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Meanings: Where This Is All Headed

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Abstract

Human tragedy, human triumph and continuing struggle, each of its own epic proportions. One convoluted war holds inside the tripartate meanings of sorrow for 620,000 lost, joy for 4 million saved and the uneasiness that the struggle for freedom would still continue 150 years later. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

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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."

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Interpreting the Civil War

Connecting the Civil War to the American Public

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Meanings: Where This Is All Headed

THURSDAY, JUNE 6, 2013



Human tragedy, human triumph and continuing struggle, each of its own epic proportions. One convoluted war holds inside the tripartate meanings of sorrow for 620,000 lost, joy for 4 million saved and the uneasiness that the struggle for freedom would still continue 150 years later.

I've started to see the giddy reaction across the internet as June's dates fall off of the calendar and July looms. Folks are excited about the guns, the battles, the tactics, the camping, the reenactments, the fun, the festivities and the revelry.

But we, a community of people who all find a fascination in this awkward and cumbersome truth that we call "the Civil War," need to remind ourselves that it all had meaning, it all had a higher purpose

and a greater outcome that hung in the balance.

Let's not let the fact escape us this time that battle doesn't happen in a vacuum. Armies don't appear out of thin air. They are things that are formed with a purpose and goal. That goal can shift and change as a war progresses, which is a key thing to understand as well. Events need context, and not just the context of the battle before and the battle after. They need placement within a narrative flow of history, the "why should I care?" of the present must meet the "you should care because" of the past and the two need to cogs must mesh. If we can't help America find that sort of real, personal relevance, preserving the special places of the Civil War will always be a game of diminishing returns.

For me at least, this time, 50 years on, must be about meaning and not simply memory. But more on *that* distinction (as well as Bill Clinton, Medgar Evers and Robert E. Lee) next week.