

# From the Editor

By Lyn Miller-Lachmann



Shortly after the outbreak of war in spring 1861, an army of 30,000 Union soldiers crossed the Potomac River on their way to topple the Confederate government in Richmond, Virginia. To get there, they had to vanquish 22,000 troops stationed near the town of Manassas.

The news of an impending battle drew men, women, and children from Washington, D.C., and the surrounding farms and villages. On a sunny July 21, 1861, the spectators arrived with their picnic baskets to the fields overlooking the expected battle site. They hoped to witness the epic fight between the Blue army and the Gray army—a quick and definitive conclusion to the hostilities that had divided a nation.

Before the day was out, hundreds of young soldiers lay dead; thousands more were wounded. An elderly woman living near the battlefield was killed in the crossfire, and the spectators, journalists, and Union soldiers nearly trampled each other in their panicked flight back to Washington.

Many came to realize on that summer day that the war would be a long and bloody one. Later generations would come to realize how little the peace four years later resolved. We remained a divided nation, geographically and ideologically. And African Americans, though freed from slavery, soon found themselves subjugated once again under the legal and cultural segregation of Jim Crow.

Over the next century and a half, courageous Americans took steps to bridge our divisions and to realize the promise of equality and justice for all. Sometimes, however, the divisions widened, and people exploited fear and hatred of the “Other” for their own ends.

Nearly 150 years later, on the damp, chilly evening of November 3, 2008, in Manassas, Virginia, near where the Civil War’s land campaign began, another campaign came to an end. Barack Obama, the first African American to run as a major-party candidate for the presidency of the United States, spoke to 90,000 of his supporters. They came from cities, suburbs, and towns to witness another turning point in the history of the United States, a turning point in which all would participate the following day. In his speech, Obama honored the soldiers who fought in the nation’s wars, adding, “They didn’t fight for Red America. They didn’t fight for Blue America. They fought for the United States of America.”

The 90,000 spectators went home. The next day, they voted, and that night, they, and we, chose Obama as the 44th President of the United States.

While this “battle” ended quickly, definitively, and peacefully, the divisions that the presidential campaign exposed will not go away without all our efforts. We will always have policy differences, but they should never lead us to brand those who disagree with us as “unpatriotic” or “un-American.”

Above all, we should focus on the positive. Obama’s election stands as the culmination of decades of struggle—by those freed from slavery who sought education and built new lives and communities, by those who marched for civil rights, and by those who taught and learned in our schools that our diversity is our greatest source of strength. It is no accident that our youngest voters, who came of age after the civil rights movement and learned the lessons of inclusion and diversity in their classrooms, were Obama’s most enthusiastic supporters. And we should also recognize that in a world torn apart by religious and ethnic hatred—where 60 years after we said, “Never again,” genocide has occurred in the Balkans, Rwanda, and now Darfur—the United States once again leads by example. This election has shown that interracial democracy is possible and a biracial child born in the early years of the civil rights movement (whose parents’ marriage would have been illegal in some states in those days) could grow up to achieve the highest office in the land. This is our victory, but it also points us to the next step in our struggle: to heal divisions and reach toward understanding.

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This issue of *MultiCultural Review* features two articles related to filmmaking around the world. “The Making of *This Is Nollywood*,” by Editor’s Shelf Editor Kathryn Mora, focuses on the Nigerian film industry that has emerged in the past two decades and has made Lagos, Nigeria, the third largest center of the film industry, behind Hollywood and Bollywood. In 2003, the director Franco Sacchi, who was born in Zambia of Italian parents, decided to make a documentary of this new cinematic enterprise. With collaborators Bob Caputo and Aimee Corrigan from the Center for Digital Imaging Arts (CDIA) in Boston, Sacchi followed one acclaimed Nigerian filmmaker, Bond Emeruwa, and his crew as they shot Emeruwa’s most recent film, the 2007 title *Check Point*. Filmed in eleven days—a typical time frame for Nollywood films—*Check Point* is a thriller about police brutality. Like most of Emeruwa’s films, it comments on the country’s social ills while capturing the idealism of young Nigerians who are fighting back against government corruption, crime, poverty, and HIV/AIDS. By making his documentary, *This Is Nollywood*, Sacchi expresses his own idealism, his quest to dispel stereotypes of Africa and to portray the lives and achievements of real people in actual places rather than an exotic “Africa” that considers the continent as one country.

Christine McDonald’s annual report from the Sundance Film Festival highlights the film that received the Grand Jury Prize Dramatic Award—Courtney Hunt’s *Frozen River*. Filmed on location in northern New York in the middle of a brutal winter, *Frozen River* features a White working-class woman, recently abandoned by her husband, who teams up with a Mohawk woman to smuggle undocumented immigrants across the frozen St. Lawrence River into the United States. In addition to her review essay, McDonald includes Hunt’s comments on the sources of her inspiration and on the making of *Frozen River*. Other films reviewed in “The 2008 Sundance Film Festival” include the documentary *Nerakhoon (The Betrayal)* by Laotian-American filmmaker Thavisouk Pharasavath, whose efforts to understand how exile destroyed his family ultimately led him on an emotional journey to Laos; a documentary of the little-known Kuna people of Panama; and *Sleep Dealer*, Latino director Alex Rivera’s science fiction feature set in two Mexican border towns.

Those seeking to introduce young children to diverse cultures will appreciate “C Is for Culture: A Look at Multicultural Alphabet Books.” Angela Leeper offers an annotated list of more than 30 recommended titles, arranged by group: general and multiple ethnicities, Africa and African Americans, Asia and Asian Americans, Caribbean, Central Americans, Hawaiians, Jews and Jewish Americans, Latinos, the Middle East, Native Americans, persons with disabilities, South Americans, and women. Leeper also cites seven titles that are not recommended and explains why they should be avoided, with problems that include forced rhymes, overgeneralizations, and a failure to distinguish traditional cultural aspects from contemporary ones.

Our final two feature articles explore different aspects of multilingual publishing. In “From Soccer and Pirates to Sex and Drugs: Recommended Books in Spanish for Young Readers,” Isabel Schon highlights 42 Spanish and bilingual books for primary, middle grade, and young adult readers. Many of these books come from U.S. publishers, demonstrating the increased presence of the United States in the global Spanish-language

market. The recommended books include biographies of soccer stars and world leaders throughout history, fairy tales, and advice books for teens. Vladimir F. Wertsman’s interview with Mike Masri, the manager of the Dahesh Heritage Bookstore, explores the marketing and distribution of Arabic-language books in the United States. Masri cites growing interest in these books and discusses popular authors writing in Arabic as well as popular books translated into Arabic from other languages. 🌐

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### Lyn’s Blog and Web Site

Editor-in-Chief Lyn Miller-Lachmann has a new web site and blog! Please stop by for a visit at <http://web.mac.com/lynml>.