

SHOW-ME AMBIGUITY:
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF MISSOURI CIVIL WAR REENACTMENT

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines Civil War reenactment as it is practiced and performed by residents of Missouri. Using fieldwork (interviews and participant observation) conducted by the researcher at reenactment events, the thesis describes reenactment's rhetorical tendency to suggest that individual Civil War soldiers are ethically ambiguous characters. These Missouri Civil War reenactors respond to outside interpretations of the war, and make use of the unique and trying circumstances of Missouri's frontier-style warfare and environment to position individual motivations of Civil War characters as removed from larger socio-political ideologies. The author points to the link between the narrative tendency to emphasize the difficult circumstances of frontier warfare and the embodied practice of reenactment, which often involves negative or strong bodily experiences. Two regional reenactments are discussed in order to demonstrate how reenactor interpretations of the Civil War are communicated to audiences.