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Capturing the Moment: A Rhetorical Analysis of World War II Celebration

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CAPTURING THE MOMENT: A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF WORLD WAR II CELEBRATION

To what extent are images from the 1940s romanticized, celebrated and replicated in reflection of remembrance of the World War II era?

By: Kylie Wagar, Communication Studies

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

World War II was one of the most devastating wars that our nation has been involved in (history). At this time, the U.S. economy was failing, unemployment was at all-time high, and countries all over the world were in the midst of war ("National WWII Museum"). World War II took the lives of over 35 million people alongside with some 205,000,000 deaths in total, making it one of the largest conflicts in recent history ("World War II"). World War II created a divide in nations with Germany and Japan representing the Axis powers and America and Britain comprising the Allied powers ("National WWII Museum"). One of the most popular images to come from the 1940s was the image of the sailor and the nurse embraced in a passionate kiss. Alfred Eisenstaedt was a German-American photojournalist. His work granted him a staff position for Life magazine and he is praised for his shoot of "candid" photography. "But suddenly, in a flash, I saw something while being grabbed." Eisenstaedt recounted. "I turned around and clipped the moment the sailor kissed the nurse" (Nemerov, 5).

LITERATURE REVIEW

At the first glance of the un-archival image, V-J Day in Times Square, from here on referred to as Figure 1, viewers can feel a sense of romanticism and joy produced by the two people in the photo. In second glance, the lines of the nurse's body give an artistic feel to the image, dragging the eyes up to the passionate kiss between two people. Figure 1, on the other hand, is at an awkward angle. Eisenstaedt's image is artistic rather than using these photos in history, but as art and artistry, it has influence on the mind. The image of the sailor and the nurse embraced in a passionate kiss is known as the "Kiss of Times Square." This iconic image has an overall nostalgia of the World War II era. I conduct a close read of both V-J Day in Times Square and the image from the National Archives and the replication through statues, internet findings and poster sales and production of the iconic image V-J Day in Times Square in popular culture, and how these contribute to the overall nostalgia of the World War II era. I conduct a close read of both V-J Day in Times Square and the image from the National Archives and the replication through statues, internet findings and poster sales and production of the iconic image V-J Day in Times Square in popular culture, and how these contribute to the overall nostalgia of the World War II era.

CLOSE READ

The familiarity of the image can be related to today's relevant popular culture. Most people have seen this photo, whether it be in poster form or online. The replication of this image is strong not only in modern media outlets, but also through the statue that stands in San Diego, California. Titled Unconditional Surrender, the statue is a replication of Eisenstaedt's iconic image. Seager Johnson sculpted this statue in 1985, but it doesn't capture whether or not it is based off Eisenstaedt's or Johnson's image. Depending on the angle one is standing, both replications of images are present. For many families, mine included, family photos are taken next to this iconic duo. Without knowledge of the actual time period or the fact that these two people didn't know each other, the romantic qualities of the image-turned-statue leave few viewers in awe.

ABSTRACT

The iconic image V-J Day in Times Square is nationally remembered for the celebration of the end of World War II. Focusing on the archival collection Victory and Peace from the National Archives, this research demonstrates a disconnect in American perceptions and the reality of culture through iconic images. Specifically I investigate the extent to which images from the 1940s romanticized, celebrated and replicated in reflection of remembrance of the World War II era. These replications do not properly reflect the true events in 1945, but rather the idea that many would like to take away from this era. The images I refer to throughout this research regarding a sudden kiss contributes to this generation’s nostalgia that comes from World War II phenomena. The relevance that this paper has to this contemporary moment contributes to the ideas of sexism, dominant American culture and the freedom of expression.