



CALL FOR PAPERS

A Fire Bell in the Past: The Missouri Crisis at 200

February 15-16, 2019

Among the series of states that will be celebrating their bicentennials over the next few years, only one almost killed the Union it sought to enter. Proposing a new slave state that would jut up into the embattled zone of freedom created by the Northwest Ordinance, Missouri's application for admission drew immediate resistance, inspiring the first major congressional debate over the expansion of slavery and the beginning of a three-year crisis that terrified Thomas Jefferson "like a fire bell in the night." The awkward compromise that resolved the crisis, allowing Missouri to keep slavery but placing the state on the north side of an extended Mason-Dixon line, Jefferson saw presciently as "a reprieve only, not a final sentence." The by-product of global war, mass migration, the spasmodic expansion of capitalism, and rapidly changing, increasingly polarized ideas about race and slavery, the Missouri Crisis sent out ripples that continued through the 19th century, creating political problems, geographical oddities, and social contradictions that repeatedly made Missouri and the compromise that created it into flashpoints of conflict. In and around Missouri, sectional cultures competed, abolitionists and white supremacists confronted each other, and enslaved people sought their freedom on the rivers and in the courts. The ripples would not finally stop until Civil War broke out and the Missouri River region descended into the worst episode of social chaos and sustained guerilla warfare the United States had ever seen.

In February 2019, as near as possible to the 200th anniversary of the Tallmadge Amendment that tried to ban slavery in Missouri, the University of Missouri's Kinder Institute on Constitutional Democracy, a partner in the Missouri Bicentennial Alliance, will convene the first-ever national conference reassessing the Missouri Crisis. The best papers presented at the conference will be selected for development into chapters of a multi-authored book to be published in conjunction with the bicentennial commemorations in 2021. While the Missouri Crisis shows up in nearly every American history textbook, it has rarely received its due as the multi-faceted, watershed event it was, or been fully analyzed in light of modern historical scholarship. Missouri's bicentennial seems the right occasion to fill this gap.

We invite proposals for individual papers or entire sessions on any aspect of the Missouri Crisis, its origins, or its long-term impact. Reconsiderations of the politics surrounding Missouri statehood are sought, but especially welcome will be papers that apply innovative methods, diverse perspectives, new theoretical frameworks, and wider angles of vision. We are interested in papers that detail the larger cultural, economic, and social forces that shaped the crisis, as well as those that examine the implications of the fact that Missouri Territory was still a transnational border region, with thriving American Indian peoples living in and around it, an established French-speaking population, and trade connections to Mexico, the Rockies, and the Pacific. Most welcome of all will be papers that illuminate the experiences and strategies of African Americans, whose presence in early Missouri and its region was the most lasting and bitter aspect of the controversy, yet hardly gets mentioned in the standard accounts of the statehood struggle.

To apply, send a 1-2-page abstract and short-form c.v. to Thomas Kane at KaneTC@missouri.edu, by **August 15, 2018**. For further information, or to discuss ideas, contact Prof. Jeff Pasley, Kinder Institute Associate Director, at PasleyJ@missouri.edu or 573-529-3163.

For information about the conference as it develops, check democracy.missouri.edu, or follow us on Twitter, as we "live-tweet" the Missouri Crisis (and the conference) at [@MO_Crisis200](https://twitter.com/MO_Crisis200).