

Soon after his “Civil War” first appeared on public television, Ken Burns was asked by an NPR reporter about accusations that his epic series had an interpretive bias. Burns said it was true, and that his general bias was that “the good guys won.” As an Ohio boy educated deep in the heart of Union country, I’d always taken much the same view; I moved to St. Louis from a place in northern Ohio where southern sympathizers in the Civil War, were thrown into the Ohio & Erie Canal (a chest-deep open sewer by the 1860s) until they renounced their “butternut” (that is, pro-Southern) views. Served them right, folks thought. That was the same county where abolitionist John Brown grew up and lived for awhile, where the Underground Railroad flourished, where a mob chased away bounty hunters trying to take an alleged former slave back to the South. We thought it was all pretty cut and dried.



In these parts, such is not the case. Sympathies for both sides run deep. The region had grown rapidly in the decades preceding the conflict with people from many places—northern industrial areas, southern plantation states, foreign countries—that carried divergent political views. Missouri represented a volatile political mix on the day Abraham Lincoln took office.

This Civil War issue of *The Confluence* looks at those differences and their legacies. Three articles examine the war’s religious impact. Sr. Carol Wildt recounts Price’s Raid through the eyes of a religious figure, and the responses of Confederates to them. Similarly, Miranda Rechtenwald and Sonja Rooney see the St. Louis wartime experience in “real time” as recorded by pro-Union Unitarian minister (and Washington University co-founder) William Greenleaf Eliot. Katherine Bava uses one St. Charles court case to delve into the divisions of not only nation and state, but the Presbyterian denomination as well.

Often, our impressions of war-related history focus on the war itself, but Thomas Curran writes of an unusual aspect of the Civil War, examining the experiences of pro-Confederate women accused of being spies in a St. Louis under Union control. David Straight looks at the impressions of the region by troops stationed at Benton Barracks during the war in their letters home. Patrick Burkhardt analyzes the sectional tensions that survived more than a half-century in his research into the controversy over constructing the Confederate memorial in Forest Park; old tensions died hard.

Herein lies the problem with the Civil War, and historical commemorations generally. People on both sides of the divide think their side and their ancestors were the good guys. Northerners saw fighting to end slavery as a noble cause, as we do; others look at their forebears as patriots fighting for what they thought was right and just. Thus, some are horrified by “secession balls” scheduled for this spring, while others are angered by judgmental Yankee historians. In the final analysis, commemorations are a tricky business, just as they were at the fiftieth anniversary of the war, with one side or the other offended or hurt or angry. Regardless of the side of your ancestors, we hope you enjoy this commemoration of the sesquicentennial of the Civil War.

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