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# Civil War Military Service and Loyalty to the Republican Party: 1884

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This research note studies the impact of Civil War military service (or lack of the same) on the loyalty of Massachusetts Republicans to their party in the election of 1884. The 1884 presidential election was selected because a sharp division took place that year between the Republican majority that supported James G. Blaine for president and the Mugwump dissidents who bolted their party's national ticket. By comparing roughly equal-sized samples of regulars and bolters, it was hoped to determine whether there was a tendency for Civil War veterans to remain loyal to the party organization rather than to join the Mugwump bolt. Such a tendency had been detected among samples of Blaine men and bolters in New York, as reported in the book *Mugwumps, Morals and Politics*.<sup>1</sup> But the possibility remained that New York was a special case. This study intends to determine whether the apparent link between veteran status and Republican Party loyalty was as strong in Massachusetts as it appeared to be in New York. After a brief description of the working hypothesis and a review of the New York evidence that seemed to support the thesis, the rather different results produced by recent research in Massachusetts will be reported.

In its simplest form the proposition to be tested was as follows: within roughly equal samples of Blaine men and bolters, did proportionately more Republican war veterans back Blaine or join the Mugwump bolt? At no point was it assumed that veteran status (or lack of it) was the sole factor in determining how any given Republican voted in 1884. However, it was assumed that a higher proportion of Republican veterans would support Blaine than oppose him. The grounds for this assumption were our knowledge of several well-known features of postwar Republican Party politics, most specifically the party leadership's frequent resort to appeals to wartime loyalties as a campaign device. That refers, of course, to the practice popularly known as "waving the bloody shirt" and also to the strategy of trying to win over Union veterans by urging them, as it was said at the time, to vote as they had shot.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, it was clear that military analogies often figured in Republican campaign rhetoric. For example, members of the party's pro-Grant, Stalwart faction were particularly forceful in their assertions that Republicans who abandoned their party by voting along independent lines were guilty of disloyalty comparable to that of soldiers who deserted their military units in wartime. It seemed that the symbolic and emotional appeal of bloody shirt politics and the Stalwarts' military metaphors

might be sufficiently effective among Civil War veterans to cause a disproportionate percentage of them to remain loyal to the party's national ticket in 1884 and to reject the Mugwumps' pleas to act independently of party discipline.

The comparative study of New York Mugwumps and Blaine Republicans produced results that fit strikingly well with the working hypothesis sketched above. That study identified a total of 470 Republicans (73 of whom were Civil War veterans) and 429 Mugwumps (including 31 veterans). There were more than twice as many Republican veterans as Mugwump veterans, regardless of whether this is measured in raw numbers (73 to 31) or proportionately (15.5% to 7.2%). However, because more of the Mugwumps than Republicans were young men in their twenties or early thirties and consequently not old enough to have served in the Civil War, the gap between the proportion of veterans in the two groups narrows somewhat if the percentage of veterans is calculated against the part of each sample consisting of men from 37 to 69 years of age, the group in which all veterans were found. But even in this smaller group, the percentage of old soldiers who backed Blaine was 45% higher than the figure for the Mugwump group (73 of 197 or 37% of the Republican sample versus 31 of 121 or 26% of the Mugwumps).

That same study applied two other measures within each of the New York samples in order to assess the relative importance that military service might have had for an individual. The first of these measures was length of service, for it seemed reasonable to suppose that the longer a man served (and consequently the greater his exposure to military discipline), the more likely he might be to continue to follow the imperatives of an organizational ethic after the war and to accept the need for strict party discipline. That this might well be so was suggested by the figures in Table One below, which indicated that the New York veterans who voted for Blaine tended, on the whole, to serve longer terms of duty than did their Mugwump counterparts. By combining the second and third categories shown below, we find that a total of 45 Republicans (75%) served two years or more, while only 15 Mugwump veterans (56%) were in those categories.<sup>3</sup>

Table One

Comparison of New York Republican and Mugwump Veterans  
Whose Length of Service is Known.

	Republicans		Mugwumps	
	No.	%	No.	%
Served well under 2 years	15	25	12	44
Served approximately 2 years	22	37	8	30
Duration 1861-1865 or longer	23	38	7	26

Data on the number of promotions received by the veterans in New York samples was collected in an effort to ascertain whether the experience of being rewarded within a large-scale organization influenced an individual's postwar political behavior. It seemed reasonable to expect that those Civil War veterans who had received one or more promotions might have developed a strong attach-

ment to an organizational ethic, and thus be more responsive to the symbolic and emotional appeals that Republicans used after the war to court the old soldier vote, than veterans who had received little or no preferment while in the military. The figures in Table Two below are supportive of just such a hypothesis. A particularly strong correlation is evident between veterans who received multiple promotions and Republicans who remained loyal to the party's presidential ticket in 1884. In category three below, 36 (63%) of the Republican veterans received two or more promotions, while only 10 (40%) of their Mugwump counterparts were similarly rewarded.<sup>4</sup>

Table Two

Comparison of New York Republican and Mugwump Veterans  
for Whom Civil War Promotion Data is Known.

	Republicans		Mugwumps	
	No.	%	No.	%
Received no promotions	11	19	5	20
Promotion of 1 rank only	10	18	10	40
Promoted 2 or more ranks	36	63	10	40

The 1975 findings were part of a larger study of New York Republicans and Mugwumps that compared the two groups in a wide variety of socio-economic categories. The distinctions between the Blaine men and the bolters were many and varied, some of the most important being that the Mugwumps tended to be younger, better educated, and more often urban-born professionals than their Republican opponents. The different proportion of former Civil War soldiers in the two groups was, therefore, only one contrast among many between the members of these rival Republican factions. Nevertheless, the evidence from New York justifies McFarland's 1975 comment about the Blaine men that "in the complex of loyalties that sustained Republican orthodoxy in 1884, the Civil War still carried weight."<sup>5</sup>

In this study Massachusetts was chosen as the focus because the Bay State was the only other state that came close to rivaling New York as a center of Mugwump strength in 1884. The Massachusetts samples consisted of 175 identifiable Blaine Republicans (42 of whom were Civil War veterans) and 184 identifiable Mugwumps (including 27 veterans).<sup>6</sup> Although these samples were smaller than the New York samples, they were sufficiently large to produce valid comparative statistics. As is evident from Table Three below, the two-to-one ratio of Republican to Mugwump veterans that was found among New Yorkers was replicated very closely in the percentage figures for Massachusetts. Similarly, when the Bay State percentages were recalculated using only the men from 37 to 69 years of age who were called the "Civil War Generation," the gap between the percentages for Republicans and Mugwumps narrowed significantly (even more among the Bay Staters than the New Yorkers), but in both cases the Republican figures remained higher than those for the Mugwumps.

Table Three

Comparison of Percentages of Civil War Veterans in Samples of  
New York and Massachusetts Republicans and Mugwumps

	New York		Massachusetts	
	Republicans	Mugwumps	Republicans	Mugwumps
Percentages of veterans in the total samples	15.5%	7.2%	29.6%	14.7%
Percentages of veterans, Civil War generation	37.1%	25.6%	38.8%	35.5%

Table Four below compares the findings for New York and Massachusetts with regard to the length of service for both groups of veterans. The Mugwump percentages in the two state samples are remarkably similar, and in the category of those soldiers having well under two years of service the percentage of Mugwumps is an identical forty-four percent in both states. The only potentially important difference between the state samples on the two groups appears in the Republican columns. The New York Republicans clearly served longer terms than the Mugwumps of either sample, with seventy-five percent of Blaine's partisans serving two or more years versus only fifty-six percent of the Mugwumps in both states. The Massachusetts Republicans, however, displayed a very similar profile to that of the Bay State Mugwumps: sixty-two percent of the Massachusetts Blaine men served two or more years, compared with fifty-six percent of the bolters, a percentage difference that is not significant given the size of the samples. There is, in other words, nothing in the data on duration of service among Massachusetts veterans to confirm the working hypothesis that a tendency to vote for Blaine might be enhanced by an extended period of Civil War service.

Table Four

Comparison of New York and Massachusetts Republican and  
Mugwump Veterans for Whom Length of Service is Known

	New York				Massachusetts			
	Republicans		Mugwumps		Republicans		Mugwumps	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Served well under 2 years	15	25%	12	44%	16	38%	12	44%
Served about 2 years	22	37%	8	30%	21	50%	10	37%
Duration 1861-5 or longer	23	38%	7	26%	5	12%	5	19%

The most significant difference between the findings from Massachusetts samples and the 1975 data on New Yorkers turned up in statistics on the promotion records of Bay State veterans, reported below in Table Five. In the New York samples, Republican veterans led the Mugwumps by a wide margin (36 of 57 or 63% versus 10 of 25 or 40%) in the figures on soldiers who received two or more promotions. By contrast, the statistics on Bay Staters in the same category showed almost the opposite result, with the percentage of Mugwumps who

received multiple promotions being double that of Blaine's partisans. This contradicted our expectation, based on the New York data, that veterans who had been rewarded in wartime within one large-scale organization, the army, would show a proportionately higher degree of loyalty to the Republican Party and the organizational discipline it asked of them after the war.

Table Five

Comparison of New York and Massachusetts Republican and Mugwump Veterans for Whom Wartime Promotion Data is Available

	New York				Massachusetts			
	Republicans		Mugwumps		Republicans		Mugwumps	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Received no promotions	11	19%	5	20%	23	55%	12	45%
Promotion of 1 rank only	10	18%	10	40%	9	21%	2	7%
Promoted 2 or more ranks	36	63%	10	40%	10	24%	13	48%

One interesting fact about the Mugwumps in the Massachusetts sample was that a significant number of them, notably some of those with long years of service and a record of multiple promotions, had been officers in black regiments. This was true of six Mugwumps (nearly a quarter of the Mugwump veteran group), while only two of the forty-two Bay State Republican veterans (barely five percent of the sample) had similar service records. This led us to ponder the various meanings that military service might have had for Civil War soldiers. Northerners joined Mr. Lincoln's armies and stayed to fight for many different reasons: to earn money, to seek adventure, to defend the Union, and to free the slaves. Similarly, in 1884 not all Republicans shared the same view of what true Republicanism meant. Blaine's supporters claimed it meant loyalty to the party's duly-selected presidential candidate. Others, Bay State Republicans like Charles Francis Adams Jr. and Thomas Wentworth Higginson, both of whom were old-time antislavery men who had served as officers in black regiments during the Civil War, joined the Mugwump insurgency because they thought they saw an analogy between the pre-war Republican fight to free the slaves and the Mugwump crusade to liberate the party from bondage to spoils politics. In other words, long years of military service did not necessarily always equate with an attachment to a pragmatic organizational ethic. It could also, as in the cases of veterans who supported the war as a crusade against slavery, reflect an individual's commitment to a highly idealistic credo.

Despite the non-conforming data on the promotion records of Massachusetts veterans outlined above in Table Five, the bulk of the data from both New York and Massachusetts supported our working hypothesis. Civil War veterans did remain loyal to the Republican Party in disproportionate numbers. Moreover, Republican veterans backed Blaine rather than the Mugwump bolt by a consistent two-to-one margin in both our state samples. On the other hand, the Massachusetts data did not convincingly confirm the New York findings that indicated that the veterans with longer terms of military service were more likely to become Blaine men than bolters in 1884. Also, the evidence from New York

that showed a positive correlation between multiple promotions and postwar Republican Party loyalty was not supported by the Bay State data.

In closing, it is clear that much more research should be done on the relationship between Civil War military service and postwar political behavior. The thesis tested was for just one election and in only two states. Obviously, other case studies could be done on such intraparty conflicts as the Liberal Republican movement of 1872. Moreover, as observed, gross categories tended to obscure some of the widely-varied effects that Civil War service might have: as was seen, it could foster a pragmatic or organizational ethic, or be an arena in which to affirm highly idealistic ideological goals. Other researchers may wish to use career-line analysis and quantitative methods to try to track the postwar behavior of veterans who entered the service with these contrasting purposes in mind.

#### NOTES

1. Gerald W. McFarland, *Mugwumps, Morals and Politics, 1884-1920* (Amherst, Massachusetts, 1975), pp. 31-32 and 185-186.
2. An excellent overview of the bloody-shirt phenomenon is Stanley P. Hirshson, *Farewell to the Bloody Shirt: Northern Republicans and the Southern Negro, 1877-1890* (Bloomington, 1962).
3. This is a revised version of Table A.7 from McFarland, *Mugwumps, Morals and Politics*, p. 185. We have eliminated the category of "Duration of Service Unknown" that included 13 Republicans and 4 Mugwumps in order to offer percentages based solely on the veterans for whom the length of their military service was known.
4. As in Table 1, we have not included those veterans (16 Republicans and 6 Mugwumps) for whom no Civil War promotion data was available. McFarland included them in Table A.8 in *Mugwumps, Morals and Politics*, p. 185.
5. McFarland, *Mugwumps, Morals and Politics*, p. 31.
6. The names of many more identifiable Mugwumps were available to us from various scholarly sources such as Alan Proctor's "Patterns of Diversity among the Massachusetts Mugwumps of 1884" (Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University, 1977). However, for consistency's sake we limited our samples to names that we collected from nineteenth-century sources, mainly newspaper accounts of the 1884 campaign.