

Active Learning Workshop (for a smaller class)

This workshop is designed to help students of history acquire a better understanding of historical interpretation, as well as providing a guideline of the ways in which historians tackle important questions in the field.

For this workshop, the class will be split into four groups: A, B, C, and D. You will collaborate with your group and examine the four attached secondary source passages from Chandra Manning's *What this Cruel War was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War*. You will then discuss the following question amongst your group:

What was the rationale of Northern Union soldiers for fighting in the Civil War?

Groups A and C will defend the position that **Northern soldiers fought to preserve the Union.**

Groups B and D will defend the position that **Northern soldiers fought to rid the Union of slavery.**

Group A will select one member of the group to present their position to the class. Present your argument using evidence from the sources.

Group B will then restate group A's argument.

Group B will then select one member of their group to present their position to the class. Be sure to use evidence from the sources.

Group A will then restate group B's argument.

Repeat for groups C and D.

Passage 1

Union soldiers occupied a broad spectrum of opinion on slavery in the second year of the war. Some impatient souls grew restless because they thought change in slavery policy was coming too slowly. “Some of us were led to take up arms in this maintenance of *republican institutions*, menaced by a slaveholding aristocracy in open rebellion,” one soldier began. Unless direct action against slavery came soon, the Union Army “had better disband at once, and go home,” he advised, because there was no point in trying to win the war without attacking “the manifest and acknowledged cause of rebellion.”

Passage 2

As one Kansan described Confederates, “there is nothing that they seem to feel so much, and care so much about, as to lose their slaves. I honestly believe that many of them would rather have us *kidnap their children*, than to let their n....go off with us.” Either wipe out slavery, he insisted, or “the same difficulty in an aggravated form will soon rise again.”

Passage 3

Some troops simply despised the idea of abolition out of sheer racism. A Maine soldier who joined the Army in March 1862, for instance, claimed that men in his regiment “hate a ‘nig’ as they do the great enemy of mankind.” Far from freeing a slave, they would “shoot one as quickly as they would a snake.” For others, it was a question of priorities, and quibbling about slavery while the Union was in danger was like worrying about a single piece of furniture while the whole house burned. Pvt. Roland Bowen fumed that...if Lincoln declared “all slaves are hereafter freed. Amen. And on the other hand if he says not one shall be freed. Amen. If this can be done then this War will come to a Speedy and Happy termination.” Ending the war and saving the Union stood as his primary objectives, and he viewed national unity as more indispensable than slavery policy to these goals.

Passage 4

The Union existed, according to northern volunteers in 1861, not simply for the limited purposes like facilitating white citizens’ pursuit of material interests, but for the grander purpose of proving to the world that republican self-government based on the principles of expressed in the Declaration of Independence could work. The destruction of the Union would turn the idea of government based on liberty and equality into an object of ridicule, and dash all hopes for the success of “the experiment of our popular government.” One soldier explained to his father that the Union must survive to prove “man is capable of self government,” while his regiment’s newspaper asked, “destroy the Union and what can republics hope for?”