



## CALL FOR PAPERS

---

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

*February 15-16, 2019*  
Columbia, MO

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 allowed Missouri to keep slavery but placed the state on the wrong (north) side of an extended Mason-Dixon line. The by-product of global war, mass migration, the spasmodic expansion of capitalism, and rapidly changing ideas about race and slavery, the Missouri Crisis sent out ripples that continued through the 19th century, creating political, geographical, economic, and social tensions and 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, close 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. 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, nor been fully analyzed in light of modern historical scholarship. Missouri's bicentennial seems the right occasion to fill this gap. 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 official bicentennial commemoration in 2021.

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, [KaneTC@missouri.edu](mailto:KaneTC@missouri.edu), by **August 15, 2018**. For further information or to discuss ideas, contact Prof. Jeff Pasley, Kinder Institute Associate Director, [PasleyJ@missouri.edu](mailto:PasleyJ@missouri.edu) or **573-529-3163**. Discounted accommodations will be available for conference participants, and by application, some travel assistance for presenters coming from outside the region.

For information about the conference as it develops, check [democracy.missouri.edu](http://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).