



6-21-2012

Lost and Found: Where the Iconic Meet

John M. Rudy
Gettysburg College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/interpretcw>

 Part of the [Cultural History Commons](#), [Public History Commons](#), [Social History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.

Rudy, John M., "Lost and Found: Where the Iconic Meet" (2012). *Interpreting the Civil War: Connecting the Civil War to the American Public*. 130.

<https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/interpretcw/130>

This open access blog post is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact cupola@gettysburg.edu.

Lost and Found: Where the Iconic Meet

Abstract

I know exactly when I began believing in the Muppets again. I am a child of the '80s. I was five years old when Jim Henson died. I remember watching the TV with my Mom crying beside me as Frank Oz's Fozzie, Richard Hunt's Scooter and Dave Goelz's Gonzo read to their friends the condolence letters sent by thousands of grieving fans. I remember the slow building of "Just One Person." [*excerpt*]

Keywords

CW150, Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Civil War Era Studies, Civil War Interpretation, The Muppets, Kermit

Disciplines

Cultural History | History | Public History | Social History | United States History

Comments

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."

Creative Commons License

[Creative](#)

[Commons](#)

[License](#)

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 License](#)



Interpreting the Civil War

Connecting the Civil War to the American Public

www.civilwarconnect.com



Lost and Found: Where the Iconic Meet

THURSDAY, JUNE 21, 2012

I know exactly when I began believing in the Muppets again. I am a child of the '80s. I was five years old when Jim Henson died. I remember watching the TV with my Mom crying beside me as Frank Oz's Fozzie, Richard Hunt's Scooter and Dave Goelz's Gonzo read to their friends the condolence letters sent by thousands of grieving fans. I remember the slow building of "Just One Person."

But somewhere along the way, I lost the Muppets. Or they lost me. "Or did something break we can't repair?" Every time I heard Steve Whitmire's voice come out of Kermit's felt maw, my heart sank. That wasn't my frog, my Kermit. For over a decade, for the better part of my childhood, the loss of Jim Henson was palpable. I held a grudge against something, someone, for taking away this frog (and the person who he embodied) I cared deeply for away from me.

Then I saw the newest Muppets movie. It was good, but it was still Steve Whitmire. It was a different Kermit, with a different voice and a different personality. Then this new voice told Miss Piggy, "it's time for our song." The crowd in the Muppet theatre applauds, and a familiar banjo patter begins. "Why are there so many songs about rainbows?" Kermit asks in song.

I burst into tears. More of the characters joined in. Eric Jacobson's Miss Piggy, Bill Barretta's Swedish Chef, John Henson's Sweetums all sing along with Kermit on the most iconic of Muppets songs. My heart broke. I sat in the theatre, next to my Mom, and cried. At that moment, Steve Whitmire became Kermit. I couldn't hear the difference in his tone or inflection. He was that frog and the frog was him.

The iconic power of the song, the raw emotional pull of its lyrics about dreams being possible coupled with its lilting banjo line, transformed a ping-pong ball adorned felt puppet into a being, a real living thing. And the iconic power of that song and its message of hope and perseverance transformed Steve Whitmire's voice into Kermit the Frog's voice, lost for me since Jim Henson died in 1990.

Icon comes from a Greek word meaning image or likeness. But the iconic moments in our lives have more to do with the Greek Orthodox Christian interpretation of that word. Wander through the market stalls of any of the former Soviet satellite states and you will find vendors peddling small hammered metal trinkets with beautiful Eastern European depictions of the Madonna and Child or any one of a number of Saints. The icon has deep spiritual meaning. It plucks at the heart somehow. It represents a larger truth, be it God or the simple beauty of man's artwork, to the believer and unbeliever alike. It encapsulates the essence of something larger than just the sum of its parts, something greater than the wood, tin and paint from which it is made.



Gilded icons: brilliant, striking and with deeper meanings. / CC Cea

Interpreters share many stories. We tell tales of valiant soldiers and courageous protestors, civilian bystanders and student sit-ins. But the stories which resonate the most with an audience are those that touch the heart. Looking for the passingly iconic in history is not hard. Many things in history represent something larger than just the paper they are written upon or the ink spilled to craft them. But looking for the icons which transcend, those which possess the power to pluck the strings of any soul requires skill, practice and a bit of luck. They often hover around those magical human things we call dreams and love.

In the realm of the Civil War and Civil Rights, the transcendentally iconic often lies where these two worlds collide. It is the image of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. standing in the, "symbolic shadow," of the Great Emancipator in 1963. It is the farm owned by a black man where, in 1863, the future of black men's right to citizenship in the nation would hang in the balance during bloody combat. It is the bridge named for a Confederate general and slaveholder where in 1965 the sons and daughters of former slaves were mercilessly beaten for wanting something as simple as a right to vote that had been promised to them a century before.

How do you find the iconic? Sometimes it is as simple as looking for the intersections of history, where two tales crash into each other, forging a broader transcendent meaning. Sometimes it takes stepping outside of your own frame of view, to see the world from a broader perspective. Keep looking. The deep, iconic and meaningful connections are out there waiting to be found and shared.

Or as Kermit the Frog said once. And another Kermit the Frog still says today:

"Someday we'll find it

The Rainbow Connection

The lovers, the dreamers, and me."



The Iconic floats over New York's streets. / CC Musicwala

This piece originally appeared as part of the pre-course reading material for the recent Civil War and Civil Rights training course I helped organize and conduct at work with the NPS. But that course only reached 19 students over the course of four days. Sometimes icons need to be shared with the wider world.