With this issue, *The Confluence* is publishing the winner of the Jacqueline Tatom Award for the best student paper on a St. Louis topic. The St. Louis Metropolitan Research Exchange grants the award biennially. The Exchange is a group researchers and writers studying regional topics (as the name infers), drawing from a wide range of disciplines—public policy, political science, economics, history, geography, sociology, demographic studies—both in and beyond the academy. Meetings are pretty interesting. And because of its ecumenical nature, the papers submitted are a pretty interesting mix as well, running a wide swath of historical and contemporary, quantitative and literary. Deciding which papers to read is always a difficult decision.

We're proud to publish the Tatom Award. It speaks to the breadth of the regional experience. More importantly, students—both graduate and undergraduate—are investigating and interpreting new topics with new research and fresh interpretations. Because they are often mining untapped intellectual veins, they often find rich seams of material to analyze and articulate. In the past, these articles have examined the views of African American educators about the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, used GIS technology to understand neighborhood demographic changes over time, delved into domestic violence and divorce in the Civil War era, and investigated the relationship between religion and civil rights reform. It's quite a list. In this issue we are publishing an article by Jesse Nasta, who is interrogating Missouri laws that regulated the institution of slavery. He suggests that the introduction of steamboats onto the Mississippi River changed both the nature of escape for slaves and the ways slave owners had to respond. Common carriers—steamboat operators—became part of a complicated web connecting fugitives, owners, transportation technologies, and geography. We hope you like it, and like all the Tatom Award papers we publish.

Jeffrey Smith, PhD

Editor