In 2012, the McMicken College of Arts and Sciences initiated its McMicken Lecture Series, a public lecture featuring speakers discussing different topics that relate to the greater Cincinnati area.

This year’s fall event, held on October 23 at UC’s Myers Alumni Center, featured Christopher Phillips, UC history professor and department head, who has published six books about various aspects of American culture during and following the Civil War era. His talk, drawn from his newest book project, “The Rivers Ran Backward: The Civil War on the Middle Border and the Making of American Regionalism” (Oxford University Press, expected 2015), discussed how the current culture of the Ohio Valley was solidified in unexpected ways by the actions of people during the Civil War era.

His talk, titled “North Star, Southern Cross: The Politics of Civil War Memory in the Postwar Ohio Valley,” described how the Ohio River has not always been a border between the North and South fought over competing devotions to slavery or freedom. In reality, the Civil War itself, and especially the cultural politics during the aftermath of the conflict, influenced how Ohioans and Kentuckians evolved as Northerners or Midwesterners, and Southerners.

“This former West,” Phillips explained, “was central to perhaps the Civil War’s most lasting outcomes. White residents constructed meanings of northernness and southernness surrounding the emerging debates over slavery and emancipation before, during, and after the war. The experience of that war, as much as in victory and defeat, and the discrete and often inaccurate memories of its winning and its losing, changed the meaning of the border, and with it the nation’s regions. The acceptance of this new border, and the mutual understandings of the new regionalism, accomplished the nationalism that in part had spawned the war. Unable to conform either to the emergent southern or northern war narratives after the war, the battleground that was the West was effectively written out, accomplishing the moving frontier not by conquering physical space or people but by creating a new regional geography driven by cultural identities. By the cultural politics of irreconciliation, the middle border was a front for the far longer war after the war, fought for nearly a half century with internecine violence and politics, formal, informal, and cultural. This is not purely a local story, but rather a national story accomplished and understood by a regional lens.”

“McMicken is very fortunate to have many accomplished professors who enjoy sharing their knowledge with both students and the public,” said Arts and Sciences Interim Dean Kristi Nelson. “We’re excited to offer an opportunity for the community to hear more about the research happening here on campus.”