

# Diversity in Desertion: How Desertion Differed in Mississippi

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# Overview

- Context on Desertion
- Literature Review
- Methodology
- Why Did Mississippians Desert?
- What Did Deserters Do?
- What Punishments Did Deserters Receive?
- Conclusion
- Opportunities for Further Research

# Context

- What is a deserter?
  - A person who leaves the armed forces without permission and with no intention of returning.
- According to "Desertion, Cowardice and Punishment" by Mark A. Weitz:
  - Approximately 1 in 9 soldiers deserted Union forces.
  - Approximately 1 in 10 soldiers deserted Confederate forces.
- What about Mississippi?
  - Roughly 11,604 deserters were from Mississippi, according to Samuel B. McGuire from the University of Georgia.
  - Roughly 80,000 white men served in Confederate forces, according to John Marszalek and Clay Williams

# Literature Review

- Literature on Confederate desertion
  - Mark A. Weitz. *More Damning than Slaughter: Desertion in the Confederate Army*.
- Literature on Desertion in North Carolina
  - Peter S. Bearman. "Desertion as Localism: Army Unit Solidarity and Group Norms in the U.S. Civil War."
- Literature on Jones County
  - Victoria E. Bynum. "Newt Knight and the Free State of Jones: Myth, Memory, and Imagination."

# Methodology

- 135 letters from CWRGM
- 50 letters excluded
- 62 letters providing context on causations, actions, and punishments
- 109 locations of deserters within 70 letters

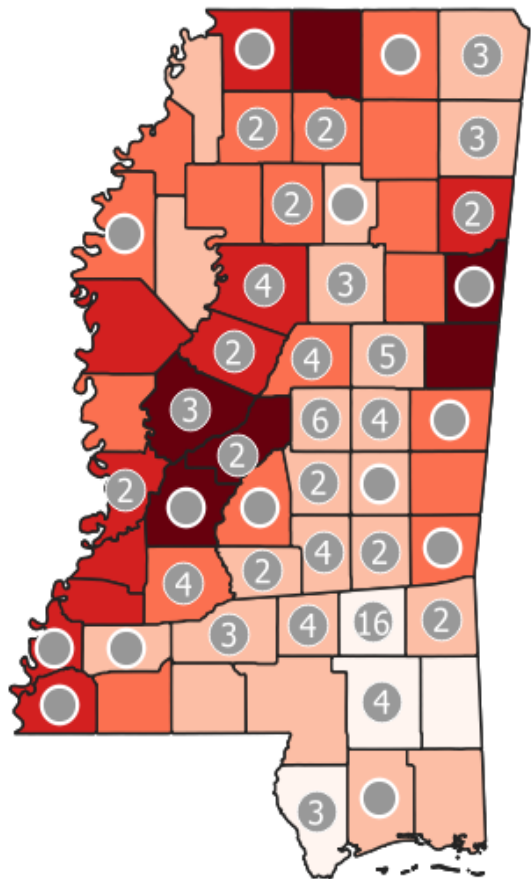
# Why Did Mississippians Desert?

<b>Causes for Desertion Described in Letters:</b>	<b>Number of Letters</b>
Dissatisfaction with Authority	4
Lack of Communication/Confusion regarding Expectations	3
Concern for family	3
Weakness of Authority/Repercussions	2
Lack of pay	2
Poor Conditions	1
Refusal to hunt deserters	1

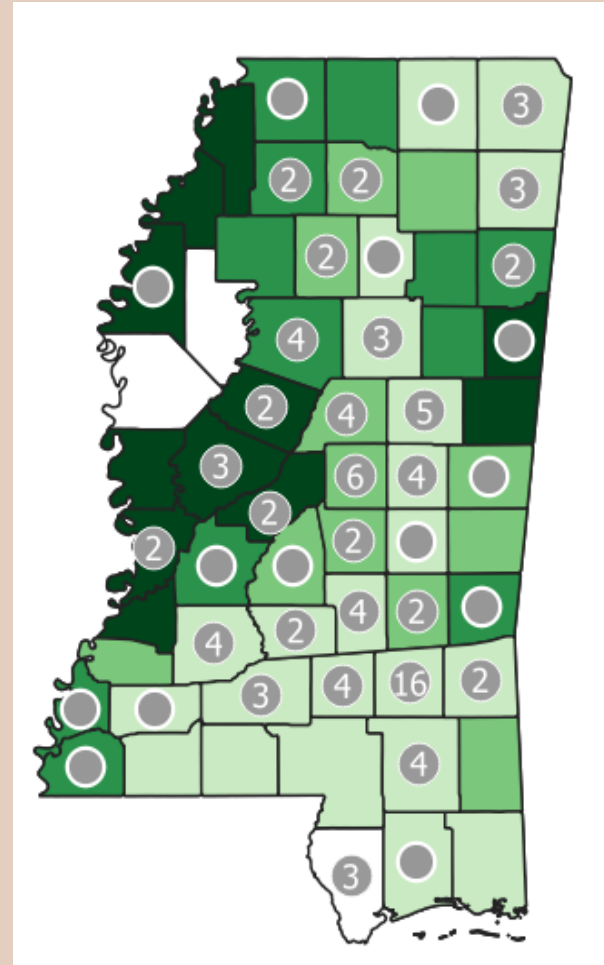
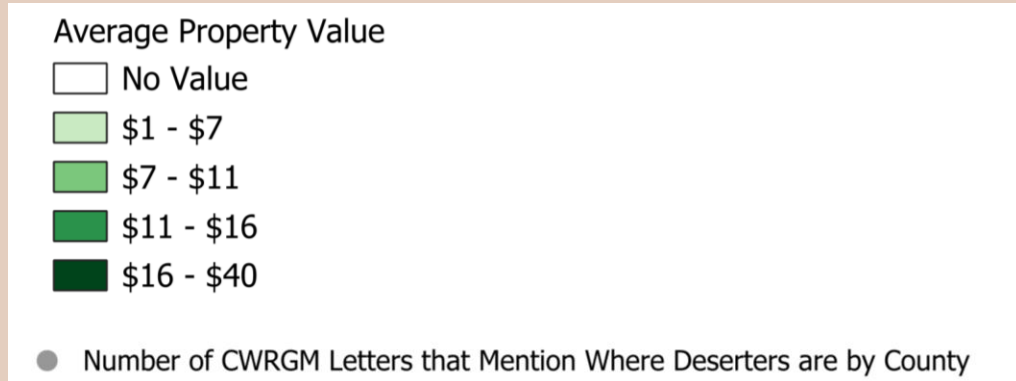
Slave Population

- 407 - 1000
- 1000 - 5000
- 5000 - 10000
- 10000 - 15000
- 15000 - 22363

● Number of CWRGM Letters that Mention Where Deserters are by County



## Where Deserters were from in Comparison to Average Property Value





# What Did Deserters Do?

<b>Actions of Deserters Described in Letters</b>	<b>Number of Letters</b>
Evading authorities	15
Resisting/acting against authorities	9
Theft	9
Raids/attacks on citizens	6
Destruction of property	5
Murder	5
Threatening/intimidation	5
Voting	2
Receiving aid from the Union	2

# What Punishments Did Deserters Receive?

Description of Punishment Given by Authorities	Number of Letters
Confinement/Arrest	10
"Inadequate"	7
No Punishment/Refusal to Punish	6
Returned to their respective Confederate Forces	4
Refusal of Pay	1
Execution	1

# Conclusion

- Causes for desertion varied, but they point to a dissatisfaction with authorities
- Desertion was widespread in Mississippi regardless of demographics
- Actions of deserters varied, but most necessitated the use of resources by the CSA
- Punishment for deserters was often described as inadequate, showcasing inefficiencies within the CSA

## Further Research...

- Looking at where battles were happening in comparison to where desertions were being written about
- Looking at demographics of deserters within military records
- Comparisons with other states

# Works Cited

- Marszalek, John, and Clay Williams. "Mississippi Soldiers in the Civil War - 2009-04." *Mississippi History Now*, 2025, [mshistorynow.mdah.ms.gov/issue/mississippi-soldiers-in-the-civil-war](https://mshistorynow.mdah.ms.gov/issue/mississippi-soldiers-in-the-civil-war)
- McGuire, Samuel B. "Desertion during the Civil War - New Georgia Encyclopedia." *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, 25 Aug. 2020, [www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/desertion-during-the-civil-war](https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/desertion-during-the-civil-war).
- Weitz, Mark A. 2012. "Desertion, Cowardice and Punishment." [Essentialcivilwarcurriculum.com](https://www.essentialcivilwarcurriculum.com). April 2012.  
<https://www.essentialcivilwarcurriculum.com/desertion>.

**Before I Go ...  
Any Questions?**

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