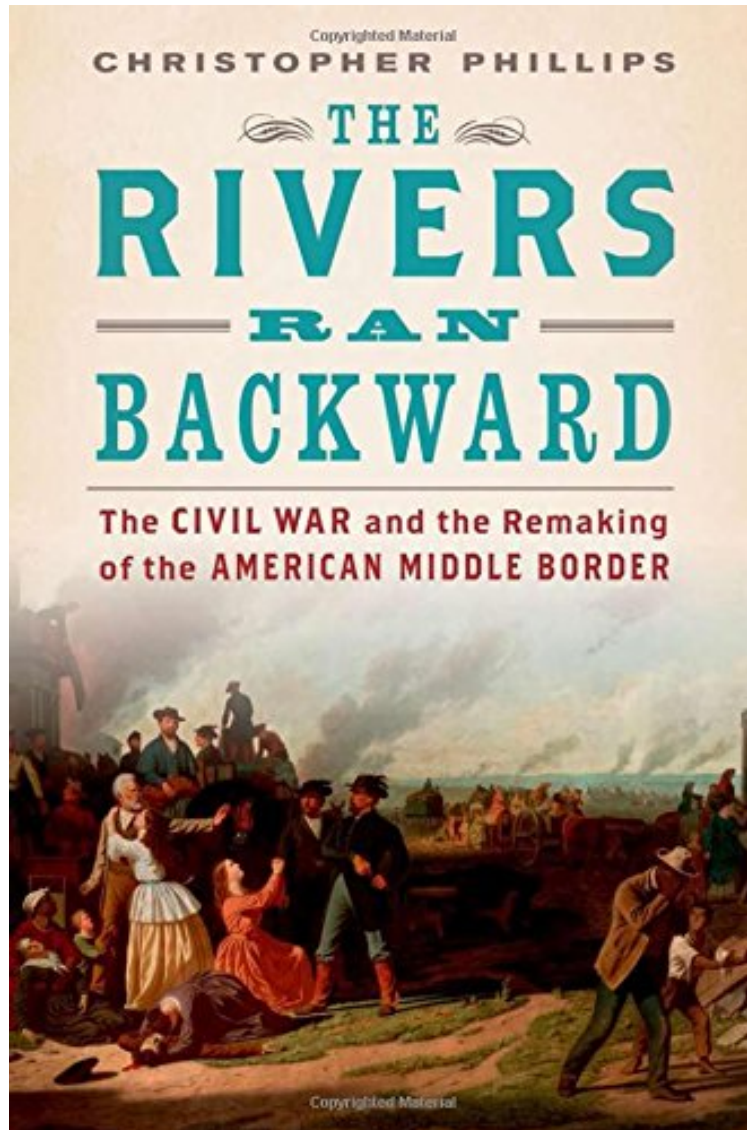


(Download) The Rivers Ran Backward: The Civil War and the Remaking of the American Middle Border

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Christopher Phillips

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Christopher Phillips : The Rivers Ran Backward: The Civil War and the Remaking of the American Middle Border before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Rivers Ran Backward: The Civil War and the Remaking of the American Middle Border:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Old history, new premise
By Alan F. Sewell
When I started this book I was thinking that *THE RIVERS RAN BACKWARD* was a nod to the well-known geographical alignment of the Cumberland and Tennessee rivers, taking their great northern jog into the Ohio River, thereby allowing the Union's riverine navy to break the Confederacy's back in the West. However, it turns out that Christopher Phillips created the title metaphorically to refer to what he believes was the Civil War's reversal of the CULTURAL RIVER whose current was guiding the development of the Western Border States:=====The national confluence once represented as the West was remade as South and North, the great divide symbolized by the former region's now-wide rivers.=====I'll have to think on that premise for a while before I decide if I can agree on it. (It seems to me that perhaps the extremists in the North and South had radicalized the West BEFORE the Civil War started. After all, the first armed conflict between North and South was in "Bleeding Kansas" in 1856, so in a sense the Civil War started on the Western Border and then inflamed the rest of the country). Premise aside, this is a solid book that encapsulates most of the previous scholarship and popular writing about the Civil War on the Western Border, in the states of Kentucky, Missouri, Kansas, and neighboring parts of southern Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. It brings to life the war that divided families and set neighbors at each other's throats. It describes the four-year terror of house-burnings, forcible relocation of "disloyal" people, and summary executions of Confederate sympathizers by Unionists, and of Unionists by Confederate guerillas. Those who were indifferent to the war and sought neutrality risked being murdered by cutthroats pretending to be soldiers of either side. Phillips draws from earlier classic works like *THE CIVIL WAR ON THE WESTERN BORDER* (which I read decades ago in researching this topic) as well as hundreds of lesser-known sources. He makes the point that this was the frontier of the East / West divide of the USA in the mid-19th Century, as well as the North / South divide. The book carries its analysis of the post-war effects on these states forward into the 20th Century. It explains the curious phenomenon of why Kentucky, Missouri, and even ferociously Unionist Kansas retrograded into the Southern sphere of influence after the South lost the war. I've published articles on this subject going back to the early 1980s, so I was familiar with the general run of events. Nevertheless, I was educated to a few points: 1. That the slavery culture in Kentucky and Missouri was much different from the plantation slavery further south. Slaveowners in the border states owned slaves in two's and three's, not in the hundreds as in the Deep South. The people were torn between patriotism for the Union, and their ill-feeling toward Yankee Abolitionists. Thus, there was every shade of opinion in these states. The center of opinion shifted back and forth, ironically becoming more pro-southern as the certainty of Union victory increased. 2. The sheer oppressive enormity that the war inflicted on these people. They were never at ease. A single word that seemed to favor the Confederacy or the Union could get a man killed by those on the other side. Petty quarrels over private matters would cause neighbors to denounce each other to the military authorities, resulting in incarceration of the denounced party, just like in totalitarian societies. The Constitution was defunct. The book, being encyclopedic of most of the prior work on the subject has the strengths and weaknesses typical of these works. Its strength is its completeness in encapsulating prior scholarship. It is written in a readable style without opinionating by the author. For example, he documents the Copperhead Movement in Indiana and Illinois but leaves it for the reader to judge whether it posed a material threat to the Union or was a "will-o-the-wisp". Likewise, the reader can render his/her own judgment of whether the Federal military government imposed on the Border States was needlessly heavy-handed. Of course, the weakness is the inverse of its strength. Because it is a scholarly book it is lengthy and matter-of-fact. It's not a happy, popular story with clichés about "Moonlight and Magnolias in the South" or "Battle Cry of Freedom in the North." It's about the brutal tragedies of families at war with each other and good men and women wondering every day which side might come to their house and drive them off their property or kill them. I've yet to form any definite conclusions about the author's primary premise. Did the Civil War alter the "cultural rivers" of the Western Border or merely confirm the trend of its pre-war development, which had already started to fission into a North / South divide? As a Civil War buff, I'll be giving that some thought.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. The Civil War in the Country's Middle
By Eric Mayforth
Students of the Civil War know that the state of Kentucky was distinct from both North and South during the conflict. Less well known is how the whole region of the West near the Ohio and Mississippi rivers was as well. In "The Rivers Ran Backward," Christopher Phillips shows the extent to which the West was a distinct section of the country before the war and that it was divided into Northern and Southern sections only in the war's aftermath. While there were wide-ranging opinions concerning slavery in the region, most in the West were relative moderates on the question, with few abolitionists or fire-eaters. Phillips describes the politics of the late antebellum period. There was heavy Southern influence in the southern parts of Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio, with slaveholding not unknown even in those nominally free states—the author recalls cases of an Indiana man and an Ohio man eventually fighting for the Confederacy when the war came. The war itself was traumatic in Missouri, Kentucky, and elsewhere in the border region. Phillips looks at the secession debate in the slave states that remained in the Union. Life was unsettled to say the least in the region during the war, with localized skirmishes and community strife, guerrilla warfare, and strained friendships between unionists, secessionists, and neutrals. Both armies attempted to occupy parts of the region during the conflict, with conscription evaders and deserters adding to the chaos. Phillips describes the politics of the slaveholding but Union states of Missouri and Kentucky during the war and notes the effect of the Emancipation Proclamation in those places.

The election of 1864 is also discussed. Phillips describes how the region known as the West during the antebellum period later came to think of itself as divided at the Ohio River between North and South in the decades following the conflict. While the war was traumatic for the entire nation, it was especially so for those borderlands that saw more than their share of the fighting and that contained people in close proximity with differing (or no) loyalties. "The Rivers Ran Backward" is a well-researched volume examining the war in an important part of the country and would be enjoyed by those with a keen interest in the Civil War. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Impressive work! By Richard R. McCormick An excellent study of the politics of racial attitudes in Middle America in both pre and post Civil War times. Truly impressive research! Unfortunately a reader will realize that our country is still adversely affected by race relations, and in some ways not totally different from the attitudes present in the 19th century. Interesting presentation of a point that "Conservative Politics" then incorporated a strong belief that the protection of property from interference by the government was an absolute right of the people and that, without regard for the human element, slaves were as much property as land, house, or horse. It is not possible to read this work and not acquire a new perspective about our society then and even now.

Most Americans imagine the Civil War in terms of clear and defined boundaries of freedom and slavery: a straightforward division between the slave states of Kentucky and Missouri and the free states of Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Kansas. However, residents of these western border states, Abraham Lincoln's home region, had far more ambiguous identities-and contested political loyalties-than we commonly assume. In *The Rivers Ran Backward*, Christopher Phillips sheds light on the fluid political cultures of the "Middle Border" states during the Civil War era. Far from forming a fixed and static boundary between the North and South, the border states experienced fierce internal conflicts over their political and social loyalties. White supremacy and widespread support for the existence of slavery pervaded the "free" states of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, which had much closer economic and cultural ties to the South, while those in Kentucky and Missouri held little identification with the South except over slavery. Debates raged at every level, from the individual to the state, in parlors, churches, schools, and public meeting places, among families, neighbors, and friends. Ultimately, the pervasive violence of the Civil War and the cultural politics that raged in its aftermath proved to be the strongest determining factor in shaping these states' regional identities, leaving an indelible imprint on the way in which Americans think of themselves and others in the nation. *The Rivers Ran Backward* reveals the complex history of the western border states as they struggled with questions of nationalism, racial politics, secession, neutrality, loyalty, and even place-as the Civil War tore the nation, and themselves, apart. In this major work, Phillips shows that the Civil War was more than a conflict pitting the North against the South, but one within the West that permanently reshaped American regions.

"Previous historians have explored the violence and internal fighting in the West, especially in Missouri, but few have provided as detailed an account of the war's effects on the region or considered as carefully its cultural legacy. Phillips's thoroughly researched and well-argued account presents an original and persuasive interpretation that deserves wide attention. *The Rivers Ran Backward* should become a standard work on the trans-Appalachian West."--Jonathan M. Atkins, *American Historical* "Phillips' expert command of Kentucky and Missouri history enables him to analyze incisively the war's impact in the Lower North...[The subfield's] most important and wide-reaching title to date."--*Civil War Book* "[E]ssential reading for anyone interested in the American Civil War and its unforeseen consequences. A 'sprawling' work, but one that conveys superbly the damage done by war to the diverse residents of a no less sprawling region that had once had grand hopes of saving the republic from the disastrous consequences of sectional conflict."--*History* "A masterful study of the 'Middle Border' region. Easy dichotomies about the Civil War era are complicated by Phillips's rich, complex narrative. Indispensable reading for students of the Civil War era."--**CHOICE** "The region where five great rivers come together-the Ohio, Cumberland, Tennessee, Missouri, and Mississippi-experienced a civil war within the Civil War. Christopher Phillips' fresh perspective on this conflict offers new insights on the great American trauma that forged a renewed nation on the ruins of the old one. This book belongs on the shelf of everyone interested in the Civil War."--James M. McPherson, author of *The War That Forged a Nation: Why the Civil War Still Matters* "Christopher Phillips has written one of the most important books on the Civil War in a generation. Massively researched-down to local church records-sparkling with original thinking, and deeply humane, *The Rivers Ran Backward* illustrates how Americans struggled over the stakes of the conflict, the definition of freedom, and the very idea of North, South, and West. Phillips reveals the War Within the States, personal, intense, and hugely consequential."--T.J. Stiles, author of *Custer's Trials: A Life on the Frontier of a New America* "In a work of remarkable research and clear insight, Christopher Phillips has recast our understanding of a vast part of the American landscape during the Civil War. Phillips shows us that the war, and the society it defined, refused to be bounded either by the Ohio River or by comforting generalizations."--Edward L. Ayers, author of *In the Presence of Mine Enemies: Civil War in the Heart of America* "The remaking of 'the middle border' that *The Rivers Ran Backward* forwards rests on a fundamental remapping of American regional histories. Instead of treating the Ohio River as a divide between the realms of freedom and slavery that dated from the beginnings of the republic and produced the

Civil War, this exhaustively researched, elegantly written, and powerfully argued book shows how the Civil War produced the division between North and South that was subsequently inscribed in the memories of the people on opposite sides of the middle border and written into the histories of the region and the United States."--Stephen Aron, author of *The American West: A Very Short Introduction*"[An] excellent work of scholarship. By focusing on the Middle Border, Phillips expands our understandings of the West and forces historians to reconsider the North-South sectional binary. As a result, *The Rivers Ran Backwards* significantly adds to understandings of the border region as well as the American West."--*The Civil War Monitor*"*The Rivers Ran Backward* is a wonderfully deep distillation of a career's worth of scholarly investigation into the people, politics, society, and warfare of the western borderlands during the Civil War era. It is highly recommended."--*Civil War Books and Authors*"[Christopher Phillips] places the trans-Appalachian border under a lens to reveal, in fine-grained detail, the multitude of wars within the Civil War that flared on both sides of the Ohio River and west through Missouri and Kansas...[E]xhaustive research...[and] fine narrative skill...adds much to our understanding of this crucial region, untangling the shifting loyalties (and disloyalties) that tore the region apart."--*The Wall Street Journal*"A most creative and important work of scholarship [with...]penetrating arguments and vivid examples."--*Missouri Historical* "Scholarly, readable, and compelling."--*Naval History* "Phillips writes eloquently, sometimes even poetically...[and his] exhaustive research in primary and secondary sources sets a high standard for historical detail, so too as an example of first-class historical analysis. Readers will especially welcome the beautifully crafted short literary sketches that preface each of his book's nine chapters."--*Ohio Valley History*"[A] masterful combination of synthesis of existing scholarship and extensive primary research....Phillips's book will clearly be a seminal study of the Midwest during the Civil War and a work that scholars will be turning to--either for enlightenment or to challenge--for a long time."--*Annals of Iowa*"Christopher Phillips's meticulously researched and well-evidenced *The Rivers Ran Backward*... brings together insights gained over several decades of writing and publishing on the topic to construct a new and comprehensive interpretation of the border region and the sectional crisis."--*Journal of the Civil War Era*About the AuthorChristopher Phillips is Professor of History and Department Head at the University of Cincinnati. He is the author of seven books, including *Damned Yankee: The Life of General Nathaniel Lyon*; *Freedom's Port: The African American Community of Baltimore, 1790-1860*; *Missouri's Confederate: Claiborne Fox Jackson and the Creation of Southern Identity in the Border West*; and *The Civil War in the Border South*.