the Union together. The other titles in the Henry Clay and the Struggle for the Union series are: The Formation of the Union and its Early Challenges and The Compromise of 1850 to the Civil War. Highly recommended. Aud: J, H, P. (T. Keogh)


Israelli filmmaker Avi Angel helmed this moving documentary about septuagenarian brothers Avner Kerem and Itzik Weinberg, who retrace their childhood in Holocaust-ravaged Europe and uncover the heroic stories of three women responsible for saving their lives. The first was their mother, who managed to spirit the boys out of harm’s way as their family was being deported in 1942 from Krakow, Poland, to the Nazi death camps—Avner was three years old and Itzik was four; they would never see their parents again. The second woman was their aunt Malka, who was given the responsibility of hiding the boys and, later, escaped from the Nazis with them into Hungary. Two years later, the boys were passengers on a refugee train that was supposed to head to safety in Spain, but the train was stopped by the Nazis and the passengers were sent to Bergen-Belsen. Here, a third woman, a 20-year-old Hungarian named Naomi Mayer, unofficially adopted the brothers and served as their protector until the concentration camp’s liberation. Avner and Itzik conduct their search through a series of cramped apartments and isolated farms with a mix of solemnity and wonder, occasionally pausing to display a wry sense of humor (they “toast” each other with pill bottles). Here I Learned to Love is a moving and ultimately heartbreaking tribute to bravery and perseverance under the most horrifying conditions imaginable. An excellent addition to the canon of Holocaust-related nonfiction filmmaking, this is highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)


Romanian expatriate Alexandru Solomon’s documentary offers a satirical look at how miserably his homeland has fared in the post-communist era. Manipulating archival footage, Solomon frames his film around a cheeky premise in which the ghostly presence of dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu, who was executed in 1989, returns to his country after two decades. Although horrified by the subsequent westernization, Ceaușescu is grimly pleased that former members of his regime have prospered from using their positions at the time of the revolution as springboards to wealth and power in a system that has continued (and even worsened) the old divide between haves and have-nots under the rubric of laissez-faire capitalism. Solomon employs primitive claymation/stop-motion animation to humorously depict the ways in which state-controlled resources were usurped by members of the old nomenklatura, and also interviews a representative sample of the new Romanian millionaire’s club, as well as ordinary citizens who have benefited little, if at all, from the change to democracy and free enterprise. Of course, these developments are hardly unique to Romania: one can see this crude form of crony capitalism operating in many regions of the old Soviet empire, including Russia itself, and in China, as well. But Romania serves as a telling paradigm of what has happened in numerous places after communism’s collapse, and Solomon’s approach—a mixture of seriousness and humor similar to that of Michael Moore or Morgan Spurlock—makes for a film that is both enlightening and engaging. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)


The American Civil War was defined by big issues, events, and battles, but what often brings a sense of rich emotion and enduring interest to this tragic conflict are the small personal stories. Narrated by Brian Dennehy, filmmaker Charles F. Larimer’s PBS-aired documentary is based on the Civil War letters of Jacob and Emeline Ritner, a married couple who ran a family farm in Iowa. While Emeline kept the farm and her brood of children together, Jacob was a Union officer who served in the Vicksburg Campaign, the Battle of Lookout Mountain near Chattanooga, TN, and marched with Sherman on Atlanta and Savannah. Writing to his “dear little wife at home,” Jacob describes other Union officers as “big bugs” who drink, swear, and gamble, in contrast to the author, who longs to do his duty then return to his family. Between battles he notes the common humanity of soldiers from both sides, who sometimes exchange banter across the lines, later followed by deadly gunfire. Emeline recounts home front news, including children’s illnesses, local disdain for “Copperheads” who oppose the war effort, and fears about rumored Confederate guerrilla raids into Iowa. The human toll includes the death of Jacob’s brother in combat, as well as Jacob’s own wounding and debilitation from malaria, which would eventually shorten his life after the war. In addition to the war’s drama, the documentary also chronicles the discovery of Jacob’s letters and a time-consuming search for Emeline’s correspondence, which together present a vivid picture of the war as being a nation’s “baptism of blood” while also bringing misery to civilians caught in the crossfire. Combining readings, dramatic re-enactments, and comments from Larimer—a family descendant—who also visits the graves of some of the people mentioned in the letters, this eloquent documentary will make a fine addition to most Civil War history collections. Recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (S. Rees)


History, as the old History Channel is now known, made a splash with the miniseries America: The Story of Us (VL-11/10), a slick but superficial overview of North America, and the U.S. in particular, from the founding of Jamestown in the early 17th century to the 2008 election. Now it offers a 12-part prequel of sorts that reaches back to the evolution of}