

THE MEANING OF UNION: USING CIVIL WAR IMAGES

A CIVIL WAR GOVERNORS OF KENTUCKY TEACHING THEME

CONTEXT

Historians identify individual citizens' thoughts and feelings about the Civil War through analyzing letters, diaries, books, newspapers and images. They look for key words that help explain the motivation for individuals to support and sustain their side of this internal conflict. References to the Revolutionary War or words such as “Freedom,” “Union,” and “Liberty” helped Civil War-era people look back to their past to understand events in their present—much like we do by studying history today.

Sometimes, those same ideas are conveyed visually as well as or instead of in writing. The documents linked below contain images, logos, or government seals in the letterhead that demonstrate devotion to the Union through patriotic imagery during the Civil War.

PRIMARY SOURCES

- [Benjamin F. Blankenship to James F. Robinson](#)
- [James Williams to James F. Robinson](#)
- [Mary Ann Burns to James F. Robinson](#)
- [John Maris to James F. Robinson](#)

BIG-PICTURE QUESTIONS

- How do the letterheads convey meaning in their symbols, colors, or text? Do the meanings change from source to source?
- What do the letterheads tell you about the about the individuals writing the letters?
- Why do you think color letterheads often were considered a luxury item?

SECONDARY LITERATURE

- Gary W. Gallagher. *The Union War*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011.
- David M. Henkin. *The Postal Age: The Emergence of Modern Communications in Nineteenth-Century America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006..

ACTIVITIES

- **Letter to the Governor:** Have students design their own letterhead based on the designs in the primary sources, and write a letter to one of Kentucky’s three governors during the Civil War.
- **KWL:** Have students complete a KWL chart on Civil War letterheads