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# Why it's not a surprise the Michael Sam story is happening in Missouri

By [Ryan Famuliner](#) Feb 2014



Center: Michael Sam. Clockwise, from top right: Llyod Gaines, James Rollins, John Brown, Todd Akin, Jackie Robinson, the Missouri Compromise, and Dred Scott. Remember these guys at your next trivia night.

Only one Missourian has ever been President of the United States, and Harry Truman used to keep a sign on his desk that read “The buck stops here.”

As America takes in the news that former MU football star Michael Sam [has come out as gay](#), many will be surprised it's a young man from Texas, who spent his last four years in Missouri. According to the New York Times, he shared that detail about his life with his teammates at the beginning of the 2013 season, and went on to have an outstanding season, being named the SEC Co-Defensive Player of the Year.

The setting isn't as strange as it may seem. Many of the country's biggest fights and struggles often come to a head in the Show Me State.

Many times people interpret that “Show Me State” nickname to be about stubbornness. I'd contend it's different than that. If you've ever talked with someone truly stubborn, you know it doesn't matter if you show them something to prove they're wrong.

This isn't to say that Missourians are always on the right side of history when it comes to major social issues: in fact they often are not. Things are often wrong at first, things get dirty, can get even dirtier. But whether it's because of geography, politics, demographics, or just pure happenstance; Missouri often does a lot of the grunt work on the heavy issues.

The phenomenon started before Missouri even became a state in 1821. Before allowing Missouri into the union, Congress came up with The Missouri Compromise in 1820. As states formed in the west, this law determined which would be slave states, and which would be free. Missouri was a slave state. The Missouri Compromise, though, was ruled unconstitutional in the Dred Scott case in 1857. Scott, a slave, was taken from Missouri to Illinois (free state) by his owner, and sued for his freedom when he was ordered by the Army to return to Missouri.

Abolitionist John Brown literally fought against slavery in Missouri, leading deadly raids against proslavery Missourians well before Harper's Ferry. When Abraham Lincoln was trying to drum up Congressional support for the 13th Amendment to abolish slavery, he was a couple of votes short. [He targeted James Rollins, a Boone County slave owner](#) also known as the "Father of the University of Missouri." Rollins changed his vote, allowing the 13th amendment to pass, despite his personal beliefs and lifestyle.

Missouri was also on the wrong side of history when Llyod Gaines attempted to enroll in MU Law School in 1936 but was denied entry because he was African American. The NAACP took the case all the way to the US Supreme Court, and the case is considered part of the foundation of the Brown vs. Board of Education ruling. In fact, [guests on KBIA's Intersection last week](#) contend it could have become a landmark case of that magnitude if Gaines had not mysteriously disappeared in Chicago as the case was going through appeals. History may never know if his life came to a violent end, or if he decided to disappear amidst the fervor around his case. Gaines' family accepted an honorary law degree for him from MU in 2006.

Michael Sam has [already drawn comparisons to Jackie Robinson](#). Before Robinson broke baseball's color barrier, he played for the Kansas City Monarchs. Kansas City is the city where the Negro National League was founded in 1920, the first negro league to last more than a year, and the predecessor to the league Robinson played in.

But it's not just been ancient history where Missourians have dealt with important social issues, that have forced people in the state to examine their views and make important decisions or changes. In fact, that's one thing Missouri did pretty often in its past. Missouri was [a bellwether state for 100 years](#), voting with the consensus to elect the President of the United States every year but one between 1904 and 2004. Even though Missouri has turned red in the past 10 years, in a 2012 Senate race Republican Todd Akin famously said that women's bodies can stop them from getting pregnant during "legitimate rape." Before that, any Republican was expected to win that race handily. [Instead, Democrat Claire McCaskill won handily.](#)

The show of support for Michael Sam in Missouri and across the country has been overwhelmingly positive – even amidst questions about what it might mean for his career. And it's true, what this means for Sam's future – and ours - is yet to be seen. Sam's time at Missouri, and his year with teammates that accepted him for who he was, will continue to be a focus of the discussion in the months to come. It is likely the story will move outside of Missouri (unless the Kansas City Chiefs or St. Louis Rams decide to draft him). But it shouldn't be a surprise that the buck finally stopped here.