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## Fifty Shades of Blue and Grey: Civil War Torture Porn?

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# Fifty Shades of Blue and Grey: Civil War Torture Porn?

## Abstract

Over the past few days I've been thinking about violence. We are a culture of violence. We idolize blind rage and violence, we normalize it and worship it....

We, as a collective American culture, promote violence, normalize it as the proper reaction to any given problem and outright encourage it. [*excerpt*]

## Keywords

CW150, Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Civil War Era Studies, Civil War Interpretation, Fifty Shades of Grey, Understanding the War, Sites of Conscience

## 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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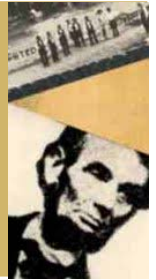
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# Interpreting the Civil War

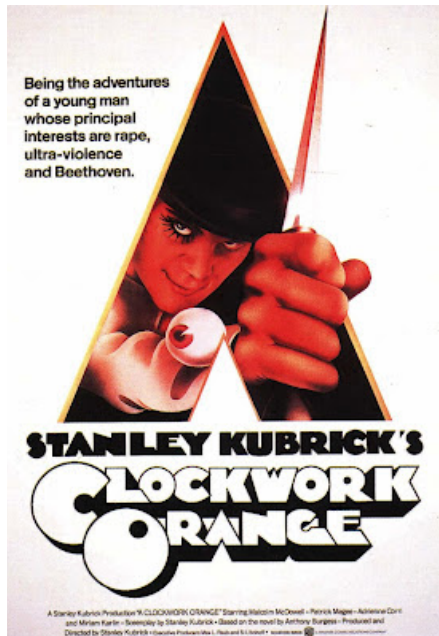
Connecting the Civil War to the American Public

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## Fifty Shades of Blue and Grey: Civil War Torture Porn?

THURSDAY, JULY 26, 2012



Alex and his droogs couldn't hold a candle to modern ultra-violence... even with Rossini on his side.

Over the past few days I've been thinking about violence. We are a culture of violence. We idolize blind rage and violence, we normalize it and worship it.

No bellwether in our culture shows this fact more clearly than our film ratings system, which allows grotesque depictions of man's inhumanity to man to be peddled to teens but turns its nose up at even the slightest mention of human fecal matter or copulation.

We, as a collective American culture, promote violence, normalize it as the proper reaction to any given problem and outright encourage it.

Except violence in entertainment is easy, cheap and meaningless. It's some of the easiest filler in any script. As an exercise a few weeks back, I edited down a copy of Ron Maxwell's *Gettysburg* to remove every line spoken by a Southern character. The only Southerners left on camera would be in non-speaking scenes only, I decreed to myself. I expected the movie to shrink to somewhere in the window of

20 minutes. It didn't.

But that wasn't a function of an abundance of Federal dialogue (although there was more in aggregate than I expected). The movie seemed to become one Over the past few days I've been thinking about violence. We are a culture of violence. We idolize blind rage and violence, we normalize it and worship it.

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But that wasn't a function of an abundance of Federal dialogue (although there was more in aggregate than I expected). The movie seemed to become one never-ending explosion punctuated by flapping flags. I'd wager that even removing the Federal dialogue, there would be nearly a solid hour of random things blowing up and random plumes of smoke.

Compare this to the two greatest war films ever produced [1]: *Bridge Over The River Kwai* and *Glory*. The amount of real, gut-wrenching violence in these films is miniscule, and used to a very specific end. But what they lack in violent, orgasmic gore they make up for in deep, philosophical meaning about the nature of war, suffering, loss, struggle and liberty. The greatest war films of all time are *actually* anti-war films, weaving a narrative that investigates why war, as Sherman once said, is, "all hell."

When visitors step onto battlefields, what type of story are they seeing? Is it a grand glorification of a nation drenched in blood, valour through slaughter? Or is it a real, deep discussion of the concrete consequences of politicians and citizens deciding that a nation or people deserves to be attacked? Is it glory or heartbreak?



Never forget that when the original cast fell down dead 150 years ago that they didn't go out for a cold one later that night. / CC Graham Milldrum

Over at *History and Interpretation* on Tuesday, Elizabeth Goetsch posted about [dealing with grief in interpretive landscapes](#). When a visitor to a battlefield broke down into tears, Elizabeth was confounded as to how to react. Tears were not part of the typical repertoire of visitor responses. "While visiting the battlefield could prove an emotional experience," Goetsch writes, "I rarely encountered the raw emotion through tears."

But what better reaction to a place where thousands of men tore at the entrails of thousands of other men, where children lost beloved fathers, mothers lost beloved sons, men lost beloved arms which had plowed the land or worked the lathe that fed their families? Isn't any reaction aside from tears callous, hardhearted and inhumane on some level?

Shouldn't the most meaningful landscapes of war, like the most meaningful films about those wars, inherently be anti-war landscapes? Shouldn't they be places where we atone for the collective sins of the past and learn to make better decisions in the future?

No. They should simply be places where we glorify torture and death, like a masculine version of a Mary-sue porn

novel. Who needs deep, resonant meaning when you can just soak up the orgasmic excitement of battles and tactics?

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[1] - Yes, I am aware this is an entirely personal judgement, but this *is* afterall *my blog post*.