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We Will Now Rejoin Your Civil War (Already In Progress)

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We Will Now Rejoin Your Civil War (Already In Progress)

Abstract

I celebrated Martin Luther King Jr. Day with a mouse and keyboard. I love diving neck deep in historical documentation for no good reason. Falling down the research hole can be so much fun, particularly when it's looking for one elusive piece of evidence. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

CW150, Gettysburg, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Civil Right Movement, March on Washington

Disciplines

African American Studies | Cultural History | History | Public History | Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies | Social History | United States History

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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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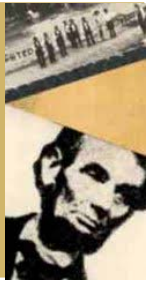
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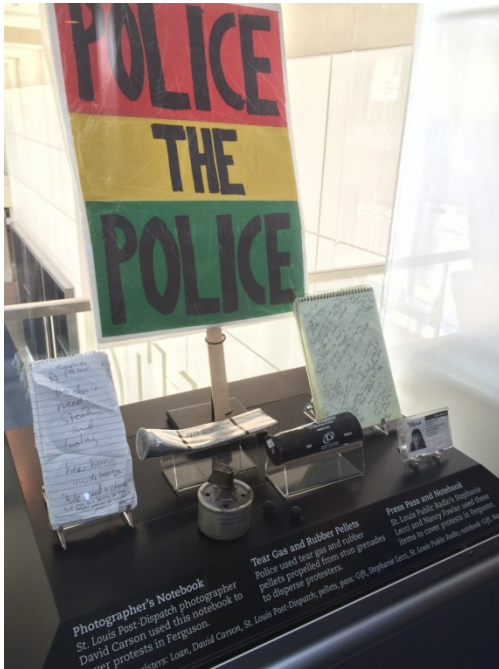
Connecting the Civil War to the American Public

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We Will Now Rejoin Your Civil War (Already In Progress)

TUESDAY, JANUARY 20, 2015



The long struggles started by the Civil War continue in America's streets even today, from St. Louis, Missouri to Staten Island, New York. And the protest sign is still the greatest weapon, like this example at the Newseum in Washington.

From what I can tell, the "official" posters produced by the march organizers, the signs announcing "We March For...Now!" and "We Demand... Now!" far outnumbered any others. But there were others. Some were hand-drawn. Some were banners brought by delegations, announcing that this church or that labor union was here to be heard.

And then there are the UAW signs. The language is far more strident than any of the others. The language is biting, snide and sarcastic. It's the language of a people oppressed for far too long to worry about being polite.

The sign I went searching for underlined the 100-year disconnect in American society. And finally I found the whole elusive poster in an Associated Press photograph published by the Washington Post. "We seek the freedom in 1963," the UAW poster reads, "promised in 1863."

I celebrated Martin Luther King Jr. Day with a mouse and keyboard. I love diving neck deep in historical documentation for no good reason. Falling down the research hole can be so much fun, particularly when it's looking for one elusive piece of evidence.

This time, it was chasing an elusive section of a United Auto Workers protest sign used at the March on Washington in 1963. I found a photo of the corner, a chunk of text.

The idea that the Civil War led toward the Civil Rights movement 100 years later is almost painfully obvious. The fitful, ineffective and aborted experiment that was Reconstruction laid the groundwork upon which Randolph and Rustin erected the grand protest of 1963. Everyone on the rostrum called back to Lincoln, to the Civil War, to Emancipation.

The March on Washington was a non-violent battle in the long Civil War, just another skirmish like the ones fought in Gettysburg or Sharpsburg or Chattanooga. And everyone on the street knew it.

Emancipation was incomplete. It was never fully deployed, thanks in part to the failure of America's reconstruction experiment in 1877. And the March on Washington was just another battle of the Civil War.

I carefully traced the poster into a vector image. I'm a compulsive history. I collect things. Luckily, in this modern age, that doesn't always mean stuffing photocopied images into filing cabinets in the office. My filing cabinets are digital and they take up less real estate.

But to celebrate Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birthday this week, I wanted to share that poster with you, along with a few more that I've been converting over. They're hosted below on Flickr, in vibrant color and at high resolution. Use them however you see fit: in a classroom, in a frame on your wall or perhaps in the streets protesting today. After all, the African-American Civil Rights movement is still going on. And so is our Civil War.



The March on Washington in August 1963 was a definite echo of the Civil War.

