian people a die-hard stubbornness, at times of fierce jealousy, an undue wariness of authority.”<sup>35</sup> Nothing seems to have changed after the Civil War with regard to this description of the Norwegians.

### **The Slavery issue’s impact on Andersen, a religious reason for enlisting:**

Having studied at the Saint Louis University like many other theology students, Rasmus Bjørn Anderson would have experienced the issue of slavery being hotly debated, and he would have taken part. Rumors had begun to circulate among the Norwegians in the north, and it seems that the rumors concerned whether or not the place where Norwegian ministers were being educated supported secession and slavery. According to Hustvedt, *Emigranten* ran a story that asked Professor Lauritz, or Laur, Larsen to comment on these rumors. When he did not, “an anonymous writer interpreted his silence as an admission that the rumor was well founded.”<sup>36</sup> *Emigranten* wanted the Norwegians in the North to know if their future pastors were being educated in a place that sanctioned secession and slavery. The anti-slavery sentiments among the Norwegian seem to shine through here. Furthermore, Professor Larsen finally answered and in his reply he seems to say that although slavery was something he personally abhorred, the matter of slavery was not a theological question, but a political one.

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<sup>34</sup> Paul Knaplund, Rasmus B. Anderson, Pioneer and Crusader, in *Norwegian-American Studies* Vol. 18, Norwegian-American Historical Association Database p. 23-44 [http://www.naha.stolaf.edu/pubs/nas/volume18new/vol18\\_2.htm](http://www.naha.stolaf.edu/pubs/nas/volume18new/vol18_2.htm) (accessed May 23, 2013), 23.

<sup>35</sup> Lloyd Hustvedt, *Rasmus Bjørn Anderson: Pioneer Scholar* (Northfield: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1966), 43.

<sup>36</sup> Hustvedt (1966), 48. Note: Hustvedt seems to paraphrase *Emigranten* (Madison, Wisconsin) , May 4, 15, 1861.

However, he also said that he could not find in the bible a sentence that ruled out slavery because slavery was common in biblical times. The official statement from the Norwegian Synod leaders was as follows:

Although according to God's word, it is not in and by itself a sin to own slaves, yet slavery in itself is an evil and a punishment from God, and we condemn all abuses and sins which are connected with it, just as we, when our official duties demand it, and when Christian love and wisdom require it, will work for its abolition.<sup>37</sup>

According to J. Magnus Rohne's sources, the laymen and pastors differed on their perspective between evil and sin. The laymen made no distinction between evil and sin, but the pastors do, since they do not view slavery as a sin, but an evil.<sup>38</sup> This is important with regards to the letters from the soldiers in the war because those enlisted were mostly laymen, and therefore had not studied the Bible in the same manner as pastors and ministers. Can we for this reason say that the Norwegians who joined for religious reasons, also enlisted because of their views of slavery as something sinful and evil? Are we dealing with a fundamental difference between the educated class of Norwegians and the laymen? If so, it seems reasonable to suggest that the academic response of the pastors were not well received, and the Norwegians who decided to enlist, did so because their views towards slavery compelled them to take a firm stand, contrary to their pastors. On the other hand, Rohne says that at least two church communities had taken a stand against slavery. They were the Augustanans and Eielsen churches.<sup>39</sup> However, one must use Rohne with caution too much because he wrote in 1926 which was close to Ager's filiopietistic book *Colonel Heg and His Boys* from 1916. Rohne says that the Norwegians had an inherit abhorrence towards slavery because they had abolished it in their own lands centuries before. This is impossible to prove, but the letters from the enlistees seem to suggest that most of them had an aversion to slavery and viewed it as something evil and sinful. What is important is that the Norwegian laymen seem to consider the pastors' differentiating between evil and sin as irrelevant.<sup>40</sup> Although Rasmus B. Anderson did not participate in the war itself, his mentor, or his role model, C.L. Clausen was

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<sup>37</sup> Hustvedt (1966), 49. Note: Hustvedt quotes from the original text that can be found in Rohne, *Norwegian American Lutherism Up to 1872*, 207.

<sup>38</sup> J. Magnus Rohne, *Norwegian American Lutherism Up To 1872* (New York: The Macmillian Company, 1926), 207.

<sup>39</sup> Rohne, *Norwegian American Lutherism* (1926), 207.

<sup>40</sup> Rohne, *Norwegian American Lutherism* (1926), 207.

a chaplain in the 15<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin. This is important because Anderson's works about the Norwegian soldiers in the Civil War were of such a filiopietistic nature that they cannot be viewed as nothing but propaganda. Because he knew and looked up to Clausen, Anderson's views towards the Norwegians who fought, and the war itself, combined with his personal faith, seem to have been entwined. Andersen created a myth saying that the Norwegians were the ones who saved the union. Whether or not he believed it to be true, he created it with the intention of creating some sort of justification for the sacrifice made by the Norwegians. However, to us in the present, he may have gone too far because to say something like that is pure invention. On the other hand, one can understand his motivations for creating this myth: to give the Norwegians something to be proud of, and to be able to convince the Americans that they had done their part in preserving the Union. His connection to Clausen is also of importance with regards to enlistment for religious reasons. Clausen himself, as noted before enlisted in the 15th Wisconsin, but as its chaplain. It seems clear that he enlisted for both religious reasons and his abolitionist attitude. However, before the war he was the editor of what Arlow W. Anderson calls the "more representative of Norwegian-American opinion in the 1850's."<sup>41</sup> Arlow W. Anderson is referring to *Emigranten* which was an antislavery Norwegian-American newspaper. Clausen was its first editor and while holding the editorial position, he did not make any efforts either for or against the issue of slavery, according to Anderson. Anderson also makes the claim that the reason for Clausen's unwillingness to openly support the abolitionist cause was the fact that he supported the Compromise of 1850, and believed that slavery would die a natural death.

The question as to why he eventually ended up supporting the Union by enlisting can be answered with Anderson's point that he simply saw the importance of preserving the political integrity of the United States government, as something more important than freeing the slaves.<sup>42</sup> One can therefore claim that his zeal for the antislavery cause during and after the war was a political one, rather than a religious one. However, the views of many Norwegians in the late 1850s may have been of the sort that resembles what Elias Stangeland wrote in *Den Norske Amerikaner*, "The Norwegian-American". Stangeland wrote that it may be too much to ask of the Norwegians to support the liberation and the pursuit of full citizenship to the former slaves, while the Norwegians themselves were treated with contempt

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<sup>41</sup> Arlow William Anderson, *The Immigrant Takes His Stand: The Norwegian-American Press and Public Affairs, 1847-1872*. (Northfield: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1953), 61.

<sup>42</sup> Anderson, *The Immigrant Takes His Stand* (1953), 62.

by some Americans, or what he defines as Know-Nothingism.<sup>43</sup> Although Stangeland wrote this in 1855 the slavery issue was more and more forcing all people in America to choose. It seems as if the position of the Norwegian pastors who on the one hand viewed slavery and the slave trade in the same way as Rynning had in 1838, while at the same time saying that they could not find anything in God's law that said that to own slaves was a sin, was something that only furthered the Norwegian abhorrence of slavery. Although the Norwegians were in general a devoutly Christian immigrant group at the time, they seem to have gone against their own pastors by clearly stating that slavery was both evil and a sin towards both God and Man.

Therefore, many Norwegians may have seen the act of enlisting as an act of doing the Christian thing and volunteered to end slavery once and for all in America. However, if slavery was a sin, why did the Northerners and the Norwegians not just leave the Southerners alone to sin? If slavery was a sin, they alone would go to hell and those who did not own slaves went to heaven. It is very hard to ascertain how much the Norwegians cared about slavery. It seems clear that most abhorred its existence, but they were not ardent abolitionists, at least not until the Civil War. When the war was a fact, it seems as if when the Norwegians who had previously supported the confinement of slavery saw that the war was going to be about the slavery issue, they cast their lot with the ones who wanted its annihilation. For this reasons, one can understand why the letters from the regular soldiers who enlisted do not devote much time to the slavery issue. It may be because they simply were not too concerned with the issue. However, the Norwegian immigrant community leaders and the regimental officers devote much more time to the issue of slavery and its sinful nature. For this reason, one might have a case of class distinction with regards to the importance of slavery as a reason for enlisting. On the one hand, one has the upper class of Norwegians, consisting of newspaper editors, clergymen, and other important members of the Norwegian-American communities who tried to persuade the working class. On the other hand, one had the working class who tried to get by, and who had to endure hostility by American Nativists who viewed the Norwegians as foreigners just like everybody else. Why should they fight for the liberation of the slaves, may have been a common thought among many a Norwegian.

An evidence of the transition of attitudes towards slavery in terms of going from viewing slavery as something that would eventually die a natural death in confinement, to

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<sup>43</sup> Anderson, *The Immigrant Takes His Stand* (1953), 63. Note: Anderson is referring to Stangeland's work from February 28, 1855.

viewing it as something that had to be fought with violence, may be found or personified in Hans Christian's Heg adjutant, Hans Borchsenius. According to Anderson, Borchsenius harbored ill feelings towards Catholics, particularly the Irish-Catholics, because they flocked to the Democratic Party. However, he and other newspaper editors were identified as Democrat sympathizers, and since Borchsenius had hopes for a political career,<sup>44</sup> he could not afford to be affiliated with neither the party that supported the continuation of slavery, nor the Irish-Catholics. Borchsenius was not the only one who saw the Irish-Catholics as a threat. Knud Langeland, also an editor of both *Nordlyset* and *Democraten* viewed the Irish as somewhat immoral because of their appreciation for alcohol, which was morally opposite to the temperance movement that had taken a hold among the Norwegians as a result of a religious awakening that had spread to the Midwest. Furthermore, the circumstances around Borchsenius' rather strange attack on Catholicism in the late 1850s, led to his attachment to the Democratic Party shifting towards the Republican along with the rest of the Norwegian newspaper editors. Originally a Dane, Borchsenius came to the United States in 1856 seemingly with a good education that seemed to have helped his rise within the Scandinavian immigrant community in Wisconsin. On November 14, 1861, he enlisted in the 15<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Infantry and on December 10, 1861 he was appointed Regimental Adjutant by Colonel Heg himself.<sup>45</sup> He resigned from his position September 28, 1862 due to a case of nerve fever. The case of Borchsenius is a case of interest due to his actively taking part in recruiting among the Norwegians in Wisconsin that would eventually make up a company in the 15th.

Anderson makes another point that serves as a way of distinguishing the Norwegians from the other Scandinavian immigrant groups. He writes that the Swedish-American press represented a more united front against slavery.<sup>46</sup> The Norwegian-American press however seems to have been plagued with disagreements on the slavery issue because many of the editors of the Norwegian-American newspapers were openly Democrats. Therefore, editors like Borchsenius had trouble getting the Norwegian immigrants to subscribe to his newspaper

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<sup>44</sup> Carl Fredrik Solberg and edited by Albert O. Barton, "Reminiscences of a Pioneer Editor," NAHA-Online, *Norwegian-American Studies*, Vol 1, page 134, [http://www.naha.stolaf.edu/pubs/nas/volume01/vol1\\_06.htm](http://www.naha.stolaf.edu/pubs/nas/volume01/vol1_06.htm) (accessed March 22, 2013).

<sup>45</sup> Vesterheim, Norwegian-American Museum, Decorah, Iowa, Civil War Database, "Norwegians in the Civil War," <http://vesterheim.org/CivilWar/db/b/bor/001086.html> (Accessed March 22, 2013)

<sup>46</sup> Anderson, *The Immigrant Takes His Stand* (1953), 69.



because they did not like his affiliation with the proslavery Democratic Party. According to Anderson one Swedish-American by the name Tuve Nilsson Hasselquist who was a minister and the editor of *Hemlandet* was firmly opposed to slavery.<sup>47</sup> This marks a clear difference from both the Norwegian ministers and editors who as mentioned earlier, were dealing with matters that many Norwegians viewed as irrelevant. If this is combined with the fact that other nationalities started raising ethnic regiments of their own, one can see why many Norwegians felt the need to enlist when the 15th Wisconsin was established by Colonel Heg, a plain spoken Norwegian who had not made any distinctions between evil and sin, and had always stood politically with the antislavery parties, first the Free Soilers, then the Republican Party. Hence, many letters do not speak of slavery as a reason for enlisting, but the admiration of Colonel Heg as a moral, determined, and proud Republican Norwegian-American is mentioned by many as a reason for enlisting. This makes the slavery reason a sub-reason for enlisting, because through Heg, they knew they were on the side of what was just, both towards God's and Man's law.

In order to show the number of letters and the individual reasons for enlistment as this thesis sees it, a table has been created. Note: The question marks besides some of the crosses are inserted in order to show that uncertainty in terms of pinpointing the exact reason(s) for enlistment.

| Names of Enlistees.       | Number of letters pr. person. | Economic/Career Reason | Ideological Reason | Religious Reason | Sense of Duty |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|------------------|---------------|
| Hans C. Heg               | 39                            | X                      |                    |                  | X             |
| Mons Grinager             | 10                            |                        | X                  |                  | X             |
| Ole Petter Hansen Balling | Autobiography                 | X                      |                    |                  |               |
| Bersven(d) (Ben)          | 16                            | X                      |                    |                  |               |

<sup>47</sup> Anderson, *The Immigrant Takes His Stand* (1953), 69-70.

|                             |  |   |      |      |   |
|-----------------------------|--|---|------|------|---|
| Nelson                      |  |   |      |      |   |
| Bernt<br>Olmanson           | 101  | X |      |      |   |
| E. Olsen<br>Brager          | 1  |   |      |      | X |
| Ole<br>Andersen             | 0  |   |      |      | X |
| Unknown<br>Norwegian<br>1   | 3  |   | X(?) |      |   |
| Lieberg                     | 2  |   |      |      | X |
| Lars<br>Dokken<br>Olsen     | 18   |   |      | X(?) |   |
| Knud<br>Olsen<br>Dokken     | 2  |   |      | X(?) |   |
| Severt<br>Terdall           | 17   |   |      |      | X |
| Knue<br>Nelson              | 15   | X |      |      |   |
| Ole<br>Jespersen<br>Taksdal | 1  |   |      | X    |   |
| Knut<br>Ivarson<br>Vike     | 1  | X |      |      |   |
| Total:                      | Total:   |   |      |      |   |
| 15 Names                    | 96 Letters<br>1<br>Collection of Letters<br><br>1<br>Autobiography/Memoirs |   |      |      |   |

# Chapter 2: Four Reasons for Enlisting.

## Note on Heg before the reasons:

The case of Colonel Hans Christian Heg, commander of the 15<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry Regiment is a special one. Colonel Heg is without question the Norwegian-American in the Civil War who has been hailed as the man who got the Norwegians into action in the war. For this reason, he is a man whose life needs to be looked into for this thesis as well. Being the most famous Norwegian-American soldier, he has been subject of much praise and little criticism. Upon reading his letters to his family one get an image of an ambitious man. There seems to be little doubt that he had goals set higher than “running a store,” as he himself says. However, there can be little doubt that he was a brave, selfless, and a good man and officer. Letters from soldiers within the 15<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin tell of the men’s admiration for their colonel. It seems that Ager’s words about Heg being a very popular commander are more or less correct. On the other hand, despite Heg’s perfect record from Camp Randall to Chickamauga, it seems like his letters has never been looked at in terms of enlistment. His views towards Norwegians who did not enlist were less than favorable. He had no kind words for those who did not serve with the same zeal as himself. Therefore, it seems to be time to look at Heg with a more critical eye because enough time has passed and many questions regarding Norwegian enlistment in the American Civil War. When Heg’s letters are read with a particular focus on enlistment, it is of this thesis’ opinion that Heg enlisted for several reasons as did many others. However, his belief in America and the American cause, which was to bring the Confederacy back into the Union and end slavery once and for all, was probably the main reason for him. Looking beyond this reason, one can also see other personal reasons such as ambitions for a career, either in the military or in politics. One can therefore make the argument that one can place Colonel Heg within three out of the four proposed main reasons for enlistment that are discussed below.

### 1. Sense of Duty: Paying Back For the Freedom Given To Them

Within this reason are many other reasons. To pay something back entail that the Norwegian immigrants owed something to the U.S. In some ways they did, because they had crossed the Atlantic Ocean in order to search for a better life. Those who did not leave Norway for economic reasons left for other reasons such as freedom to pursue the American Dream. When they came to America they could pursue whatever dream they had in order to achieve

happiness. Some reached their goal, some did not. What this chapter will do is to examine four reasons why this particular group of immigrants enlisted in such numbers in order to defend their newly adopted country. Based on the number of people from Norway in the United States at the time, the Norwegian immigrants served in the Union army in quite large numbers. Each of them probably had his own reasons, but through their letters and the theoretical works discussed in chapter one, these four reasons are all represented in the primary sources. In order to categorize them, it seems useful to look at the first reason for enlisting that Odd Lovoll, Jon Gjerde, and Orm Øverland see as the reason put forward by the immigrant leaders. This reason seems to be that the Norwegian immigrants had a debt to America. Most of them do not write specifically that they enlisted because they felt they had a debt to pay. An example can be made of E. Olson Brager who enlisted in the Wisconsin 15th Regiment. The way he writes, to what seems to be a friend, can be interpreted as doing ones duty without talking too much about it. He writes in 1862 that ever since they came south, they have done little. According to Brager, if the Confederates defending Richmond flee, they will come to where they are now, Corinth, Mississippi. If this happens, the Union Army, with the Wisconsin 15th, will meet them and do battle. He does not want it to happen, but if it happens, they will be ready for them, and with God's aid, they will conquer.<sup>48</sup> This could be seen as a man who is simply doing his duty. It seems that he did not want to end up on a battlefield, but according to his letter he and the rest of the soldiers will do their duty, but whether he did his duty or not in the battle is unknown, because this is the only letter from Brager. His letter serves mainly as an example of how some Norwegian soldiers in the Union Army wrote about the war and their feelings towards it. The reason(s) for enlisting is not always spelled out in front of the reader, so sometimes one has to find it between the lines, such as with the Brager letter.

### 1.1. A Debt to Pay

They had been given a chance to succeed in ways which never would have been possible in Norway and now their adopted country was in need of manpower to serve in its armed forces. For community leaders like the Heg family, it seems that they, and in particular Hans

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<sup>48</sup> E. Olson Brager to C.N. Hæsjabakken, July 17, 1862, Corinth, Mississippi, in *Det Løfterike Landet Database*, [http://nabo.nb.no/trip? b=EMITEKST&urn="URN:NBN:no-nb\\_emidata\\_A1222"](http://nabo.nb.no/trip? b=EMITEKST&urn=) (accessed May 21, 2013). Note: In the Roster for the 15<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin, there is no E. Olson Brager, but there is a Ellen Olson in Company B, in the 15<sup>th</sup> Regiment. Since there are no other E. Olson in Company B, one can assume that this is in fact Private E. Olson Brager.

Christian Heg saw it as their duty to form a regiment in order to pay this debt. This reason is a complex one because it needs to be seen as not just paying something back, but also defending the American institutions which the Norwegians had been allowed to participate in. Although Norway was a democratic society in name, since May 17<sup>th</sup> 1814, most Norwegians did not enjoy the rights listed in the Norwegian Constitution. Also, although Norway had no nobility to hold down the people, those at the bottom of the social ladder were in essence serfs both before and after 1814. These people at the bottom in Norway were the ones who made up the main bulk of immigrants who came to America in from 1825 and up to the Civil War. These people had been used to working under a “storbonde”, the landowning farmer who employed people during harvest season. Those who worked had no chance of saving up money to buy their own farm, so it seems that their only way of becoming landowners themselves was to emigrate. Also, American ideas such as freedom and equality under the law must have been an appealing thought to many. Although this answers the question as to why they went to America, it does not answer the question why fight for America. The answer to the last question must be found after settling in America. Most Norwegian immigrants settled in the West, where land was cheap, and open for cultivation. The majority of those who went from Norway to America at that time were used to this kind of work, and it seems that they sought this way of life in America as well. In America, they were able to acquire land for themselves and become independent landowning farmers. Those who achieved this were now in the very class they had worked for in Norway. These people became in turn community leaders in the newly established Norwegian townships and communities in states like Wisconsin, Iowa, and later Minnesota. Clustering together in close vicinity to each other these people made the Norwegian language, culture and mentality prevail in these areas. One can say that Norway was established in America, with some modifications. The process of assimilation was slow according to Lovoll. He says that the second generation of Norwegians lived for the most part under the same conditions as the first generation of immigrants.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, those who enlisted in the Civil War were either first or second generation immigrants. This tells us that they were in essence still Norwegian, but had adopted America as their home along with American ideals of freedom, liberty, equality, and republicanism, as opposed to constitutional monarchy. Also, the idea to assimilate completely into American culture could result in losing their Norwegian heritage. The idea of losing their heritage seems

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<sup>49</sup> Odd S. Lovoll, *The Promise of America: A History of the Norwegian-American People*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1984:309.

to have been something the Norwegians did not want, but rather to assimilate enough to be seen as not foreigners, but rather as Norwegian-Americans, which according to Lovoll was their goal.

## 2. Ideological Reason: Connection between Enlistment and the Free Soil Party Ideals

In order to connect the reason for enlistment to the idea of paying debt, it seems useful to connect enlistment to a certain group of immigrants, the community leaders. As is the most famous Norwegian-American Civil War hero, Hans C. Heg. For this reason, he is the starting point of the argument. He was a leader in the Norwegian immigrant community. His father, Even Heg, had emigrated from Lier, Drammen and arrived in Wisconsin when Hans was only eleven years old. The leadership skills that Hans possessed seemed to have come from his father who, upon arriving in Wisconsin, quickly became the “acknowledged leader of the community.”<sup>50</sup> Being the son of a prominent man such as Even Heg, Hans eventually followed in his footsteps as the immigrant leader who in 1861 created the 15<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Regiment. In order to understand the argument that the Norwegians had a debt to pay to America in terms of enlistment, one must understand Hans C. Heg. He was a local politician who according to, Theodore Blegen, was heavily influenced by what a writer who knew Heg, called “the “freedom equality, and the spirit of brotherhood” of the frontier.”<sup>51</sup> Blegen claims his party was the Free Soil Party. This connection is worth looking more closely into because the Free Soilers were popular among some of the Norwegian immigrants, and the Norwegian newspaper *Nordlyset*, (The Northern Light) co-founded by Heg’s father, was a pro-Free Soil paper. According to Lovoll, *Nordlyset* would in addition to giving traditional news, engage in political discussion and side with the Free Soil Party, putting emphasis on slavery.<sup>52</sup>

Lovoll provides some important information regarding the newspaper in his book, *Norwegian Newspapers in America*. In it, he has an old list of those who subscribed for the paper. According to Knud Langeland, who was the editor of *Nordlyset* before moving it to Racine County and gave it a new name, *Democraten*, (The Democrat) there were 278 subscribers. Seventy percent of them resided in Wisconsin, the rest in Illinois. Langeland also

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<sup>50</sup> Theodore C. Blegen, *The Civil War Letters of Colonel Hans Christian Heg* (Northfield, Minnesota: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1936), 6.

<sup>51</sup> Blegen, *The Civil War Letters of Colonel Hans Christian Heg* (1936), 15. Note: Blegen cites a writer who knew Heg personally, but leaves no note of who this writer was.

<sup>52</sup> Odd S. Lovoll. *Norske Aviser I Amerika*. (Oslo: Scandinavian Academic Press, 2012), 25-26

notes that he knew that many neighbors shared the subscription charge and took turns in reading it. This was fairly common according to him, and one can assume that more than these 278 people with their families read the paper. In addition, the reading skills among the Norwegian immigrants were fairly good in Norwegian. Lovoll comments that one must take in to account the distinct difference between the language used by the press, which was more Danish-Norwegian, and the different dialects spoken in Norway at the time which the immigrants brought with them,<sup>53</sup> which also the America letters show. Anyway, the fact that many people read a paper like *Nordlyset* can suggest that they were aware of what was going on in the political landscape in America. For this reason, they would be subjected to a Free Soil agenda that Heg represented.

The Free Soil Party seems to have been a natural choice for the Norwegian immigrants in terms of a party forwarding their interests as land-hungry immigrants. Moreover, the Free Soil Party would be one of the parties that merged and became in 1856, the Republican Party. The Republican Party was a result of many smaller political groups, like the Free Soilers, joining together in order to form a united front against the Democrats. Even some anti-slavery Democrats joined the new party along with former Whigs, and other as such. The new Republican Party had a strong base of support in the northwestern states, which is where many Norwegians settled. States like Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Illinois were caught up in the Republican fervor which helped the Republicans gain traction, and finally elect Abraham Lincoln to the Presidency in 1860. Eric Foner puts it like this in his introduction to the 1995 edition of his study of the ideology of the Republican Party before the war:

...the Republican Party before the Civil War was united by a commitment to a “free labor ideology” grounded in the precepts that free labor was economically and socially superior to slave labor and that the distinctive quality of Northern society was the opportunity it offered wage earners to rise to property-owning independence.<sup>54</sup>

If we put Foner to use with the idea that the press is the mirror of public opinion, than we can understand why many Norwegians were Republicans back in the years from the arrival of the Norwegian immigrants up to the Civil War. This has a direct link to enlistment because it shows us that from the first publication of *Nordlyset* in 1847 with its Free Soil agenda, to the creation of the Republican Party in 1856, and up to the Civil War, many Norwegians had cast

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<sup>53</sup> Lovoll, *Norske Aviser I Amerika* (2012), 25-26.

<sup>54</sup> Eric Foner, introduction to *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), I.

their lot with those who would fight for the abolishment of slavery and the survival of the Union. The community leaders of the Norwegian immigrant societies saw it as their job to let everyone know that the Norwegians, as immigrants, would help in defending the country that had offered them a new start. Also, the Free Soil Party convention of 1852 made their position in the slavery issue well known to all when it said that slavery was “a sin against God and a crime against man.”<sup>55</sup>

## 2.1 The Slavery Issue.

Heg became involved in politics in his twenties. As noted earlier, his connection to the Free Soil Party was replaced when several parties merge into the Republican Party in 1856. In 1859 he was nominated as a candidate for state prison commissioner by the Republican state convention.<sup>56</sup>

According to Blegen, Heg emphasized the slavery issue in his nomination by declaring that the Norwegians had left the most beautiful country in the world for a free country, America. He said that because of this, the Norwegians were natural opposed to slavery. With this emphasis on the slavery issue, he won the office and became the first Norwegian immigrant elected to public office. With this in mind, one can assume that Heg’s position as a leader of the Norwegian community in Wisconsin was secured. In terms of enlistment, one could maybe not have asked for a better recruiter than Heg. Along with other immigrant community leaders from Wisconsin, he dispatched to Governor Randall a letter that stated “that said meeting has passed a resolution to raise a Scandinavian Brigade for the war now pending in this our adopted Country.”<sup>57</sup> From this, one can make the assumption that Heg saw it as his duty to go to war for his new country. It seems like he emphasized that every able bodied Norwegian immigrant had to join the cause for the preservation of their adopted government, a government that had given them freedom and had given them the opportunity to prosper, when he asked, “is it not our duty as brave and intelligent citizens to extend our hands in

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<sup>55</sup> Arlow Anderson, *The Immigrant takes his Stand: The Norwegian-American Press and Public Affairs, 1847-1872* (Northfield: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1953), 59.

<sup>56</sup> Theodore C. Blegen, preface to *The Civil War Letters of Colonel Hans Christian Heg* (Northfield: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1936), 16.

<sup>57</sup> Blegen, *The Civil War Letters of Colonel Hans Christian Heg* (1936) Note: Blegen quotes from the letter dated September 5, 1861. Blegen’s quote and reference on page 21.



defense of the cause of our country and of our homes?”<sup>58</sup>

The way Heg presents this seems to say that said if a man does not enlist he is a coward. In one of his letters to his wife, he writes that he has heard that Wisconsin has to raise five more regiments, and that this cannot be done without a draft. Through his language when writing about those who did not enlist when they did not have to, one can identify a rather negative attitude towards these people. He writes to Gunhild on July 14, 1862, that “we will make some of these fellows come out who have laid at home sucking their thumb.”<sup>59</sup>

Someone who did not volunteer at first was a Norwegian from Dodge County, Minnesota. Sadly, his name is unknown so it is impossible to find him in any roster. However, one can still trace his sentiments towards enlisting and the coming of a draft in 1862. When Heg wrote that he wanted to see those who had not yet volunteered drafted, it was July, 1862. This unknown Norwegian from Minnesota wrote in September, 1862.

Although Heg was talking about Wisconsin, he had spoken about in other letters to be allowed to raise additional regiments in Minnesota as well. This had been denied due to other were going to do it. This unknown Minnesota man had clearly not enlisted, and therefore feared that his name would be one of those who were going to be drafted. His letter is in Norwegian and has not been translated, so this author paraphrases here. He says that every male citizen between the ages of 18 and 45, regardless of whether he is married or not, which this man was, would by October 1862 be drafted for military service. In his county alone, he says, 118 men would be drafted on top of those who had already volunteered. Furthermore, he says that they are now walking around waiting and tension is high. He says that they feel like prisoners of war already in this so-called free country. Moreover, his letter seems to suggest that on the one hand they can choose to be “cannon-fodder” to the guns of the South, or remain in Minnesota at the mercy of the Indians, which is a probable reference to the Sioux Uprising of 1862.<sup>60</sup> Heg’s views towards those who did not take up arms when the call for volunteers was heard are quite visible as abysmal. He goes on in his letter from July 14, 1862, to say that those who enlisted right away are the ones that would receive an honorable reputation after the war. This is an example of how difficult it is to pinpoint the exact reason

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<sup>58</sup> Blegen, *The Civil War Letters of Colonel Hans C. Heg* (1936), 23. Note: Blegen is quoting Heg

<sup>59</sup> Blegen, *The Civil War Letters of Colonel Hans C. Heg* (1936), 108.

<sup>60</sup> Letter from a Norwegian to an unknown recipient in Dodge County, Minnesota, September 1862. The letter was found on the Cappellen’s website:

[http://historievg3.cappellendam.no/c308131/tekstoppgave/vis.html?tid=342653&strukt\\_tid=308131](http://historievg3.cappellendam.no/c308131/tekstoppgave/vis.html?tid=342653&strukt_tid=308131)

why Heg and other Norwegians enlisted to fight. On the one hand it is easy to understand Heg's frustrations towards those who did not share his zeal for the United States, but on the other hand, one can understand this unknown Norwegian who did not volunteered and dreaded the draft because then his wife and possibly his family would be left alone, and as it seems, be at the mercy of the Native Americans.

Another Norwegian, whose story has been hard to track, is that of Second Lieutenant Ole Andersen from Iowa. Although he seems to have left no letters personally, someone who knew him or possibly a relation wrote about him. Jørgen Gulbrandsen wrote to his sister and brother-in-law on September 29, 1861. Gulbrandsen seems to have lived in Decorah, Iowa, or at least this letter from him was written in Decorah. He devotes much of the letter to the war and Ole's part in it. According to Vesterheim, the Norwegian-American Museum, Ole A. Andersen enlisted on May 21, 1861 into the Iowa 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry, Company D. The evidence presented at Vesterheim's database corresponds with the letter from Gulbrandsen. Ole had his residence in Decorah, Winnishiek County, Iowa. Also, Ole was indeed made second Lieutenant, which according to Gulbrandsen was because he was loved and respected by Norwegians and Americans alike.<sup>61</sup> The letter also tells of how Ole was injured. This also corresponds correctly to Vesterheim's findings, and also to what Karl Jakob Skarstein has found in his book, *Til Våpen For Det Nye Land*. In his book, Skarstein writes about how some Union cannons were in danger of being captured by Confederate soldiers and that Ole Andersen leads the counterattack that avoided the Confederates to capture these guns.<sup>62</sup> Why Ole enlisted is unknown, but according to the letter of Jørgen Gulbrandsen the slavery issue was why many Norwegians in Iowa enlisted. Why Gulbrandsen himself did not enlist is unknown, but it could be that he was too old to serve in the army or that he simply did not want to. He gives no clues as to why he himself does not join the others who did enlist. However, he is attempting to explain the recipient(s) of the letter why there is a war and the reasons for it. The issue of slavery and the difference between the North and the South is something he goes into in detail. He tells of how the North will not bow to a system that goes

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<sup>61</sup>Jørgen Gulbrandsen in Norwegian, to his mother, sister and brother-in-law, Decorah, Iowa, September 29, 1861. Found in the database of the Norwegian National Library and the Norwegian Immigrant Museum at Hamar. Direct link: [http://nabo.nb.no/trip?\\_b=EMITEKST&urn=%22URN:NBN:no-nb\\_emidata\\_A0244%22](http://nabo.nb.no/trip?_b=EMITEKST&urn=%22URN:NBN:no-nb_emidata_A0244%22)

<sup>62</sup> Karl Jakob Skarstein, *Til Våpen For Det Nye Land: Norske Innvandrere I Den Amerikanske Borgerkrig* (Gjøvik: J.W. Cappelens Forlag, 2001), 51.

against God's law and that through the sheer strength of numbers, the North will prevail.<sup>63</sup> If Gulbrandsen's views are representable, the reasons for why Ole went to war may have something to do with slavery. If he was respected by Norwegians and Americans alike, it may have been because he was a confirmed anti-slavery man, and answered the call for volunteers quickly. On the other hand, Skarstein writes that many of the Norwegians who fought in the Missouri area wrote letters that tell of an eagerness to get into combat and demonstrated a firm belief in themselves.<sup>64</sup> If Ole fitted this description, one might compare him with Bersven Nelson who enlisted for economic reasons, but also for the thrill of adventure and an opportunity to explore the country.<sup>65</sup> It becomes troublesome to make up one's mind about why Ole enlisted, but like with nearly all the Norwegians who volunteered, to find the one reason that made them enlist is impossible. The fact seems to be that they went to war for a number of reasons. Ole A. Andersen is no different it would seem, but given that this letter written by Gulbrandsen who presumably knew Ole, one can identify a strong sense of duty towards enlisting when the call for volunteers was made, and that many Norwegians in Iowa harbored strong anti-slavery sentiments.

It becomes an impossible task to find one decisive reason. On the other hand, the sources do suggest a number of reasons. One must try to list them according to importance and thereafter discuss the different reasons and come up with an idea of why they joined the war. This will probably result in a host of reasons for each individual, but put together they make up an image of what it was like to be an immigrant in America when their adopted country was in desperate need of manpower to fight a Civil War.

By saying that their homes are in danger, he plays on fear. This notion of fear was true, because these words were printed in *Emigranten* on October 7, 1861, and the Union defeat at Bull Run on July 21 was still felt among the peoples in the Northern states where the Norwegian immigrants resided. General C.C. Andrews reports in his narrative of the Third Minnesota Regiment that recruiting was done when people still felt the "thrilling influence of

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<sup>63</sup> Letter from Jørgen Gulbrandsen in Norwegian, dated September 29, 1861. Found in the database of the Norwegian National Library and the Norwegian Immigrant Museum at Hamar. Direct link: [http://nabo.nb.no/trip? b=EMITEKST&urn=%22URN:NBN:no-nb\\_emidata\\_A0244%22](http://nabo.nb.no/trip? b=EMITEKST&urn=%22URN:NBN:no-nb_emidata_A0244%22)

<sup>64</sup> Skarstein, *Til Våpen For Det Nye Land* (2001), 52.

<sup>65</sup> C.A. Clausen, ed, *Notes of a Civil War Soldier: Bersven Nelson*. Translated and edited by C.A. Clausen.

the battle of Bull Run.”<sup>66</sup> Heg can be seen as the representative figure of the “debt” argument, because as the natural leader of his community, he saw the need for the Norwegians to play their part in the war, a war which they owed to the U.S. government to volunteer for. This feeling of having to do something about the situation the country was in may have been felt even stronger after the defeat at Bull Run. As it seems, many Norwegians across states borders felt the same way.

On other hand, this was an opportunity for the Norwegians to rise above their immigrant status and become integrated into the American cultural elite, and thusly become “proper” Americans and not just foreigners. This brings us to the second reason for enlistment that was to make what Orm Øverland defines as a blood sacrifice in order to become true Americans.

## **2.2 Becoming true Americans.**

The Norwegians were not seen as Americans when the war broke out. They were foreigners to the Anglo-Americans, just like all the other immigrant groups. In order for an immigrant group to become accepted by the dominant group in a specific country, a sacrifice of blood is necessary. This seems to be true for all countries and peoples, and it was for the Norwegians in America as well. Although Heg had been accepted by the Republican Party in 1859 when he won the candidacy for state prison commissioner, Blegen says that this was done to secure Norwegian support for the Republican Party. In order for the Norwegians as a group to be viewed by the Americans as “true” Americans, a visible contribution to the war seemed necessary. This argument falls into the “debt” argument in some cases, they differ in other cases. Ethnicity did have something to do with enlistment. For practical reasons it was important because if the regular soldiers did not understand their commanding officers, how could they do anything? Also, the idea of enlisting in predominantly Norwegian or Scandinavian regiment must have been preferable to the Norwegians who did not speak or understand English. According to Blegen, the Norwegians preferred to be commanded by someone from their own ranks and blood. If this is true, then the very idea of enlisting in a Norwegian regiment may have been reasons enough for some. However, Norwegian immigrants had experienced racial abuse from Anglo-Americans ever since they arrived in the U.S.

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<sup>66</sup> *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars, 1861-1865*. St. Paul, Minnesota: Electrotyped and Printed for the State by the Pioneer Press Company, 1891: 147.

As noted in chapter one, Lovoll writes about the Norwegian being referred to as Norwegian Indians because the Norwegian immigrants had a reputation of being lazy and not very intelligent.<sup>67</sup> Having probably been aware of this description of themselves, many must have wanted to show the Americans that the Norwegians were just as brave, productive, and were loyal to the American way of life as any immigrant group, or the Americans for that matter. The relationship with other immigrant groups is of particular interest in regards to enlistment, because Heg himself said that the Norwegians could not allow themselves to be outmatched by the Irish and Germans in terms of creating ethnic regiments.<sup>68</sup> To create an ethnic regiment was to create awareness of the particular ethnic group's love for America. By creating such a regiment, the ethnic group could point to it and say that we are Americans because we have sacrificed our blood for this country. In doing so, they sacrificed themselves, or were at least willing to do, for the preservation of the Union. An act of voluntary sacrifice upon the altar of an adopted country seems to be the highest form of sacrifice one can make. Therefore, one can assume that this was something the immigrant leaders among the Norwegians in America were aware of. According to April Schultz, the Norwegians also wanted to tie their Norwegian heritage to their adopted American heritage.<sup>69</sup> This would result in creating not an American identity, but rather a Norwegian-American identity. This fits with what Lovoll says about assimilation. He says that many scholars who are preoccupied with assimilation often overlook the fact that the second generation does not escape the first generation's heritage, but rather they preserve by adjusting it to new circumstances.<sup>70</sup> Whether or not the Civil War was something that changed everything is hard to say, but many of those who sacrificed themselves were first generation immigrants (according to the rosters) and their sacrifice was of such a magnitude that the second generation did not want to escape it. On the other hand, the sacrifice of the ones who enlisted were of such magnitude that they went through a form of assimilation that lead from being Norwegian, to becoming Norwegian-American. However, this does not seem to apply to Heg personally because he seems to have been through an Americanization process due to the fact that he came to

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<sup>67</sup>Odd S. Lovoll, *The promise of America: a history of the Norwegian-American people* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1984), 71.

<sup>68</sup> Blegen, *The Civil War Letters of Colonel Hans C. Heg* (1936), 22.

<sup>69</sup> April R. Schultz, *Ethnicity on Parade: Inventing the Norwegian American Through Celebration* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), 120-121.

<sup>70</sup> Lovoll, *The promise of America* (1984), 308.

America as a child. Since he was born in Norway, he was a first generation immigrant, but being at an age when you take in all the impressions and you form your own identity, it seems like he became Americanized before the war. This may have something to do with the fact that he embarked on a political career when he was quite young, but his words when trying to get people to enlist are words that are meant to remind Norwegians about their Norwegian heritage. For this reason, one might put forward the assertion that Heg was the prototype of the Norwegian-American because he retained his Norwegian cultural traits but defended American ideals to the end. So, in conclusion one might say that Heg's example was something that many Norwegians admired and hoped to achieve the same for themselves by following him in his regiment.

### **3. Religious Reasons for Enlisting.**

#### **3.1. The Religious Scene in the Northwest before the Civil War.**

At the time of the eve of the Civil War, the religious scene was going through some turmoil in the states where the Norwegians had settled. Many Norwegians were caught up in the religious revivals that nearly forced everyone to take sides in religious matters and how religion was to be practiced. The issue of slavery was hotly debated and different religious views towards slavery seem to have been divided between the North and the South. Most Norwegians who lived in the Northwestern states seem to have been firmly opposed to slavery. Although there may have been some different views as to how slavery was to end. If slavery was to end, how was it going to be abolished? Through war or let it die a "natural death" through contamination in the South.

When the Southern states seceded and the Confederacy was established, there seems to have been little doubt in the minds of the Norwegians as to what had to be done. Slavery was not something to be tolerated and it must be ended. However, not everyone wanted to do what was necessary to end it. In the mind of Hans Christian Heg, there seemed to be little doubt what had to be done. Slavery was something unholy in his mind, and surely to many others. Heg's letters reveal a man who seems to be religious, but not a fundamentalist or purist. However, he puts his faith in Providence, as he writes to his wife Gunhild, that he will come out of this war alive.<sup>71</sup> Regarding enlistment, Heg himself seems to not have joined for

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<sup>71</sup> Blegen, *The Civil War Letters of Colonel Hans C. Heg* (1936), 62.

religious reasons, but his letters reveal a belief in slavery as something unholy, which suggests that his views towards slavery is based in some religious thought. In a letter to his wife on April 1, 1862, he writes about the Confederate enlistees in such a fashion that portrays them as being tricked by their own government, “how these poor people are fooled to go into an unholy war, a war that will certainly use them up entirely.”<sup>72</sup> Slavery itself is something unholy, but to fight a war in order to preserve this institution is equally unholy according to Heg. The quote from his letter seems to suggest that he feels sad for the Southern soldiers, but at the same time his attitudes towards the institution of slavery is very clear. As for the soldiers who are fighting to defend it, his words seems to entail a form of respect for them, but at the same time he knows that these Confederate soldiers has to be killed in order to rid the U.S. of slavery.

Heg’s position as an anti-slavery man may have had something to do with his personal views on slavery that were based in religion, but one must not forget that he had run for a political office before the war. In his campaign, he put emphasis on the slavery issue and his position against it. In his letters as a colonel in the Civil War, he seems to be keen to report that he and his regiment, the Scandinavian Regiment, have freed more slaves than any other in the army.<sup>73</sup> Whether or not this is true seems to be hard to establish as a fact. His reasons for saying this to his wife may be seen as little more than bragging. (Which he seems to do a lot.) An important point regarding Heg’s position as a man who joined for religious reasons is his view towards some of his own countrymen. In another letter to his wife he praised two companies in his regiment, A and C, but condemns Company K for not doing anything but “read their Norwegian prayer Books and hang out a long face.”<sup>74</sup> It seems reasonable to suggest that Heg has little time for religious matters while in the service. Whether or not he would have cared if those in Company K had enlisted for religious reasons, we cannot know. However, it does seem that Heg’s personal religion did not play any part when it came to enlisting. It may be that Heg is the personification of Øverland’s blood sacrifice theory. His sense of nationalism, both towards the United States and for the promotion of the Norwegians in America, seems to have been his reason for enlisting. On January 26, 1863, Heg maybe reveals one reason for enlisting without knowing it when he says that he has hopes for a

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<sup>72</sup> Blegen, *The Civil War Letters of Colonel Hans C. Heg* (1936), 73.

<sup>73</sup> Blegen, *The Civil War Letters of Colonel Hans C. Heg* (1936), 115.

<sup>74</sup> Blegen, *The Civil War Letters of Colonel Hans C. Heg* (1936), 115.

promotion, but also for a more “favorable influence of Norwegians in Wisconsin.”<sup>75</sup> The exact quotation is not to be found in the letters, but Blegen who edited the letters wrote this as a way to sum up this letter. What sort of influence Heg is talking about is unknown, but given his history as a pioneer among Norwegians in American politics, it might be influence in local or state politics he is referring to.

Religion played a significant role in the lives of the immigrants. In the correspondence of the Norwegian immigrants it does seem that there was a difference between “true faith” and a mechanical choice of words. Almost all the letters have some religious element in them, but some are more deeply religious in the way they communicate. For example, in the letters from two brothers who fought in the 15<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin, they talk of God in a way that makes them both seem very religious because both of them, but maybe especially Lars Olsen Dokken write in a way that makes it seem that he truly believes that “the Lord will heal all the sick and grieving people in this enemy land.”<sup>76</sup> The enemy land is in Tennessee on May 4, 1862. Another Norwegian who seems to harbor deep religious feelings is Knud S. Aaker from Goodhue County, Minnesota. In the opening lines of his letter to his son-in law, he writes “may God make it as mild and bearable as possible, which He surely does and, although we would or could understand it reluctantly, He still has shown His wise and love-filled intentions thereby, which we with humble patience and devotion to His will may try to accept with humble devotion.”<sup>77</sup> On the other hand, we have a captain the 15<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin, Mons Grinager. In his Civil War letters, he writes nothing like Lars Dokken, but in a more “normal” way. His way of talking about God and religion seems to be in a more “common” way. In his only mention of God in his letter to his family on May 24, 1862, he writes “I am, thank God, in good health and am feeling fine.”<sup>78</sup> As we can see, the two letters are quite different, and so were the people who wrote them. Although religion knows no social class, it seems to be more deeply felt in the lower class, or “normal” families in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, Grinager has a personal opinion of slavery and the way he views it is as something horrible. He writes about having been to a plantation somewhere in Tennessee and he writes

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<sup>75</sup> Blegen, *The Civil War Letters of Colonel Hans C. Heg* (1936), 179.

<sup>76</sup> Lars Olsen Dokken, Island No. 10, Tennessee, May 4, 1862.

<sup>77</sup> Knud S. Aaker, Holden Township, Goodhue County, Minnesota, 1863. Letter found in *America- America- Letters: A Norwegian-American Family Correspondence*, ed. Bjørn Gunnar Østgård (Northfield: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 2001), 21.

<sup>78</sup> Captain Mons H. Grinager, Island No. 10, Tennessee, May 24, 1862.



that “the abhorrence I have always felt toward slavery is considerably stronger now than ever before because of these first hand observations.”<sup>79</sup> Although he does not mention God or any religious attitudes as reasons for his feelings towards slavery, he seems to be a regular churchgoer because in an earlier letter he wrote about the religious scene in America. In this letter from August 25, 1853, to his mother and siblings he wrote that there are many religious sects in America and that everyone can choose freely which they want to join. Maybe he wrote it to show the difference between Norway and America. What this seems to have done to the Norwegians in America is that they cannot agree upon religious matters, and the Haugeans had built a church close to the first church, which presumably was Lutheran.<sup>80</sup> What one can extract from this passage of the letter is that Grinager went to church, and it seems to have a standard Norwegian Lutheran church. Grinager states in his letter from the Civil War that he was opposed slavery. When he came to America he may have had already had some notions of oppression on the account of religion or skin color with him from Norway.

According to Arlow Anderson who wrote *The Immigrant takes his Stand* in 1953, there might be a connection between the seemingly widespread anti-slavery notions among Norwegian immigrants, and the actions by the Norwegian government in Norway in the 1840s and early 1850s. Since toleration was granted to Catholics in 1845, and Jews were allowed to come to Norway in 1851,<sup>81</sup> there seemed to have a natural inclination towards accepting people from all faiths and creeds. If these ideas are combined with Ole Rynning’s *True Accounts of America*, in which he speaks of slavery and the slave trade as an “ugly contrast” to the ideals of America that were freedom and equality, and a statement from a lay preacher named Elling Eielsen, who according to Anderson, “denounced slavery as a ”frightful sin” and declared that Negroes “are redeemed by the same blood and are destined to inherit the same glory as other races.”<sup>82</sup> These three elements of heritage from Norway with

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<sup>79</sup> Captain Mons H. Grinager to his family, Island No. 10, Tennessee, May 24, 1862, in *The Letters of Mons H. Grinager: Pioneer and Soldier*, ed. C.A. Clausen, [http://nabo.nb.no/trip? b=EMITEKST&urn="URN:NBN:no-nb\\_emidata\\_1273"](http://nabo.nb.no/trip? b=EMITEKST&urn=)

<sup>80</sup> Mons H. Grinager to his mother, brothers, and sisters, Honey Creek, Wisconsin, August 25, 1853, in *The Letters of Mons H. Grinager: Pioneer and Soldier*, ed. C.A. Clausen, [http://nabo.nb.no/trip? b=EMITEKST&urn="URN:NBN:no-nb\\_emidata\\_1273"](http://nabo.nb.no/trip? b=EMITEKST&urn=)

<sup>81</sup> Anderson, *The Immigrant takes his Stand* (1953), 58.

increased toleration, slavery as something fundamental un-American, and finally the idea of slavery as something that went against God's law, may have come together at the outbreak of the war, as reason enough for some Norwegian immigrants to take up arms, not only to defend their newly adopted country, but also in emancipating the slaves.

### 3.2 The Slavery Issue, a religious Reason for Enlisting:

Having studied at the St. Louis to become a theologian, Rasmus Bjørn Andersen would have taken part in the slavery debate on campus. Rumors had begun to circulate among the Norwegians in the North, and it seems like the rumors surrounded whether or not the place where Norwegian ministers were being educated supported secession and slavery. According to Lloyd Hustvedt, *Emigranten* ran a story that asked Professor Larsen to comment on these rumors, when he did not, "an anonymous writer interpreted his silence as an admission that the rumor was well founded."<sup>83</sup> *Emigranten* wanted the Norwegians in the North to know if their future pastors were being educated in a place that sanctioned secession and slavery. The anti-slavery sentiments among the Norwegian immigrants seems to shine through here. Furthermore, Professor Larsen finally answered and in his reply he seems to say that although slavery was something he personally abhorred, the matter of slavery was not a theological question, but a political one. However, he also said that he could not find in the Bible a sentence that ruled out slavery because slavery was common in biblical times. The official word from the Norwegian Synod leaders was as follows: "Although according to God's word, it is not in and by itself a sin to own slaves, yet slavery in itself is an evil and a punishment from God, and we condemn all abuses and sins which are connected with it, just as we, when our official duties demand it, and when Christian love and wisdom require it, will work for its abolition."<sup>84</sup> According to J. Magnus Rohne's sources, the laymen and pastors disagreed between evil and sin. Laymen made no distinction between evil and sin, but the pastor do since they do not view slavery as a sin, but an evil.<sup>85</sup> This is important with regard to the

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<sup>82</sup> Anderson, *The Immigrant takes his Stand* (1953), 58-59.

<sup>83</sup> Lloyd Hustvedt, *Rasmus Bjørn Anderson: Pioneer Scholar* (Northfield: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1966), 48. Note: Hustvedt seems to paraphrase from *Emigranten* (Madison, Wisconsin), May 4, 15, 1861.

<sup>84</sup> Hustvedt, *Rasmus Bjørn Anderson: Pioneer Scholar* (1966), 49. Note: Hustvedt quotes from the original text that can be found in Rohne, *Norwegian American Lutheranism Up to 1872*, 207.

<sup>85</sup> J. Magnus Rohne, *Norwegian American Lutherism Up To 1872* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1926), 207.

letters from the soldiers in the war because those enlisted were mostly laymen, and therefore had not studied the Bible in the same manner as pastors and ministers. Can we for this reason say that the Norwegians who joined for religious reasons, also enlisted because of their views of slavery as something sinful and evil? Are we dealing with a fundamental difference between the educated class of Norwegians and the laymen?

If so, it seems reasonable to suggest that the academic response of the pastors was not well received, and the Norwegians who decided to enlist, did so because their views towards slavery compelled them to take a firm stand, contrary to their pastors. On the other hand, Rohne says that at least two church communities had taken a stand against slavery. They were the Augustanans and Eielsen churches.<sup>86</sup> However, one must be careful when using Rohne too much because he wrote in 1926 which was close to Ager's filiopietistic book *Colonel Heg and his Boys* from 1916. If one remembers Øverland who maybe would put Rohne in with Ager and Andersen as a filiopietistic writer because Rohne says that the Norwegians had an inherited abhorrence towards slavery because they had abolished it in their own lands centuries before. The way the Norwegians are being lifted up as defenders of the slaves sounds like an overgeneralization because it is impossible to prove, but the letters from the enlistees seem to suggest that most of them had an aversion to slavery and viewed as something evil and sinful, but they do not show any inherited abhorrence towards the institution of slavery as Rohne writes. Someone who seems to have no such natural abhorrence towards slavery was Knute Nelson. Nelson was a Private in Company B, 4<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Cavalry. During the course of the war, he became a Corporal and on December 19, 1863 he writes to his parents that he has been given the opportunity to command a regiment of black men. However, he declines because "I do not like the black man well enough for that."<sup>87</sup> His personal feelings towards the black slaves themselves may not have anything to do with his feelings towards the institution of slavery, but his own words seem to suggest that some of the Norwegians did not have particularly warm feelings towards the blacks. This view is further supported by Carl Frederick Solberg, the editor of *Emigranten* from 1857 to 1860. Arlow W. Anderson writes in his article, *Lincoln and the Union: A Study*

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<sup>86</sup> Rohne, *Norwegian American Lutheranism Up To 1872* (1926), 207.

<sup>87</sup> Knute Nelson to his parents, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, December 16, 1863, found in NB's *Det Løfterike Landet* Database, <http://nabo.nb.no/trip? b=EMITEKST&r=713& f=note> (accessed May 5, 2013) ed. Millard L. Gieske.

of the Editorials of *Emigranten and Fæderlandet*, that Solberg replied in an editorial from October 26, 1853 when the Republicans were being called “nigger-worshippers” by “anti-government forces,” that the North did not exalt the black slaves in any way, but they rather looked at slavery as morally wrong.<sup>88</sup> Solberg was with the Wisconsin 15<sup>th</sup> as a war correspondent for *Emigranten* during the war. This does fit with the debate between the pastors and the laymen on whether slavery was an evil or a sin, or both. On the other hand, what is important is that the Norwegian laymen, such as Knute Nelson, seem to look at the pastors’ differentiating between evil and sin as irrelevant.<sup>89</sup> For this reason, one cannot exclude this debate between sin and evil as a reason for enlistment.

Returning to Rasmus B. Anderson, although he did not participate in the war itself, his mentor, or his role model, C.L. Clausen was a chaplain in the 15<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin. This is important because Anderson’s work about the Norwegian soldiers in the Civil War were of such a filiopietistic nature that they cannot be viewed as anything else than propaganda. Because he knew and looked up to Clausen, Anderson’s views towards the Norwegians who fought, and the war itself, combined with his personal faith seems to have been entwined. Andersen created the myth about the Norwegians being the ones who saved the union. Whether or not he believed it to be true, he created it with the intention of having some sort of evidence of the sacrifice made by Norwegians. However, he may have gone too far because to say something like that is pure make belief.

On the other hand, one can understand the reason for creating this myth in order to give the Norwegians have something to be proud of and have something to show the Americans that they had done their part in preserving the Union. His connection to Clausen is also of importance with regards to enlistment for religious reasons. Clausen himself as said before enlisted in the 15<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin, but as its chaplain. It seems clear that he enlisted for both religious reasons and his abolitionist attitude. However, before the war he was the editor of what Arlow W. Anderson calls the “more representative newspaper of Norwegian-American opinion in the 1850’s.”<sup>90</sup> Arlow W. Anderson is referring to *Emigranten* which was

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<sup>88</sup> Arlow W. Anderson, *Lincoln and the Union: A Study of the Editorials of Emigranten and Fæderlandet*, *Norwegian-American Studies and Records*, 15:85-121 (1949), direct link to the article in Norwegian-American Historical Association database, [http://www.naha.stolaf.edu/pubs/nas/volume15new/vol15\\_4.htm#50](http://www.naha.stolaf.edu/pubs/nas/volume15new/vol15_4.htm#50) (accessed May 14, 2013).

<sup>89</sup> Rohne, *Norwegian American Lutherism Up To 1872* (1926), 207.

<sup>90</sup> Anderson, *The Immigrant Takes His Stand* (1953), 61.

an antislavery Norwegian-American newspaper. Clausen was its first editor and while holding the editorial position, he did not make any efforts either for or against the issue of slavery, according to Anderson. Anderson also makes the claim that the reason for Clausen's unwillingness to openly support the abolitionist cause was due to the fact that he supported the Compromise of 1850, and believed that slavery would die a natural death. The question as to why he eventually ended up supporting the Union by enlisting can be answered with Anderson's point that he simply saw the importance of preserving the political integrity of the United States government, as something more important than freeing the slaves.<sup>91</sup> One can therefore claim that his zeal for the antislavery cause during and after the war was a political one, rather than religious one. However, the views of many Norwegians in the late 1850's may have been of the sort that resemble what Elias Stangeland wrote in *Den norske amerikaner*. (The Norwegian-American) Stangeland wrote that it may be too much to ask of the Norwegians to support the liberation and the pursuit of full citizenship by the former slaves, while the Norwegians themselves were treated with contempt by some Americans, or what he defines as Know-Nothingism.<sup>92</sup> Although Stangeland wrote this in 1855, the slavery issue was more and more making all people in America choose sides. It seems the position of the Norwegian pastors who on the one hand viewed slavery and the slave trade in the same way as Rynning had in 1838, while at the same time saying that they could not find anything in God's law that meant to own slaves was a sin, was something that only furthered the Norwegian abhorrence of slavery. Although the Norwegians were in general a devout Christian immigrant group at the time, they seem to have gone against their own pastors by clearly stating that slavery was both evil and a sin towards both God and Man. Therefore, many Norwegians may have seen the act of enlisting as an act of doing the Christian thing and volunteered to end slavery once and for all in America.

However, if slavery was a sin, why did the Northerners and the Norwegians not just leave the Southerners alone in sin? If slavery was a sin, they alone would go to hell and those who did not own slaves would go to heaven. It is very hard to identify how much the Norwegians cared about slavery. It seems clear that most abhorred its existence, but they were not hardcore abolitionists, at least not until the Civil War. When the war was a fact, it seems like the Norwegians who had previously supported the confinement of slavery saw that the

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<sup>91</sup> Anderson, *The Immigrant Takes His Stand* (1953), 62.

<sup>92</sup> Anderson, *The Immigrant Takes His Stand* (1953), 63. Note: Anderson is referring to Stangeland's work from February 28, 1855.

war was going to be about the slavery issue, they cast their lot with the ones who wanted its annihilation. For this reasons, one can understand why the letters from the regular soldiers who enlisted does not devote much time to the slavery issue. It may be because they simply were not too concerned with the issue. However, the Norwegian immigrant community leaders and the regimental officers devote much more time to the issue of slavery and its sinful nature. For this reason, one might have a case of class distinction with regard to the importance of slavery as a reason for enlisting. On the one hand, one has the upper class of Norwegians, consisting of newspaper editors, clergymen, and other important members of the Norwegian-American communities who tried to persuade the working class. While on the other hand, one had the working class who tried to get by, who had to endure hostility by American Nativists who viewed the Norwegians as foreigners just like everybody else. Why should they fight for the liberation of the slaves may have been a thought known to many Norwegians?

An evidence of the transition of attitudes towards slavery in terms of going from viewing slavery as something that would eventually die a natural death in confinement, to viewing it as something that had to be fought with violence, may be found or personified in Hans Christian's Heg adjutant, Hans Borchsenius. According to Anderson, Borchsenius harbored ill feelings towards Catholics, particularly the Irish-Catholics, because they flocked to the Democratic Party. However, he and other newspaper editors were identified as Democrat sympathizers and since Borchsenius had hopes on a political career<sup>93</sup>, he could not afford to be affiliated with neither the party that supported the continuation of slavery, or the Irish-Catholics. Borchsenius was not the only one who saw the Irish-Catholics as a threat. Knud Langeland, also an editor of both *Nordlyset* and *Democraten* viewed the Irish as somewhat immoral because of their appreciation of alcohol, which was morally opposite to the temperance movement that had taken a hold among the Norwegians as a result of a religious awakening that had spread to Midwest. Furthermore, the circumstances around Borchsenius' rather strange attack on Catholicism in the late 1850's, led to his attachment to the Democratic Party was shifted towards the Republican along with the rest of the Norwegian newspaper editors. Originally a Dane, Borchsenius came to the United States in 1856 seemingly with a good education behind that seemed to have helped his rise within the

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<sup>93</sup> Carl Fredrik Solberg and edited by Albert O. Barton, "Reminiscences of a Pioneer Editor," NAHA-Online, Norwegian-American Studies Vol 1, page 134, [http://www.naha.stolaf.edu/pubs/nas/volume01/vol1\\_06.htm](http://www.naha.stolaf.edu/pubs/nas/volume01/vol1_06.htm) (accessed March 22, 2013).

Scandinavian immigrant community in Wisconsin. On November 14, 1861, he enlisted in the 15<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Infantry and on December 10, 1861 he was appointed Regimental Adjutant by Colonel Heg himself.<sup>94</sup> He resigned from his position September 28, 1862 due to a case of nerve fever. The case of Borchsenius is a case of interest due to him actively taking part in recruiting among the Norwegians in Wisconsin that would eventually make up a company in the 15th.

Anderson makes another point that serves as a way of distinguishing the Norwegians from the other Scandinavian immigrant groups. He writes that the Swedish-American press represented a more united front against slavery.<sup>95</sup> The Norwegian-American press however seems to have been plagued with disagreements when it came to slavery because many of the editors of the Norwegian-American newspapers were known Democrats. Therefore, editors like Borchsenius had trouble getting the Norwegian immigrants to subscribe to his newspaper because they did not like his affiliation with the proslavery Democratic Party. According to Anderson one Swedish-American by the name Tuve Nilsson Hasselquist who was a minister and the editor of *Hemlandet* (The Home Land/Country) was firmly opposed to slavery.<sup>96</sup> This represents a clear example of difference between both the Norwegian ministers and editors who as mentioned earlier, were dealing with matters that many Norwegians viewed as irrelevant. If this is combined with the fact that other nationalities started raising ethnic regiments of their own, one can see why many Norwegians felt the need to enlist when the 15<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin was established by Colonel Heg, a plain spoken Norwegian who had not made any distinctions between evil and sin, and had always stood politically with the antislavery parties, first the Free Soil Party, then the Republican Party. Hence, many letters do not speak of slavery as a reason for enlisting, but the admiration of Colonel Heg as a moral, determined, and proud Republican Norwegian-American can be seen as a reason for enlisting. This makes the slavery reason a subordinate for enlisting, because through Heg, they knew they were on the side of what was just, both towards God's and Man's law.

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<sup>94</sup> Vesterheim, Norwegian-American Museum, Decorah, Iowa, Civil War Database, "Norwegians in the Civil War," <http://vesterheim.org/CivilWar/db/b/bor/001086.html> (Accessed March 22, 2013)

<sup>95</sup> Anderson, *The Immigrant Takes His Stand* (1953), 69.

<sup>96</sup> Anderson, *The Immigrant Takes His Stand* (1953), 69-70.

## 4. Economic Reasons for Enlisting.

### 4.1 What were the economic advantages enlistees would get?

According to several sources the economic advantages were substantial. Odd S. Lovoll writes a little bit about how much enlistees would receive upon volunteering and the monthly salary they had a claim to. Lovoll includes an enlistment poster in his book, *Det Løfterike Landet*, in which it states that 10 recruits are wanted in order to fill up the quota of the town of Primrose, Dane County, Minnesota. On the poster it says that each recruit will receive 170 dollars in extra bounty. It is signed by Captain Mons Grinager of the 15<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin on February 26, 1864.<sup>97</sup> This may be an evidence of the economic motivations needed to fill up the quota. If no-one enlisted a draft would be necessary. In order to avoid a general draft which in some cases were nothing else than a lottery. In regard to the poster itself, several questions need to be answered. Did the posters work? Were there any differences between 1861 and 1864 in terms of how much the pay would be? Was the bounty higher in 1864 in order to avoid the draft? The poster in Lovoll's book does not say if the 170 dollars in extra bounty is on top of the "standard" bounty and the monthly salary.

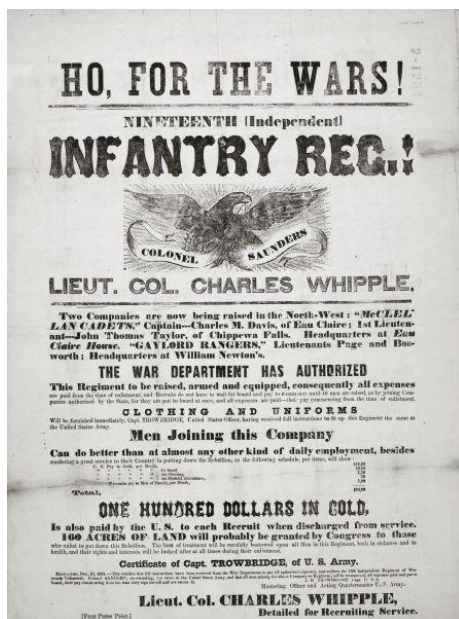
The poster is a call for volunteers to join the 19<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Infantry Regiment from 1861. It promises one hundred dollars in gold. Moreover, and maybe more importantly, it offers 160 acres of land from the U.S. government.<sup>98</sup> For the Norwegians who had come to America because they had no inheritable claim to the family farm in Norway, the promise for a piece of land of their own must have been tempting and possibly worth risking their lives for. This poster also contains information given by several letters from Norwegians who wrote home that they had never had finer and better quality clothes. The poster says that clothing and uniform will be provided for them. It is important to understand and not underestimate the value of good clothing for these men in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The Dokken Olsen Brothers makes a note of this in their letters. For a young immigrant like Bersven Nelson who seemed to have no prospects in terms of a career or an occupation, the promise of bounty, a monthly salary, and clothing was the key for him when it came to volunteering. His decision to enlist seems to have little to do with sense of defending his newly adopted

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<sup>97</sup> Odd S. Lovoll, *Det Løfterike Landet: En Norskamerikansk Historie* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1997), 90.

<sup>98</sup> Wisconsin Historical Society, "Wisconsin Historical Images: 19<sup>th</sup> Infantry Recruitment Poster," [http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/whi/fullRecord.asp?id=57912&qstring=http%3A%2F%2Fwww%2Ewisconsinhistory%2Eorg%2Fwhi%2Fresults%2Easp%3Fsubject\\_narrow%3DRecruiting%2Band%2Benlistment](http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/whi/fullRecord.asp?id=57912&qstring=http%3A%2F%2Fwww%2Ewisconsinhistory%2Eorg%2Fwhi%2Fresults%2Easp%3Fsubject_narrow%3DRecruiting%2Band%2Benlistment) (accessed March 19, 2013).





country, but rather as an opportunity to get ahead in America. Service in the Union could provide this opportunity. Since he does not mention anything about the causes of the war such as preserving the nation, or emancipating the slaves, the case of Bersven Nelson may be a case of enlisting for economic reasons, and the patriotic aspect, which was felt by many others, came second to Bersven himself. It might be possible to say that this case was an opposite case of what Lovoll says when he writes that the “patriotic mind” of the Norwegians was further induced by tempting bounties.<sup>99</sup> Bersven Nelson was also known as Ben Nelson.

However, according to the Roster of the Wisconsin Volunteers, War of the Rebellion, 1861-1865, he was enlisted with the name Ben Nilson because he was born Bersven Nilson, but he must have changed his name, or someone got it wrong later.<sup>100</sup>

A letter from 1862 gives an alternative account of the economic advantage the enlistees would get. About the wages he writes that they were given a choice. They could choose between being paid 15 dollars a month, but no clothing, or 13 dollars a month and free clothes. He says they chose the latter option. The “they” reference seems to be the three other Norwegians he mentions. He ends the part of the letter regarding the war that he thinks it will be a short war. Sadly, according to the records on ancestry.com Ole was killed at the battle of Shiloh on April 6, 1862. In the record of the Minnesota Civil War Results on ancestry.com, his name is spelt, Pvt. Ole I. Taxdahl, age 33, mustered in on November 21, 1861. This way of spelling his last name corresponds with the letter and the fact that he was in the First Battery Light Artillery, also corresponds with his letter in Øverland’s and Kjærheim’s book. “We are in a battery called the First Minnesota Battery (1<sup>st</sup> Battery of Light Artillery).<sup>101</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Lovoll, *Det Løfterike Landet* (1997), 90.

<sup>100</sup> Wisconsin Historical Society, *Roster of the Wisconsin Volunteers, War of the Rebellion, 1861-1865*, Photocopy of roster, [http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/roster/results.asp?image\\_id=1977](http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/roster/results.asp?image_id=1977) (Accessed March 23, 2013).

<sup>101</sup> Ole Jespersen Taksdal to Tobias Tørresen Kvia, St. Louis, Missouri, March 2, 1862, in *Fra Amerika til Norge II: Norske utvandrerbrev 1858-1868 (med et tillegg av brev 1837-1857)* Orm Øverland and Steinar Kjærheim, (Oslo: Solum Forlag, 1992), 213.

There can be little doubt that the financial reward for enlisting was tempting to many Norwegians, indeed for all volunteers. If a soldier enlisted he would be given a cash bounty, monthly salary also paid in cash, good quality clothes, and food. Both Ager and Lovoll recognize the economic advantages a volunteer would get if he enlisted. Ager presents Bersven Nelson's letters in chapter two in *Colonel Heg and his Boys*, in which Bersven Nelson clearly states that the economic terms offered seemed good enough for him to enlist, as noted earlier.<sup>102</sup> Money was not something the regular Norwegian farmer or farm worker had much of. When the call for volunteer was issued, the large bounty and monthly salary, combined with the belief that the war would be over within a couple of months, must have been too tempting to resist for many.

Ager and Lovoll say that the promise of money was a bonus to the main reason behind enlisting, which was to preserve the Union and the emancipation of the slaves. This thesis looks at the possibility that the reasons might have been reverse, making the economic advantages the primary reason and the preservation of the Union and emancipating the slaves, as secondary reasons. It does not say that it was solely money that influenced their decision, but had there been no or little economic advantages, chances are that many would not have enlisted voluntarily because although they were opposed to slavery, their feelings towards the issue were not strong enough for them to enlist. If one examines the letters of those who volunteered, little is said by the common soldier about the preservation of the Union and freeing the slaves. In fact, it seems that the more "noble" reasons are limited to the officers. Officers like Grinager and Heg are the ones who speak of their duty to defend their adopted country and wage war against the unholy institution of slavery. "Regular" men like Bersven Nelson seem to have written little about these noble reasons. For them, the prospect of cash seems to have been closest to their hearts. That does not mean that they were mercenaries who did not fight for a cause. This thesis is just saying that among over the ninety letters examined when researching for this thesis, very few do mention the preservation of the Union and freeing the slaves as a reason for enlisting, therefore one cannot automatically assume that all of them had such a zeal for their newly adopted country.

A source that has not been used to the same extent as Bersven Nelson's letters is that of a soldier in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Minnesota Volunteer Regiment. Bernt Olmanson was a Civil War veteran. He served in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Minnesota Volunteer Regiment. It is unclear which company he

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<sup>102</sup> Waldemar Ager, *Colonel Heg and His Boys: A Norwegian Regiment in the American Civil War* (Northfield, Minnesota: The Norwegian-American Historical Association, 2000), 11-54.

served in because in his letters he is said to have served in Company E, but in the roster for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Minnesota Volunteer Regiment, he is found in Company F.<sup>103</sup> This would not be a problem with regard to why he joined the army, but the problem arises when he said that he enlisted because in the roster, it does not say whether or not he was drafted or enlisted voluntarily. In his letters, Olmanson says that he was going to leave the regiment because he had not been given the salary he thought he had a right to.<sup>104</sup> The captain, Aslak K. Skaro, tells him to not to leave and guarantees that he will get his money in the next paycheck. Bernt seems to accept this and joins. His story is somewhat untypical because he seems to be clearly aware of the money aspect of joining, as opposed to the aspect of preserving the Union and freeing the slaves. There can be little doubt that Olmanson was aware of why the war was being fought, but his main concern seems to have been an economic one. There can be many reasons for this. One is that he had a family to take care of. It seems that he sent most of his salary home to his wife and children. This is not untypical among the married soldiers or among the sons who were still living at home. The Dokken Olsen brothers and Heg himself also wrote home saying that they would send home money and valuables they had collected throughout different campaigns. Many joined for economic reasons, and the monthly salary and bounty was a lifeline for themselves, but maybe more for those who were left behind when the men went to war. The women and children would suffer as much as the soldiers because they lost the main source of income. Colonel Heg seems to the same as well. In almost all of his letters, he tells his wife that he is sending home money to her, along with other things he has bought or taken from the enemy.

Another piece of information that is given by the roster is that it shows that Bernt Olmanson re-enlisted in 1863 and was discharged with the rest of the regiment, probably when the war was over. This can be evidence for his enlistment back in 1861 because if he was drafted he would probably have been inclined not to go to war, but as it shows in his

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<sup>103</sup>Annual Report of the Adjutant General, of the State of Minnesota for the Year Ending December 1, 1866. And the Military Forces of the State from 1861-1866. St. Paul: Pioneer Press Company. 1866. Direct link to the roster for the 2nd Minnesota Volunteer Regiment. Final Record of Company "F" – continued. Page 84-85. <http://www.archive.org/stream/annualreport01minn#page/84/mode/2up>

<sup>104</sup> *Letters of Bernt Olmanson: A Union Soldier in the Civil War, 1861-1865*. (Minneapolis, Minnesota, cop. 2008), 12-13. Note: Since this is a thesis that is concerned with why the Norwegians enlisted, this becomes problematic. However, further research show that he was in contact with the captain of the company, he is listed in the roster with the same information as Olmanson gives in his account, therefore one can assume that Olmanson is telling the truth. Another clue that gives indication that Olmanson is right is that there is a money issue at hand.

letters, he wanted to go because of the bounty and salary. To say that someone enlisted solely for the money is not the intention of this paper, neither to offend the memory of the men and their families, but it is the duty of this paper to come as close to the truth as possible and therefore one must report quite objectively of the findings. In this case, the reason for his enlistment seems to have been an economic one, but that does not entail a lesser degree of sacrifice. His sacrifice is as great as anyone because he enlisted voluntarily to fight in the war. He suffered like all the other Norwegians who participated on behalf of their entire ethnic group. They demonstrated their right to a home in America, as did all immigrant soldiers in the Civil War. Orm Øverland says that for linguistic reasons, many letters have not been used in most scholarly works by U.S. scholars. When they cannot read the letters, they are not used as sources and their significance is lost. They are therefore forced to rely on the more filiopietistic works, and the reasons for why the Norwegians enlisted in such numbers have not been fully explored. That is the purpose of this thesis. Øverland says that the “dressing up of ugliness”<sup>105</sup> is a common thing of those who write about wars. When the ugliness is dressed up the truth is also dressed up. Therefore, to say that someone volunteered to fight because they needed the money or had nothing better to do, is not to dress up, but to state a fact. This does not entail that it was the only reason for enlisting, but it was maybe the reason that tipped the decision towards enlisting. For this reason, its significance cannot be left out, but it should rather be put forward for further analysis in order to find the truth.

Whatever the reason any individual had for enlisting, the Norwegians who enlisted did their part in preserving the Union, and emancipating the slaves. As the Civil War was a war that pitted brother against brother, it might have been difficult for the Norwegians to actually meet one of their brothers in battle because they were so few in terms of enlistees. The settlement patterns indicate that the Norwegians stayed close to their families, and therefore did not end up fighting one another on the battlefield. However, one letter mentions a case of brothers fighting brothers. Private Severt Tesdall in Company A, 23rd Iowa Volunteers Infantry Regiment, wrote on December 10, 1863:

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<sup>105</sup> Orm Øverland, *Immigrants Minds, American Identities; Making the United States Home, 1870-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 88.

By the way, when we were at Youngs Point, I found a Norwegian prisoner of war from Texas, and he said his wife was a sister of Henry and Eric Egglund, they live east of Huxley, Iowa, brothers fighting against brothers.<sup>106</sup>

This seems like a fitting end to this chapter because it provides some perspective on the larger themes concerning the Civil War. The brothers against brothers theme is one that this thesis has not dealt with, but as one can see, the Norwegians were very much a part of one of the larger, perhaps most tragic, theme of the conflict.

## Chapter 3: Conclusion

### Summary of the Thesis Question/Problem, Main Findings and the Discussion:

The main question of this thesis has been to answer why Norwegian immigrants took up arms for their newly adopted country. The answer has been presented through four main sets of reasons: economic, ideological, and religious reasons, along with a sense of duty. These four main categories of reasons represent the main findings of this thesis after the close examination over ninety letters, excluding the letters collected in the *Civil War Letters of Colonel Hans Christian Heg*, edited by Theodore C. Blegen, and the autobiography of Ole Petter Hansen Balling. On the one hand, it has been important to avoid creating too much of a distance to the actual letter writers. The theory and method used for this thesis have been chosen to show how the historiography, the discourse on the history, of the Norwegian-Americans participation in the Civil War has changed from a filiopietistic history that portrayed the Norwegian immigrants as better than everyone else, to a more moderate, balanced, and objective portrayal.

The letters have been the primary sources of this thesis, because they tell us in the present time what these men who enlisted thought. The people writing these letters do not always write directly why they enlisted, but they do tell us what they were preoccupied with when they enlisted. This is open for interpretation, but if one takes their words for what they are, one has to discuss what they actually wrote and not add what we would like to hear.

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<sup>106</sup> Private Severt Tesdall to his father, brothers, and sisters, Fort Esperanza, Texas, December 10, 1863, found in *The Civil War Letters of Private Severt Tesdall, Company "A", 23rd Iowa Volunteer Infantry Regiment*, ed. Kenneth Wald who is the great grandson of Severt Tesdall, [http://www.iowavalor.com/e107\\_files/downloads/the\\_civil\\_war\\_letters\\_of\\_private\\_severt\\_tesdall.pdf](http://www.iowavalor.com/e107_files/downloads/the_civil_war_letters_of_private_severt_tesdall.pdf) (Accessed March 26, 2013)

Naturally, one wants to hear that they enlisted to end slavery because that was the noble reason, but that was simply not the case.

Rasmus B. Andersen and Waldemar Ager were the first to write about the Norwegian immigrants who enlisted. Their works, especially Andersens, promote the Norwegians as the ones who “built” America’s institutions. From the Viking Age and through the Middle Ages, the Norwegians promoted democracy, and though the British brought it to America. During the Civil War, the Norwegians saved the Union and were instrumental in freeing slaves. Although more recent theories have been of more objective nature, no previously reported research has discussed the reasons why the Norwegian immigrants decided to answer Abraham Lincoln’s call for volunteers.

Orm Øverland’s work has dominated the theoretical part of this thesis and it serves as a red thread throughout the thesis because his theory on “blood sacrifice” has been the most fruitful theory with regard to enlistment. It would seem that this willingness to sacrifice themselves, regardless of individual reasons, was the single most important action taken by the Norwegian immigrants. They did so in order to assimilate and ascend into the ranks of “proper” Americans. Although the Norwegian enlistees fought to end slavery, many did not have any particularly strong feelings concerning the black slaves, but rather viewed the institution of slavery as something that had to be removed from American soil. This antislavery sentiment seems to have been a result of a newfound nationalism, which had its roots first in the antislavery parts of the Democratic Party, then in the Free Soil Party, and finally it reached its peak when most of the Norwegian immigrants were caught up in the Republican fervor that spread throughout the Midwest where most of them had settled.

The Whiteness theme, presented mainly by David Roediger, has also been important for this thesis. The Civil War was a war that was fought over slavery and the perseveration of the Union. It was a war to secure some rights for black slaves, but also for whites who were not seen as “proper” whites by the dominant Anglo-American culture. The Norwegian immigrants were not seen as “proper” whites, and therefore one can look at enlistment in terms of proving their allegiance to the “proper” whites, in essence, America. By making their willingness to sacrifice themselves for the Union visible, the immigrant leaders hoped for a more prominent role in business and politics, first at local level and then at state and federal level.

The reasons for enlistment discussed in this thesis have appeared in the contents of the America letters. The four main reasons serve as four umbrellas under which several sub

reasons are found. As noted earlier, the majority of letters do not say explicitly the reasons why the writer enlisted, but what the writer is preoccupied with gives us an idea of what his feelings are towards the war, politics, and Americans in general. When these are added together, one ends up with the table presented in chapter one, and from it, one can apply the appropriate theory to reach a conclusion. The conclusion of this thesis is that the four sets of reasons for enlistment presented were the main motivations for Norwegian immigrants to take up arms for their newly adopted country. The Norwegian immigrants represented a small portion of the war effort, but through their sacrifice they were a part of perhaps the most important event in U.S. history. Regardless of individual reasons and personal feelings, they aided Abraham Lincoln in preserving the Union and freeing the slaves. Those who volunteered for military service did indeed serve their country well. Therefore, it seems appropriate to end this thesis with the full quotation from Ole Petter Hansen Balling's memoirs. When he was commissioned to paint a portrait of Abraham Lincoln at the White House, the President at first thought Balling was a German. When Balling told him that he was Norwegian, the President took his hand firmly and told him:

“I know the Norwegians from my home out West, they are very best of settlers, no immigrants have served America as well as them, and they are well off – Good Bye!”<sup>107</sup>

## **How Do the Results Fill In, Advance, or Contradict Previously Reported Research?**

Due to the many individual reasons for enlisting, the conclusion this thesis reaches when all the evidence are put together has in some ways contradicted previously reported research. Odd S. Lovoll suggests that the economic advantages offered were seen as a bonus, on top of

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<sup>107</sup> O.P. Hansen Balling, *Erindringer fra et Langt Liv* (Kristiania/Oslo: S & Jul Sørensens Bogtrykkeri, 1905), 83.

<http://www.nb.no/nbsok/nb/824f6e617afce77afe19b22ba902d509.nbdigital;jsessionid=4865E036359A408E1BF5F38FBFD97FD1.nbdigital2?lang=no#0> (accessed May 21, 2013).

Note: Another source that gives the same account is *Folkebladet*, an illustrated magazine in Norway that was in print from 1880-1921. In 1898 the magazine ran an article titled *Grant and his Generals*, in this article the story and words of Balling and Lincoln are printed.

the cause the Norwegian enlistees fought for, which was the preservation of the Union and freeing the slaves. This thesis has suggested that in reality, this might have been the other way around. In other words, the preservation of the Union and freeing the slaves were noble causes that came as a bonus to the economic advantages the men were offered for enlisting. However, this does not necessarily mean that they enlisted purely for economic reasons, but that the “noble causes” might have been secondary reasons for enlisting. The letters tell us that the money was of paramount importance for the enlistees. They write about the money they were promised to enlist and money that was being sent home to their families who had lost their main breadwinner. On the other hand, the enlistees who became officers seem to have been motivated to a greater extent by either the one or both of the causes, preservation and emancipation. Colonel Heg and Captain Grinager are the most prominent examples of this, and fit better with Lovoll’s words about money being just a bonus. This raises a question that might be useful to ask for further research. Was there a class distinction between the Norwegian working class enlistees and the Norwegian immigrant community leaders in regard to their reasons for enlisting? This could be a possible direction to take for further research.

### **In What Ways Are the Results of this Thesis Useful for the Field?**

Having examined three main theories, blood sacrifice, whiteness, and assimilation, this thesis has focused on interpreting the letters in order to answer the question about enlistment. The results of this thesis may serve as an alternate way of looking at why the Norwegian-Americans enlisted for service in the Civil War. It is of this author’s opinion that the question “why they joined” has not been fully examined and discussed. This thesis may serve as a starting point for looking at the question from another angle. Most of the previously reported research has looked at the voluntary enlistment in the Civil War as a part of the Americanization process. This is not wrong, but it might entail that the primary material is looked at in a certain way because one might be looking for something specific in the letters. This thesis has examined the letters from another angle. Its only goal has been to find reasons for enlistment. This might prove useful for future research in terms of the way it looks at the sources, the sources themselves, and because its findings do contradict some theories. In other words, it supports Øverland’s theory because it seems that although some of the Norwegian enlistees joined for economic reasons, it seems evident that they shared a love for their newly adopted country, a newfound nationalism that eventually lead them to consider enlistment, but



the economic advantages promised if one enlisted might have been what eventually made them sign up.

### **In Which Direction Should Further Research Go?**

As noted above, there are a number of directions further research could go. In terms of enlistment, it could go into a direction of comparison. One could compare the Norwegians' reasons for the enlistment of the Swedes, or the Danish, or perhaps to everyone else who enlisted. Were the Norwegians different from the average enlistee? As this has been a shorter MA thesis, one could take the whole thesis further in a longer study. By taking it further, one could include a chapter that deals with a comparison such as suggested above. One could also take one of the chapters and develop the research further. For example, take the part about ideology and look at how newspapers like *Emigranten*, served as a promoter of Republican ideology and discuss its importance as a recruiting force. This brings us back to the question asked above: Was there a class distinction between the Norwegian working class enlistees and the Norwegian immigrant community leaders? This could be fruitful to pursue further because many editors of newspapers were prominent figures within the immigrant communities.

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