

Edited by Gene Santoro

**The African American Civil War Museum, now 12 years old,**

is tucked away on Vermont Avenue, NW, off U Street, the historic heart of Washington's black community. Situated halfway between Ben's Chili Bowl and Howard University, the museum deserves to be as celebrated as those venerable D.C. institutions. It sprang from the austere, modestly enthralling African American Civil War Memorial located across the street. Ed Hamilton's bronze *Spirit of Freedom*, which depicts black soldiers, sailors, slaves and children, and the names of 209,145 black soldiers who fought for the Union are worth inspecting before venturing into the museum's rich, unexpected exhibits.

The museum's objective: to place the Civil War in the foreground of African-American history. As founding director Frank Smith puts it, "The struggle for freedom didn't end when slavery ended. It began

**African American Civil War Museum**

Washington, D.C.  
www.afroamcivilwar.org



An African-American cook works for the Union Army in Virginia during the Civil War.

almost as soon as we were allowed to fight in the war." Nevertheless, slavery is hardly brushed aside here. Near the entrance, there are shackles to be seen, as well as a \$600 bill of sale dated 1834 for a slave girl and other details illustrating the stubborn presence of the "peculiar institution" in American life. Here as

elsewhere in the museum, less familiar elements are delicately woven into a well-known narrative. The words of African Americans like journalist-soldier Martin Delany and physician-abolitionist John S. Rock, for instance, are given as much importance as those of Frederick Douglass.

Those whose knowledge of black Civil War soldiers begins and ends with *Glory*, the 1989 movie, might be surprised to learn that Kansas, site of some of the bloodiest antebellum battles over slavery, was the first state in the Union to organize what the museum terms "an African-descent regiment" (the 1st Kansas Colored Volunteers). Interactive displays allow visitors to track down black regiments from other states. (In all, there were 142; seven were cavalry units.) The Union Navy, fully integrated at the time, had black engineers, gunners and more. Black women also served. Mary Elizabeth Bowser and Mary Touvestre, freed slaves who spied for the Union while embedded near the heart of the Confederacy in Virginia, appear in a display with other unsung women. The documents, medals, film clips and rare books on display and in the museum archives relate largely to the Civil War. But they also chronicle the service of blacks in subsequent American wars and the Freedom Rides of the civil rights movement, implicitly tying the long struggle for equality together. Pointedly culminating the exhibit is a life-size cutout of President Obama, ready for picture-takers to pose with.

—Gene Seymour



Founding director Frank Smith helped the museum move to new digs in 2011.

**On Exhibit**

**Shipwreck! Winslow Homer and *The Life Line***

Philadelphia Museum of Art, September 22–December 16



Winslow Homer's breathtaking 1884 oil *The Life Line* (above) is the centerpiece of the Philadelphia Museum of Art's exhibit on the theme of rescue at sea. Homer's depiction of a breeches buoy in

action—one end attached to the sinking ship, one end fixed on land—is explored along with other works showing maritime disasters from the 17th through the early 20th centuries.

**On DVD 1960s Music**

**Mr. Mojo Risin': The Story of L.A. Woman** (Eagle Rock, 103 minutes)

In the '60s, getting busted was a rock rite of passage, but the Doors' Jim Morrison outdid nearly everybody else, including Keith Richards. He also had bursts of genius, and a tight band that could jam. Here they work out their swan song—one of their best.

**The Rolling Stones: All 6 Ed Sullivan Shows** (2 DVDs, SOFA, 312 minutes)

Slip these time capsules into the DVD player, and you're in America's Sunday night living rooms 50 years ago. Original commercials (from amazing to awful) fill the slots between the inevitable vaudeville and animal acts

(ditto) and the Rilly Big Shoe's perennial guests: Topo Gigio, Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Armstrong, Joan Rivers, Rodney Dangerfield, the Muppets and Señor Wences. Oh yeah—and the Stones during their U.S. liftoff, playing hits like "Satisfaction" and "Paint It Black."

**Dawn of the Dead: The Grateful Dead & The Rise of the San Francisco Underground** (Sexy Intellectual, 138 minutes)

Psychedelic San Francisco, as seen through the often-shrewd eyes of its creators. Astonishing rare footage, excellent sounds, minimum nostalgia. Skip the periodic pontificating experts. After all, man, it's your movie.

**We Also Like**

■ **Highway Under the Hudson: A History of the Holland Tunnel**

by Robert W. Jackson (NYU) Each year, 33 million vehicles pass through it between lower Manhattan and New Jersey. The visionaries, intriguers, sandhogs, blasters and cutting-edge engineers enliven an engrossing story of how vital infrastructure came to be—a tale that echoes tellingly today, as that infrastructure grows old and crumbles.

■ **The Company Town: The Industrial Edens and Satanic Mills That Shaped the American Economy**

by Hardy Green (Basic) A provocative historical survey that argues the company town has been vital to American growth—in ways good and evil.

■ **With Golden Visions Bright Before Them: Trails to the Mining West, 1849-1852**

by Will Bagley (Oklahoma) Depth and breadth bring the 250,000 Americans who joined the Gold Rush, and what they faced, to empathetic life.

■ **Ride, Boldly Ride: The Evolution of the American Western**

by Mary Lea Bandy and Kevin Stoehr (California) Perceptive, wide-ranging, with a foreword by Clint Eastwood.

**This new biography is like our 33rd president: short and to the point.**

*Truman*, David McCullough's 1,100-page tome, is exhaustive, but often loses the plain-speaking Truman. Donald, by contrast, defines the man and his policies in language as simple and straightforward as Truman's own.

In Donald's estimation, Harry S. (the S, he said, stood "for nothing") was "common sense-practical with simple virtues." The Trumans never succeeded in making a go of their farm. "All his life," writes Donald, "he remained a virtually, and virtuously, poor man."

**Citizen Soldier: A Life of Harry S. Truman**

By Aida D. Donald  
Basic Books

His family harbored deep Confederate sympathies. When young Truman came home in his Missouri National Guard uniform, his grandmother said, "Harry, this is the first time since 1863 that a blue uniform has been in this house. Don't bring it here again." But he wore khaki as an artillery officer in World War I and earned his men's respect in several harrowing duels with the Germans. Though he escaped injury, he often slept wearing a gas mask.

During the war, Truman made friends with a young officer named Tom Pendergast, whose family ran

the most corrupt and powerful political machine in Missouri. This led to Truman's stint as a county judge. He somehow, Donald marvels, remained uncorrupted, but lost the race for reelection in 1924, his only political defeat.

Still, Truman never escaped the Pendergast shadow. In 1935, when he was elected to the U.S. Senate, the *New York Times* misnamed him Henry and called him "a rube from Pendergast land." Perhaps, but his honesty, competence and stubborn sense of duty earned his fellow senators' respect. At 61, he seemed ready to finish his second term and

retire. Instead, he became FDR's 1944 running mate. (FDR's advisers told him that "Truman would lose him the fewest votes in the election. It was," Donald notes dryly, "a backhanded compliment.") Within a year, he became the most reluctant president in American history.

Donald gives Truman high marks for championing the Marshall Plan, but most of the credit is properly given to Secretary of State George C. Marshall and his policy head, George Kennan. She notes Truman's 1946 executive order on anti-lynching laws, ending the poll tax and desegregating the armed forces,



**Captain Harry S. Truman, 129th Field Artillery, arrived in France in April 1918.**

but reminds us that "Truman did not fight hard for this program, given the southern control of Congress...It took almost a generation for a president to touch this subject again." She makes a

solid argument for the decision to drop atomic bombs on Japan; characteristically, Truman wrote in his memoirs, "The final decision of where and when to use the atomic bomb was up to me. Let there be no mistake about that." And she lucidly assesses the Truman-MacArthur clash over the Korean War: "Truman's gift to the American people was...the bolstering of the constitutional mandate that the president was commander in chief of the nation's armed forces."

Personally and politically, Harry Truman really meant what that well-known sign on his desk said: "The buck stops here." —*Allen Barra*

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## We Also Like

### ■ **Bill and Hillary: The Politics of the Personal**

by William H. Chafe (FSG)

Thoughtful analysis of this high-powered couple's riddles and enigmas. Not for Clinton-haters.

### ■ **The Eve of Destruction: How 1965 Changed America**

by James T. Patterson (Basic)

Voting rights acts, Medicare and Medicaid, Vietnam, protests, riots—it was a helluva year, and it set in motion the sea change that created today's relentless confrontational politics.

### ■ **Encyclopedia Paranoica**

by Henry Beard and Christopher Cerf (Simon & Schuster)

Cutting boards. Swordfish. Poinsettias. Lettuce. They can all kill you. Have the last laugh while you find out how.

### ■ **Best of Rivals: Joe Montana, Steve Young, and the Inside Story Behind the NFL's Greatest Quarterback Controversy**

by Adam Lazarus (Da Capo)

For seven years, these fierce competitors lifted the San Francisco 49ers to top status—until Montana finally had to go.

### ■ **A Vineyard in Napa**

by Doug Shafer with Andy Demsky (California)

The last 40 years at the California wine industry's heart, seen through a pioneering vintner's eyes.

—Gene Santoro

## 20th Century With Mike Wallace: America at War

10 episodes, 470 minutes

Athena



### Nearly 100,000 Americans have died in undeclared wars

since the end of World War II. This often discomfiting series takes an unvarnished look at the hows and whys and asks, Were they worth it? Its informed, fair-minded approach ensures that the question is worth pondering.

Take Vietnam, the era when rifts that shook the country hardened into today's intransigent political divides. The first episode, “How We Went To War;” deftly follows the tricky trail of events from Presidents Dwight Eisenhower to Lyndon Johnson. “A Soldier’s Diary” is drawn from the raw in-the-field footage that spilled into America’s living rooms nightly; it serves up the haunting, grunt’s-eye view of an increasingly savage,

frustrating stalemate. “Tet and the Anti-War Movement” recounts how the growing realization that America was locked in a far-off civil war on the losing side swelled protests in the streets and the halls of government. Finally, “Portraits of Courage” examines the horrific treatment of 600 American POWs, most of them aviators shot down during bombing campaigns.

Korea and the Gulf War get only one episode apiece, though each receives clear-eyed scrutiny. “Military Debacles” investigates moments many Americans would rather forget: the 1983 bombing of a Marine barracks in Beirut by Islamic Jihad, which killed 241 Americans and led President Ronald

Reagan to withdraw U.S. troops from Lebanon, in the process raising Hezbollah to heroic status among Arabs; President Carter’s

1980 attempt to rescue American hostages in Iran going so badly wrong, leaving them in captivity another nine months; and the 1990s trauma of Somalia with Black Hawk Down—a tactical victory for the U.S. and its allies and a fabulous movie, but a strategic real-world win for Somali warlord Mohamed Aidid. Beyond the battlefield per se, the series examines the changing ways Americans fight: the increased use of special elite units, women’s changing roles in the military and futuristic sci-fi weaponry that still doesn’t solve the problems of “asymmetrical warfare” dogging our troops overseas daily.

Anchored by veteran journalist Mike Wallace and featuring evocative visuals with commentary from Robert McNamara, John McCain, David Halberstam, Walter Cronkite, Edward R. Murrow and military veterans, *America at War* is blunt, challenging, sobering and rewarding.

—Gene Santoro



U.S. Marines evacuate the hills near Khe Sanh after 11 days in battle in April 1967.