

TRUE CRIME

A CIVIL WAR GOVERNORS OF KENTUCKY TEACHING THEME
BY EMILY MOSES

CONTEXT

No time in history has been free of crime, but the brutal and chaotic conditions Kentuckians faced during the Civil War may have caused the commonwealth's crime rate to increase.

Courts overflowed with cases, overwhelmed local justice systems could not keep up, and many people reached out to the governor as a last lifeline. More than half of each governor's wartime correspondence dealt with pardon requests and appeals to remit (reduce) fines and prison sentences. Victims turned to the governor for help, but so did people who had committed a crime because of the hard choices the war forced them to make.

The documents for this theme show the range of requests Civil War-era governors received.

BIG-PICTURE QUESTIONS

- How did crime change over the course of the war?
- Were governors more willing to pardon, remit, or grant a respite? Why or why not?
- Do you think race and gender played a role in the governors' decisions? Explain your reasoning.

PRIMARY SOURCES

The Murder of Dr. Norwood

- [Robert Glass to Beriah Magoffin](#)
- [Alex H. Major to Beriah Magoffin](#)
- [L. W. Trafton to Beriah Magoffin](#)
- [F. A. Cannon et al., Five Hundred Dollars Reward](#)

Petitions to the Governor

- [R. F. Baird and J. Hobson to Beriah Magoffin](#)
- [Mary Ann Burns to James F. Robinson](#)
- [Nicholas Simon to Thomas E. Bramlette](#)

SECONDARY LITERATURE

- Amy Louise Wood, and University of Mississippi. Center for the Study of Southern Culture. 2011. "Violence." The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture, V. 19. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- "Irregular Violence and Trauma in Civil War Kentucky." The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society 116, no. 2 (Spring 2018): 146–292.
- A Guide to Legal Terms in the 19th Century.

ACTIVITIES

- **MURDER!:** As governor do you issue a warrant for Jim Brown? Why or why not?
- **Judge and Jury:** Examine the facts of each petition, determine what the petitioner is requesting, and then decide if you agree or disagree with the governor.

- **Response Paper**

Students should select either the Dr. Norwood documents or Petitions to the Governor to write a one page response. Their responses should be single-spaced, have 1-inch margins and use 12-point Times New Roman font.

»» Address these questions.

- Who wrote it?
- What is the subject?
- What makes this collection unique?

»» What does this text tell us about Crime during the Civil War?

»» What in these documents reminds you of the themes and issues you have heard, read, or discussed in this course?

»» Do the documents raise new questions about American society that we have not covered in class?

»» How do the documents help you better understand everyday individuals during the Civil War era?

