The Border States by Amy Murrell Taylor

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| Reading | Notes |
| The Border States, Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, and West Virginia, were located between the southern states that had seceded from Union and the Northern states. These states seemed like a "middle ground." None of them had supported Lincoln in the Election of 1860, but they had not seceded when he was elected either. They were slave-holding states that remained with the free states of the Union. Yet, there was little hope of peace as war began. Angry confrontations, including some of the most violent guerrilla warfare in American history, became an everyday fact of life in this region, as citizens who supported the Union lived side-by-side with people who supported the Confederacy and confronted one another on a daily basis. Public opinion surrounding slavery was just as divided. Abolitionists set up new organizations and newspapers, while proslavery vigilantes tried to stop them with mob violence. Border States represented nothing less than the warring nation on a smaller scale.At first these states tried to hold their divided population together by taking the compromise position: neutrality. But because they were in the center of the two sides geographically, both the Union and Confederacy recognized their strategic value. Maryland surrounded Washington, D.C., on three sides, and Baltimore's port and railroads were on key supply lines for the Union. Kentucky was key to controlling the Ohio River, which ran along its northern border. This river and the railroad lines that started into Kentucky and ran into the South would be important routes for troops. Crossing the Ohio River into Kentucky to invade would also have meant dangerous beach landings of troops. Missouri sat on the Mississippi River, and St. Louis was the home to one of the nation's largest arsenals. The Border States possessed human and material resources that could help either side. So with the opening shots of the war, both set out to win these states.The earliest challenge to the Border States' neutrality took place in Maryland in April 1861. A Massachusetts regiment was moving through Maryland on the way to Washington, D.C. A Pro-Confederate mob in Baltimore opened fire as the troops approached. The Massachusetts soldiers fired back, and by the end of the day, 16 people had died. More Union troops were then sent to occupy the capital of Annapolis and protect the route into D.C. The state legislature left Annapolis, and although its members openly criticized Union leaders, no vote for secession was called. By mid-June, Union feeling dominated, and all six Maryland seats in the U.S. Congress were held by Union supporters. Kentucky also abandoned neutrality, despite the governor's southern sympathies, when it officially decided to support the Union in September 1861. Kentucky's decsion was the result of anger at the Confederacy for imvading the state, as the confederacy claimed it was each state's right to decide whether it was part of the Union or not. Missouri was also invaded by the Confederacy, so Union troops were invited in by the governor to push Confederate troops out. Neutrality was over and the Border States were now officially attached to the Union.Even though these states had decided to stay in the Union, not all citizens in them felt the same. Long-standing disagreements rose up with a vengeance, and citizens openly attacked each other. Communities divided, and in West Virginia, an entire state, split from Confederate Virginia in 1863. West Virginia held the arsenal John Brown had attacked, contained key mountain passes, and was strategically located along the beginning of the Ohio River. The citizens, living in this mountainous region of Virginia, had always been subsistence farmers, not slaveholders. They broke away from Virginia with the help of Union troops. Families divided, too. Sons fled Unionist parents to enlist in the Confederate army. Brothers, such as a Kentucky Senator's own sons, joined the opposing armies. Even husbands and wives avoided talking politics lest they find themselves on the brink of divorce. "There is scarcely a family that is not divided," a St. Louis woman noted in 1861. This deeply felt inner conflict forced both armies to continue fighting mightily in these states throughout the war. The stakes were high. Lincoln himself said in September 1861, "I think to lose Kentucky is nearly the same as to lose the whole game. Kentucky gone, we cannot hold Missouri, nor as I think, Maryland. These all against us, and the job on our hands would be too large for us."The fighting in these states was some the most violent of the whole war, and nowhere was this more true than in Missouri. There, pro-southern forces had been influential from the start, counting among them the governor of the state. Frustrated with his state's neutrality, the governor tried to get control of the federal arsenal by organizing a pro-Confederate militia in April 1861. Union troops prevented this, but it took the Union over a year to solidify their hold on Missouri. But the Union would have to fight against Confederate guerilla forces in Missouri for the entire war. Unionist guerrilla forces from Kansas, known as "Jayhawkers," also fought against these Confederate guerillas, exposing the citizens of these states to some of the most brutal warfare Americans had ever seen.For the Union this meant that winning the war would require suppressing this rebellion in its own border states as well as winning the conventional battles elsewhere. Lincoln decided early on that political measures, in addition to military force, were necessary to curb disloyalty and put down the border region's inner civil war, causing him to develop policies that violated civil liberties using his power as Commander-in-Chief. The first instance occurred in Maryland, in the early days of the war when Maryland had not yet decided on supporting the Union. President Lincoln suspended the writ of habeas corpus, ordering that anyone suspected of disloyal acts or speech be arrested and detained in military prison without a hearing in court. It was a move that resulted in the arrest of members of Maryland's legislature, among others, but as the state's unionism eventually prevailed, the policy was extended to other places, too. In Missouri, facing the battle against Confederate guerillas, General John C. Fremont imposed martial law, or military rule, on that state, ending its elected government. He ordered the seizure of property owned by Confederate sympathizers as well as the emancipation of their slaves, and military courts replaced civil courts. In September 1862, Lincoln ordered the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus nationwide. Living in the Border States after this meant living with the fear of arrest for any word or deed thought to be disloyal to the Union. Lincoln would have to be very careful to control of these states but not lose their loyalty. |  |