



2-5-2013

## Her Meaning, My Meaning, Our Meanings

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Rudy, John M., "Her Meaning, My Meaning, Our Meanings" (2013). *Interpreting the Civil War: Connecting the Civil War to the American Public*. 67.

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# Her Meaning, My Meaning, Our Meanings

## Abstract

One of the most special places in the world to me is that random collection of marble and skyscraper steel at the end of the National Mall known as the Lincoln Memorial. I've had so many amazing experiences there. They're small experiences, but they're amazing. Seeing America, us, walk through those columns and up at *that man*.*[excerpt]*

## Keywords

CW150, Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Civil War Era Studies, Lincoln Memorial

## Disciplines

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."

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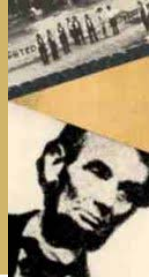
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# Interpreting the Civil War

Connecting the Civil War to the American Public

[www.civilwarconnect.com](http://www.civilwarconnect.com)



## Her Meaning, My Meaning, Our Meanings

**TUESDAY, February 5, 2013**

One of the most special places in the world to me is that random collection of marble and skyscraper steel at the end of the National Mall known as the Lincoln Memorial. I've had so many amazing experiences there. They're small experiences, but they're amazing. Seeing America, us, walk through those columns and up at *that* man.

It instantly makes you a child again, standing knee-high, gape-jawed at our collective grandfather as he sits in his comfortable chair and tells his silent story.

But my favorite memory of that place didn't happen to me. I still see it every time I visit. I didn't witness it. But I can still trace the events, written on the backs of my eyelids as I stare at that ground.

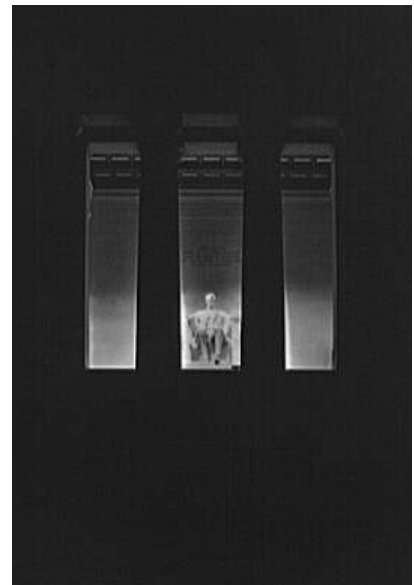
My mother was young. I don't know exactly how young. I could ask her, but it's not all that important. Her father was a working-class stiff, a milk truck driver in Syracuse. Her mother was a skilled woman, working in the polio ward at a local hospital. Vacations were rare. And yet here was the car rolling down the highway.

It was the 1960s. America was different. My mom has told me the tale of stopping by a restaurant with her parents while on the road. She went off to the bathroom, but came back perplexed and still needing to go.

*There are two bathrooms, she told my grandmother, one saying "Women" with white writing on a black door and one with black writing on a white door. I don't know which one to use, the perplexed girl explained.*

My grandmother, savvy to the situation, knew the right answer: *it doesn't matter which one you choose.*

The ride from Syracuse to Washington, DC is long. Darkness wrapped around the car. Like most great road-trips, the kids in the back seat fell asleep. And then, late in the night, the car eased to a stop. My grandfather, a wiry man, walked around the car and opened the door on my mothers' side



Lincoln at night:  
pure majesty. / [PD LOC](#)

of the car.

I like to envision her face from her childhood photos, pressed against the glass and asleep. I like to imagine him opening the door and her slowly realizing it was gone and she should wake up. And then I like to see her smile in my mind.



A beacon light for Us, like  
a modern Parthenon. / [PD LOC](#)

Behind my grandfather, shining like a beacon down from a man-made Olympus, there *he* was. Lincoln sat there in the darkness, the car parked right at his feet. And my young mother stood in awe at his majesty, at the fact that she was really seeing that man.

That awe is what I feel. I visit that man at least once a year. And I stand down on that driveway, too. No cars drive there anymore, but I can still see them parking. I see the door popping open. And I can see that look.

My mother's awe at that man has never waned. That is her meaning for that place, the majesty of a young girl awakening to see, peering from the darkness, the brightly lit figure of hope, power and promise. That meaning is mine now too.

And I hope that the next time you visit the Great Emancipator that you imagine that car, that door and that face. Now it's your meaning too. That's how this whole game works.