



5-21-2013

Rewind: Good Morning to the Night

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Rudy, John M., "Rewind: Good Morning to the Night" (2013). *Interpreting the Civil War: Connecting the Civil War to the American Public*. 79.

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Rewind: Good Morning to the Night

Abstract

Today is a special day, a momentous day. It's a day I've thought about for a long time. A day for beginnings and a day for looking back. So I'm looking back for today's blog, to one of my favorite posts. It's simple and meaningful to me. It's about a place that has changed my life so much. And today the ripples from that place are changing it again. And it's wonderful. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

CW150, Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Civil War Era Studies, battlefield

Disciplines

Cultural History | History | Public History | 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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Interpreting the Civil War

Connecting the Civil War to the American Public

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Rewind: Good Morning to the Night

TUESDAY, MAY 21, 2013

Today is a special day, a momentous day. It's a day I've thought about for a long time. A day for beginnings and a day for looking back.

So I'm looking back for today's blog, to one of my favorite posts. It's simple and meaningful to me. It's about a place that has changed my life so much. And today the ripples from that place are changing it again. And it's wonderful.

Here's a rewind [to last June](#), with...

Good Morning to the Night: Requiem for My Battlefield

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLMotU8Tu9E&feature=player_embedded

The fireflies have started to appear around Gettysburg. We have a new sliding glass door in the kitchen that I can press my face against and see them. I did it the other night when Jess mentioned they're out there.

"It's got a lot of songs to sing
If I knew the tunes I might join in..."

I live up on Seminary Ridge, now. The right flank of the final Confederate push on the afternoon of July 1st flushed right across the postage stamp lawn out my front door. The next night, young men from Virginia and North Carolina milled around, eating and singing and readying themselves for the pain of the next day.

I look out my windows, or I wander these streets or these fields, and I see ghosts. I don't mean the pretend, "boogity boogity," ghost tripe they peddle in town. I mean the resurrected dead who wander in my mind. If I squint out the window, between the fireflies, I can see the forms of men swilling Pennsylvania whiskey and chanting out rebel tunes from hoarse throats.

This field swarms with more than just fireflies. It swarms with living memories.

After grabbing an ice cream, Jess and I went driving on the south end of the battlefield last night. She flipped off the AC and rolled down her window. On the radio, John Lennon was singing the last few lines of, "In My Life." "Though I know I'll never lose affection," the ill-fated Beatle sang, "for people and things that went before." The song's last strains faded and Elton John began singing, "Mona Lisas and Mad Hatters."

I turned to Jess and asked her if we were the only people who did this. Everyone else tooling around the field was squinting into the growing darkness and desperately trying to listen to their auto tape tour. They were trying desperately to read the last few lines of this wayside or that monument in the dying sunlight. But we were intently listening to the King of Pop (yes, I went there) sing about his undying love for a place and her people.

That field means so much to me, but that meaning goes so far beyond the phantoms of the dead wandering through my mind. They're always there. But there's a cleanness on the landscape, a centering calm and a beautiful quiet. It's mournful and celebratory all at once. Sort of like Elton's song.

When I squint at that field, I don't just see soldiers floating across it. Phantom trolley cars cruise down long-rotten rail lines. On the fields north of town, a legion of white hooded ghosts appear and disappear in long clouds of hate-filled mist. On a rostrum in the cemetery, the ghostly voice of a Vice-President demands, "together."

But that's not all. I can squint and see Tim and Garry giggling gleefully as they dive headlong into photos and parade around in front of PCN cameras. Somewhere on Culp's Hill, a crowd of Civil War Roundtable members still clips away at the pricker bushes incessantly in my mind. And now, in the valley of death, I'll forever hear Elton John singing, "And I thank the Lord for the people I have found, I thank the Lord for the people I have found."

"They know not if
it's dark outside or light..."



Last week, while we were sitting in a meeting with a visitor to the building, the interpretive training staff was talking about how we all live in different places. One of my co-workers lives right in Harpers Ferry. My boss lives across the river in Maryland. I drive an hour to and from work each day from Gettysburg.

The woman we were talking to asked me the simple but loaded question, "you're looking to move down here though, right?"

The answer fell out of my mouth before I could close my lips. If my mind could have kept up, it would have said something judicious, something measured. Thank god it couldn't.

"No, never."