

Historian finds Civil War TV series 'numbing'

By Janice Brunson
staff writer

Last week's PBS series on the Civil War was a journey through familiar terrain for historian Stuart Bloom, who has "extensively toured in my imagination" the many sites and scenes that comprised the drama.

The compelling five-night epic combined letters, writings and music from the period with historical footage and interviews with experts.

"To me, the Civil War is not something that happened a long time ago. I'm intimately involved with it," said Bloom, whose ancestors immigrated to the United States from Poland and Hungary some four decades after the great war.

During a recent interview, Bloom, a history instructor at Schoolcraft College in Livonia, held forth on both the war and the documentary, something he does most lunch periods in the school cafeteria.

"THIS IS obviously the first serious crisis in American history to be recorded on film, well, actually glass plates. We have a visual record that is far more encompassing than paintings," the Southfield resident said.

Although an estimated 1 million photographs were recorded on glass plates, "selected amnesia" resulted in the destruction of most, used by florists as windowpanes in greenhouses.

"They were really, gut-wrenching reality," and the nation preferred to forget, Bloom said of the destruction.

Though Bloom had previously

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— Stuart Bloom

viewed most of the photos, their cumulative impact in the documentary was both "moving and numbing, body after body, casualty after casualty."

"There is a cautionary warning in all this. It's a lot easier to get into war than to get out of it, and wars never result in the anticipated outcome of those who start them. This is something to keep in mind, in view of current events."

IN ADDITION to the visual record, individuals like Mary Chestnut, the wife of a Confederate plantation owner, maintained written accounts.

"Hearing their spoken words (by actors) made it intensely personal, this use of language by ordinary people. We don't write like that anymore."

Abraham Lincoln not only had no college education, not only had no high school education, he had hardly any formal education at all. The son of a semiliterate Kentucky farmer.

Yet he is the source of some of the finest prose in Western civilization." Both Lincoln and Confederate president Jefferson Davis "had a view of the ordinary citizen that exceeds anything today."

"They didn't have PR people, spin doctors, who talk down to the people. There was no pretense. They had the courage of conviction to make decisions, irrespective of what others might say."

OF THE MORE THAN 600,000 casualties of the Civil War, including 7,000 killed during 20 minutes of battle at Cold Harbor in Virginia, the fate of countless thousands remains unknown.

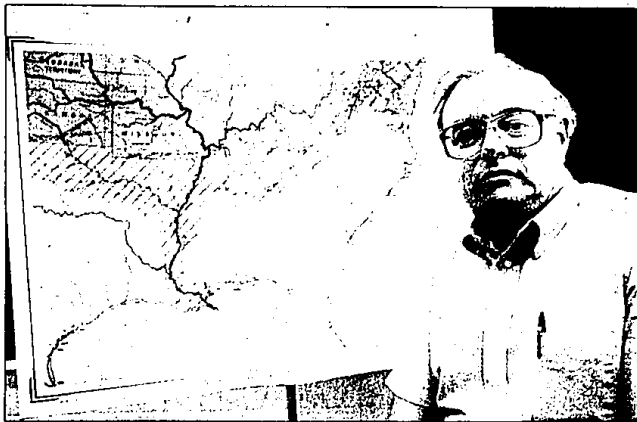
MIAs are "not unique to Vietnam. This is true of all wars. Visit any Civil War cemetery, there are many unidentified tombstones. Remember, dog tags were not a part of their equipment."

Following the bloody battle at Cold Harbor, Gen. Ulysses S. Grant of the Union observed little had been accomplished. The documentary concluded a lot of the bloody battles were without reason, the result of inept leadership and faulty decisions.

STILL, TROOPS remained unfailingly loyal and dedicated. They endured horrible suffering.

"I'm not so sure we're as good today."

The war, Bloom said, did not have



JIM JAGDELD/staff photographer

Schoolcraft College professor Stuart Bloom the Civil War, a subject he's studied most of his life.

to be. It was the decision of a handful of people, including Lincoln who "envisioned the future of America as embodied in the Declaration of Independence."

Judged within the context and reality of his day, Lincoln was, Bloom said, a decisive and bold abolitionist.

The documentary also "emphasized the active participation of blacks in the war. They died for their own liberty. In the end, skin color didn't matter. Blood runs red."

IN THE FINAL DAYS of the war, the Confederacy called upon an end

to slavery and beseeched slaves to join the ravaged Southern army, leading Confederate politicians like Howell Cobb to question "our fundamental beliefs. We have been wrong."

This loss of faith was pivotal in ending the war, Bloom said.

Arab-Americans fear heightening of ethnic hostility

By Janice Brunson
staff writer

Dr. Bhagwan Dashaia, a Westland businessman who is a naturalized U.S. citizen, was quietly reading his newspaper when the phone rang.

Using what Dashaia describes as vile and abusive language, the caller threatened to bomb Dashaia's home unless "you go back to Iraq."

The irony of the threat is not lost on Dashaia, who immigrated to the United States 25 years ago from northern India.

He is not an Arab. "I have a brown color. They thought I was Arab," he said, pausing to add, "Even if I was Arab, it was a stupid thing to say."

EVEN BEFORE the outbreak of the Middle East crisis, when Iraq invaded Kuwait and U.S. troops were sent to Saudi Arabia, Arab Americans said many "stupid things" were directed their way — even though they, like Dashaia, view the United States as their "home" and themselves as "loyal Americans."

With U.S.-Iraqi relations at a crisis point, some in the Arab community say they are frightened.

Livonian Terry Ahwal, originally of Palestine and now an executive assistant to Wayne County Executive Edward McNamara, "thinks God for small favors" each time she is told Arab-Americans, especially those from Palestine or Kuwait, should be confined to camps like Japanese-Americans during World War II.

Such comments are always qualified, according to Ahwal. "Not you," she is told. "You're an OK Arab."

ARAB BASHING, according to Ahwal and other suburban Arab-Americans, is typically less visible to the outside community than familiar expressions of bigotry directed at other ethnic minorities.

Unlike burning crosses or painted swastikas, prejudice against Arabs often takes the form of personal confrontation, slurs, threats and harassing phone calls.

Its effect is no less demeaning. "We have been victimized so openly, exposed so long, that most of us have developed a defense mechanism. We deny what's happening. It's very dehumanizing," said Ahwal who has dubbed the process "subtle bashing."

Imam Muhammad Karoub of Farmington Hills, religious director of the Islamic Association in Redford Township, describes a typical scenario frequently related to him by distraught members of his flock, devout Muslims whose women are identifiable by the head scarves they normally wear in public.

"People are insulted as they go about their daily business. Maybe they are shopping. They are stopped and confronted in a hostile manner. There are epithets. Sometimes they are spat upon," said Karoub who was born in the United States of Lebanese parents.

Since Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, the number of threatening phone calls to Karoub has jumped, as they always do when world news is centered in the middle east.

"They demand the A-rabs, they don't even know how to say the word, go back where we came from," Karoub said, adding, "I was

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ART EMANUELE/staff photographer

Imam Muhammad Karoub of Farmington Hills believes Arab-Americans who maintain native, non-Western dress are routinely exposed to prejudice.

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