

WOMEN AT WAR

A CIVIL WAR GOVERNORS OF KENTUCKY TEACHING THEME

CONTEXT

Wars are not just about battles. The Civil War plunged all of Kentucky society into conflict at the national, sectional, state, community, and family levels.

By their choice or through harsh circumstance, women found themselves in new roles, some of them unimaginable just a few years before. Not only did they take sole responsibility for homes, farms and businesses, they also sought outside employment as nurses or factory workers, voiced political opinions as they protested the lack of food and goods, and expanded the footprint of the already female charitable domain by hosting benevolent events or prayer groups to keep up morale.

The Civil War gave women the opportunity to take on new responsibilities, but they still fought for their own equality for years to come. The Kentucky Civil War governor's papers do not contain many letters from women to the executive office, partly because women did not usually write to governors. The documents highlighted in this lesson are a selection of "typical" letters to the governor, but do not represent "typical" writings of women in the 19th century. As a group, they show transitions in rights available to women and their involvement with government throughout the war years.

PRIMARY SOURCES

- [Commonwealth of Kentucky v. Sally E. Grant, Warrant](#)
- [Jane Welch to Beriah Magoffin](#)
- [Leslie Combs to Thomas E. Bramlette](#)
- [George Nichols, Affidavit](#)

BIG-PICTURE QUESTIONS

- Why would women write to the governor?
- How did women exercise agency (the ability of individuals to alter their conditions) between 1861-1865?
- How does the role of women change over the course of the war?

SECONDARY LITERATURE

- Nancy D. Baird and Josie Underwood. *Josie Underwood's Civil War Diary*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009.
- Drew Gilpin Faust. *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996.
- Anne E. Marshall "A 'Sisters' War: Kentucky Women and their Civil War Diaries." *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 100, no. 3 (2012): 481-502.
- Jane E. Schultz. *Women at the Front: Hospital Workers in Civil War America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.

ACTIVITIES

- **The Caroline Chronicles**: A primary and secondary source reader with accompanying writing and in-class activities. The teaching unit documents the life of an African American woman bound and accused of murder in Louisville. Through it, students encounter firsthand testimony about women's work, opportunity, and peril during the Civil War.
- **Story Board**: Using document 1 or 4 create a six-block storyboard that depicts its event

