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Building the War One Brick at a Time

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Building the War One Brick at a Time

Abstract

I've been waiting for this moment since 1996. Back then, when I was 11, My favorite toy came out with figures from my favorite era. The LEGO Western line was an amazing crossover of my love for history and my love for tiny ABS building blocks. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

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Disciplines

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Interpreting the Civil War: Connecting the Civil War to the American Public is written by alum and adjunct professor, John Rudy. Each post is his own opinions, musings, discussions, and questions about the Civil War era, public history, historical interpretation, and the future of history. In his own words, it is "a blog talking about how we talk about a war where over 600,000 died, 4 million were freed and a nation forever changed. Meditating on interpretation, both theory and practice, at no charge to you."

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Interpreting the Civil War

Connecting the Civil War to the American Public

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Building the War One Brick at a Time

THURSDAY, APRIL 18, 2013



LEGO's latest Civil War dudes.

I've been waiting for this moment since 1996. Back then, when I was 11, My favorite toy came out with figures from my favorite era. The LEGO Western line was an amazing crossover of my love for history and my love for tiny ABS building blocks.

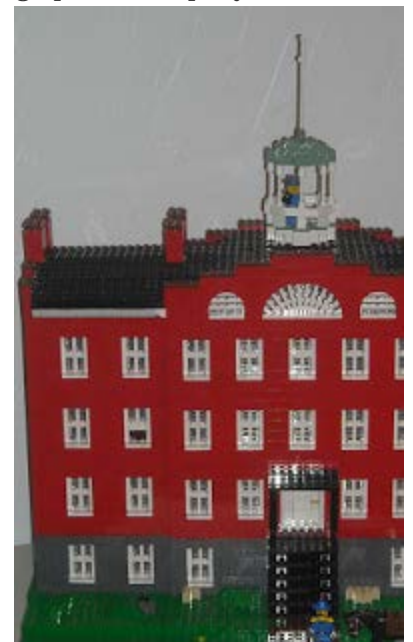
But an 11-year-old has no expendable cash reserves, which means I gathered a dozen or so Civil War minifigures with pocket money and Christmas presents. And like all LEGO products, the sets disappeared from the shelves in two years, never to be seen again.

Now, Civil War minifigures are making a return thanks to the new *Lone Ranger* movie. And I'm not an 11-year-old anymore. So I'm planning on stocking up on a company of men to carry tiny plastic rifles.

And I'm not alone. Some friends are interested in military history and LEGO, and we're in the planning stages of some dioramas depicting famous battle scenes to show off at the annual local convention.

I've written about Civil War violence being used as a sort of [patriotic pornography](#) in the past. In fact, "Civil War porn" is one of the strongest drivers of traffic to the site from Google. (Hello, [all you nymphos out there](#)!) I've had similar conversations with friends in my LEGO hobby about the penchant for military dioramas to be toy bloodbaths with pools of plastic ooze. It seems like a glorification of violence, a fetishistic obsession through the medium of a toy of real violence.

So now I'm contemplating the idea of crafting a few of my own dioramas of Civil War combat, using a toy as an artistic medium. And I want to make sure the violence doesn't become a fetish. I think I've got the solution. One of my dioramas will depict the reburial of the Federal dead in the months after the battle of Gettysburg. I recently found a sketch of Basil Biggs' crew digging burial trenches in the National Cemetery that I'm hoping to transform into plastic reality.



One of my previous Civil War models.

Hopefully a representation of the true cost of war, the real dead men represented by tiny plastic toys, will help place the battle scenes into a proper context. War, as Sherman said, is all hell. How to depict a meaningful little plastic hell that evokes real emotion is the true question.