

The tumultuous middle years of Maryland's Civil War brought systematic efforts to suppress dissent through arrests and imprisonment, consolidation of Unionism that further minimized likelihood of secession, federal and Confederate troops occupying parts of Maryland, and two battles on the state's soil (one still the single bloodiest day in American history). Troops—white and black, free and slave—were raised for the Union army through voluntary enlistments, national conscription passed by Congress in March 1863, and the establishment of the U.S. Bureau of Colored Troops later that year. The emergence of a radical, antislavery Union Party generated mounting pressure to end slavery in the state, and the state's slaveholders deprived themselves of a chance for government compensation by failing to devise a collective response to this new political dynamic.

In the wake of Lincoln's limited suspension of the writ of habeas corpus on April 27, 1861, along Maryland's railroad lines, the U.S. State Department that year assumed broad powers to arrest and imprison suspected dissidents in the state without charges or trial. (The president suspended the writ throughout the nation on September 24, 1862, two days after issuing his Emancipation Proclamation.) Marylanders were detained on the slightest suspicion of Southern sympathies—some were offered release in exchange for a loyalty oath, while others faced indefinite imprisonment with no charges. These circumstances underscored the strategic importance of Maryland for North and South. Southern leaders were quick to exploit Lincoln's extreme measures to hold the state in the Union, which provided fodder for Confederate propaganda that portrayed events in Maryland—beginning with the Northern "invasion" of April 19 and consequent presence of federal troops, arrests, military oversight of elections, and general suppression of civil liberties—as rationale for rebellion against a central government that would impede the right of a state to set its own course. The notion of Maryland as an occupied state, though, is misleading, as Union soldiers were permanently encamped only during the war's first year (along the Potomac River and outside Washington), and permanent military installations were in Baltimore and Annapolis only.

Though public officials and private citizens were detained throughout the North, the border states were replete with putatively Southern sympathizers who made their views known by their own public expressions, professions, prewar southern travel, or relatives and friends who had fled into the Confederacy. These individuals bore the wrath of federal officials determined to seize every advantage in suppressing the rebellion. Mark Neely found of the 509 military arrests of civilians in 1861 (where the home state of the detainee was known), 166, or 32.6 percent, were Marylanders.¹ This heavy federal hand on Maryland reflected both the importance of ensuring the state's loyalty and the imperative to thwart communications and

“Occupation”