When you think of a monument, normally you think of some high and mighty statue in the center of a given area. Some of the most popular monuments in the United States that may come to mind are the Lincoln Memorial, the Washington Monument, and the Statue of Liberty. But what truly makes a monument? Its size? Its aesthetic? Its meaning?

People enjoy analyzing monuments as a whole, but sometimes it’s hard to gain much joy from them. Especially those that hold gruesome histories and memorialize America’s dark past. For example, the numerous confederate monuments that are still standing today serve as dark reminders that mock America’s past with slavery. But do all monuments need to hold a deep meaning that integrates a historical memory of America’s past? Not necessarily.

The Make Way for Ducklings statue, found in the Boston Public Garden, recognizes the popular children’s book, Make Way for Ducklings by Robert McCloskey. The story consists of a mother duck, Mrs. Mallard, who has just given birth to eight ducklings. Mrs. Mallard and her ducklings then decide to travel to the Boston Public Garden in an effort to find a safer place to live where they may flourish.¹

This story recognizes the Boston Public Garden and its peaceful atmosphere where the ducks were able to find a home where they belonged. Taking pride in this story, Boston decided to create the Make Way for Ducklings monument in 1987. This monument stands as a way to honor the work of McCloskey’s successful story, while also creating yet another landmark that contributes to the Public Garden’s inviting atmosphere.

While these ducks have a simple story, they have become something greater. People enjoy dressing the monument up in different costumes and attire in order to gain aesthetic appeal, tell a story, and even present real-time issues to the common people who walk by these joyful ducks every day. These ducks serve as a blank canvas for artists and pedestrians to express themselves and the current state of the world. For example, many people enjoy dressing the ducks in sports attire to celebrate different sports teams and events.

Back in July 2019, however, the ducks were dressed to portray caged child immigrants who were being held in immigration detention centers on the border of Mexico. As you can see, these beloved ducks are all stuck in cages and separated from their mother. Alongside the separation aspect of this design, each duck is wrapped in a shiny security blanket. This display of cages and security blankets depict the real-time issues children and families face in detention centers.

Karyn Alzayer, a local Boston artist, created this design in order to display this horrible concept to the numerous pedestrians that walk through Boston Public Garden. It would be assumed that the majority of people walking by the Make Way for Ducklings monument were not expecting to see the ducks reflecting children in immigration detention centers, ultimately catching their attention.

While this monument was not initially placed in the middle of Boston Public Garden as an area to represent the change that needs to be made in America, the frequent decorating of these ducks provides the space and environment to display issues and call for action. While there is no sign on the ducks that explicitly states something needs to change, the visual representation of children in immigration detention centers provokes the audience of pedestrians.

During the Make Way for Ducklings story, it was noted that the reason for the duck’s journey to the Public Garden was so that they may find a place where they are accepted and will have greater opportunities. The juxtaposition between the attire and the idea of freedom and opportunity creates an even greater impact on the message being distributed. Like the ducks, many immigrant families have shared that they initially came to America in order to gain safety and better opportunities, but are now being held as prisoners.

Although young children walking by may not be able to completely understand what the cages and emergency blankets mean, the targeted audience are the adults that bring said children to visit a monument of their favorite children’s book.

Another notable demonstration took place in June 2020. While the ducklings were left untouched, the mother duck was found wearing a sweater with the letters “BLM” standing for the Black Lives Matter movement. These ducks symbolize safety and freedom, however, not everyone is safe and free until there is no more racial injustice. The artist that created this sweater used it as a way to show the ducks supporting the Black Lives Matter movement and their overall support for freedom and equality.

Again, the meaning behind the duck’s story emphasizes the meaning behind the sweater and its call for equality and racial justice. These ducks are placed in an area that many people walk by and take notice of, including the different outfits they are wearing. Creating statement pieces, such as the Black Lives Matter sweater, will

---

undeniably gain a lot of attention because the monument is commonly loved and appreciated. Using such a monument will put these messages right in people’s faces, making it hard to ignore.

Tourists and pedestrians commonly visit the Make Way for Ducklings monument just to see what the ducks are wearing. While sometimes people may dress the ducks in costumes for various holidays or simply in creative outfits, the openness and acceptance of decorating the ducks allows for statements and messages to be made and are expected.

While this monument does not have as much of a significant meaning as monuments representing those who are war heroes or important figures from history, the way the monument is used and perceived gives it a greater meaning and impact. The Make Way for Ducklings monument is loved by many people of all ages and is a great tourist attraction. Using the monument for statements such as fighting for freedom and equality for all, creates an even greater importance for the monument, ultimately providing a significant meaning and influential purpose for the Make Way for Ducklings monument as a whole.

I hope you enjoyed learning about the Make Way for Ducklings monument, and consider visiting the monument yourself. You never know what you might see.