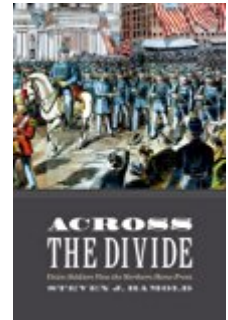


**Steven J. Ramold.** *Across the Divide: Union Soldiers View the Northern Home Front.*  
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Steven J. Ramold challenges the idea that Union soldiers and the Northern home front stood united during the Civil War. He argues that fighting men and civilians held clashing attitudes and opinions about key issues relating to the war, a reality that is crucial to understanding the political and social outcomes of the nation's bloodiest conflict. For Ramold, soldiers left for war with specific expectations about how their families, friends, and communities would support the Union army in the field. Soldiers anticipated that the home front would represent an unquestioned source of strength by providing constant emotional and political support. Quickly and unexpectedly, however, fighting men viewed attitudes and opinions back home with a sense of anxiety, fear, and even anger. For some soldiers, the home front ultimately symbolized not a source of strength, but a major obstacle in the way of Union victory.

Ramold identifies several different "divides" that explain the chasm between soldiers and civilians. Not only did the physical separation from home create emotional stress, but firsthand expe-

rience with combat also desensitized Northern soldiers to death, suffering, and violence in a way that challenged prewar notions of morality. According to Ramold, soldiers became decidedly more depraved, making it difficult to relate with family and friends when communicating during the war, visiting on furlough, or returning home after the conflict. Battlefield experience, moreover, convinced soldiers that civilians simply could never understand the most important issues relating to the war. Fighting men believed that a firsthand viewpoint from the front lines provided a unique perspective on key issues such as slavery, conscription, and national politics that gave soldiers' opinions greater weight than civilian noncombatants.

Problems with communication further exacerbated the physical and experience divides. While letters from home often provided emotional support, letters that described anything but complete support for soldiers and the war convinced some that civilians were unwilling to acknowledge or match the sacrifices of Union sol-

diers. At the same time, if communication became less frequent or letters stopped altogether, soldiers took it as an affront or a signal that loved ones no longer supported their sacrifices in the field. Finally, the exaggerated rhetoric and political biases of Northern newspapers provided soldiers with an inaccurate perception about the strength and nature of the antiwar movement, Southern sympathizers, and internal enemies at home. Although such fears proved exaggerated, fighting men became convinced that a large segment of the Northern population was disloyal or deliberately harming the war effort, and lashed out with violent rhetoric and threats.

Ramold's argument unfolds in six thematic chapters, each describing how these various divides created a gulf between soldiers and civilians over crucial wartime issues. Civil War scholars will find some of the arguments familiar. Three separate chapters about conscription, the antiwar movement, and the 1864 presidential election deal broadly with soldiers' perspective on political dissent. Here Ramold confirms what such historians as James M. McPherson, Jennifer L. Weber, and others have argued. Union soldiers had little tolerance for antiwar sentiment, resistance to the draft, or even opposition to Abraham Lincoln's reelection. Some soldiers even viewed draft rioters, political opponents of Lincoln, and Confederate sympathizers with more vitriol than Southern rebels, and at times advocated violent measures to suppress their activities.

Ramold's chapter about emancipation constitutes the strongest aspect of the book. The extent to which Union soldiers accepted and embraced emancipation remains a topic of vigorous debate among Civil War historians, but here the author puts forward a nuanced interpretation that represents a welcome middle ground. Rather than suggesting that Northern soldiers largely accepted antislavery attitudes and emancipation or cared little about issues of slavery and race, Ramold maintains that a diverse and fluid debate existed

among Union soldiers, illuminating a spectrum of attitudes about emancipation. Some soldiers rejected emancipation as a war aim under any circumstances; others embraced abolition and complete racial equality as vital to winning the war. At the same time, a middle ground of "emancipationists" supported emancipation as a war aim, but rejected radical ideas about racial equality. Most important, Ramold acknowledges that soldiers' opinions shifted throughout the war, as wartime experiences challenged antebellum beliefs about slavery on both ends of the spectrum.

To a large degree Ramold tends to avoid direct engagement with current scholarship. A notable omission from the text or bibliography is Gary W. Gallagher's *The Union War* (2011), a recent publication that provoked spirited scholarly discussion, and is most relevant to Ramold's topic. Most notably, Gallagher forcefully argues that the Union army represented the single most important symbol of national unity in the North. He also suggests that Union soldiers thought little about ideas of race, slavery, and emancipation, and viewed abolition only as a necessary measure to win a war to preserve the Union. In many senses, *Across the Divide* challenges these ideas. Ramold's Union army appears not as a symbol of unity but as a group that remained suspicious and angry about the way Northerners supported the war, and sometimes lashed out at individuals back home. *Across the Divide* could have benefited from *The Union War*, which perhaps appeared after Ramold's manuscript was complete. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to know how Ramold believes his argument fits with the most recent scholarly debates about soldiers' motivations, emancipation, and the Northern home front. Without a doubt, the book has something to contribute to these discussions.

*Across the Divide* is highly readable and clearly argued, and contains new information that Civil War scholars will find useful. In the broadest sense, the fact that many Union soldiers

viewed the Northern home front as a source of constant worry, anxiety, and even anger challenges many of our assumptions about the Civil War North. Historians have long debated whether internal divisions or lack of support from the Southern home front damaged the Confederate war effort, but fewer scholars have asked similar questions about the Civil War North. The tacit assumption seems to be that because the Union won the war, the Northern home front must have rallied around the war or supported the cause to a greater degree. Ramold demonstrates that many Northern soldiers did not share in this assumption, suggesting that scholars should continue to examine the significance of internal divisions in the Civil War North.

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