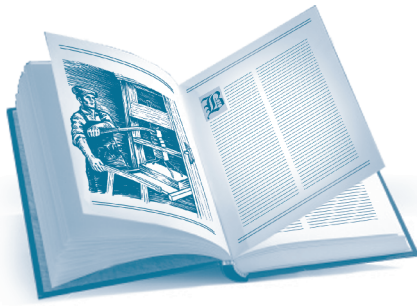


BOOK REVIEWS



Images of America: Kaufmann's Department Store

By Melanie Linn Gutowski with the Senator John Heinz History Center
Arcadia, 2017
192 photos, 128 pages,
Paperback, \$21.99
Reviewed by Julia Snyder, Publications Intern

An icon of downtown Pittsburgh, Kaufmann's Department Store inhabited the city in one form or another for more than 130 years. Author Melanie Linn Gutowski, who published *Pittsburgh's Mansions* in 2013, documents the history of Kaufmann's from its humble beginnings as a single-floor clothing store for men in 1871 to its final days before being rebranded as Macy's. Gutowski takes the reader on a photographic journey where readers can relive fond memories or learn more about Pittsburgh's history with descriptive captions that together tell a cohesive story.

Founded by German immigrants, Kaufmann's began as a men's clothing store and quickly grew into a one-stop shop for clothing, merchandise, furniture, books, auto parts, hardware, and even medicine. Occupying an entire block on Smithfield Street, Kaufmann's once housed a restaurant, a bakery, and a hospital in addition to the department store.

Gutowski follows the evolution of Kaufmann's through expansion, multiple building projects, remodeling, and the endless rearranging of departments and intricate window displays that the store developed for its anniversaries and Christmas.

More than 150 of the photos are from the History Center's Detre Library & Archives, documenting everything from how Kaufmann's pioneered convenience with free delivery, to its own parking garage, to the first department store photography studio in Pittsburgh. The department store and the Kaufmann family left a lasting legacy, from the iconic Kaufmann's clock at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Smithfield Street, to Edgar J. Kaufmann's famous summer home Fallingwater, to the memories of people throughout Western Pennsylvania who shopped at Kaufmann's for years; Gutowski portrays that legacy beautifully.

Overall, *Kaufmann's Department Store* is organized well, easy to read, and an interesting glimpse into the history of the store. Readers looking for a detailed history may want to try *Kaufmann's: The Big Store in Pittsburgh* by Letitia Stuart Savage, but for the person hoping for a solid overview of Kaufmann's past filled with historical pictures, *Kaufmann's Department Store* is the perfect fit.

American Founders: How People of African Descent Established Freedom in the New World

By Christina Proenza-Coles
New South Books, 2019
24 photos, 362 pages
Hardcover, \$29.95
Reviewed by Samuel W. Black, Director of the African American Program

In 2019 various institutions, organizations, corporations, and government agencies commemorated the 400th-year of the landing

of people of African descent in Virginia. Learned organizations such as the Association for the Study of African American Life & History, the Commonwealth of Virginia, and the National Park Service commemorated the landing of the first enslaved Africans in the Virginia colony in 1619.¹ In August 2019 the *New York Times Magazine* published a series of articles called the "1619 Project" That focused on the history of America after the 20 enslaved persons were brought to the Virginia colony and sold into slavery.² The "goal was to reframe American history by considering what it would mean to regard 1619 as our nation's birth year."³

This historic occasion is only part of the centuries-old story of African contributions to attaining and defining freedom in the west. *American Founders* offers introspection into a not so well-known understanding of the African presence in the Americas. In fact, Proenza-Coles' book is not a volume of African American history but a volume of African history in the Western Hemisphere that includes North, South, and Caribbean America. She refers to this identification as America.

The book chronicles how people of African descent developed and defended New World settlements, undermined European enslavement of indigenous and African people, and championed freedom throughout the hemisphere from the 16th through the 20th centuries. While conventional history tends to reduce the roles of African Americans to antebellum slavery and the civil rights movement, in reality, Africans preceded the English and Spanish to the New World by a century or more.

Much of this historic interpretation is offered by Ivan Van Sertima's *They Came Before Columbus* and Lerone Bennett, Jr.'s *Before the Mayflower*. Both volumes denote the African presence in the Western Hemisphere

before or during the early stages of the European age of exploration. Proenza-Coles adds color and detail where Van Sertima and Bennett left off. She connects the early stages of African presence in South America with the 20th century revolutions for civil rights and independence throughout the Americas. She paints an unbroken string of African civilization in the Americas that stretches over 500 years. The reader is left with a universal feeling of Africaness in the century's long freedom movement in the Americas.

Africans in the Americas outnumbered Europeans at many times and places, from colonial Peru to antebellum Virginia and South Carolina. Bibliophile Howard Dodson has stated that "Six and a half million people came to the Americas between 1492 and 1776—one million came from Europe mostly by choice seeking a better life or freedom from oppression. Five and a half million came from Africa most in chains."⁴ Proenza-Coles posts biographical vignettes along the text that highlights the presence of individuals as explorers, conquistadores, settlers, soldiers, sailors, servants, slaves, rebels, leaders, lawyers, litigants, laborers, artisans, artists, activists, translators, teachers, doctors, nurses, inventors, investors, merchants, mathematicians, scientists, scholars, engineers, entrepreneurs, generals, cowboys, pirates, professors, politicians, priests, poets, governors, and presidents.

Sheila Walker's UNESCO-sponsored documentary, *Slave Routes: A Global Vision*, explores the African history of much of the Americas as a peopling via the slave trade.⁵ However, Proenza-Coles offers additional peopling evidences in the form of Africans as part of European exploration. From Columbus and subsequent Spanish voyages to the period of colonization and liberation movement in Haiti and elsewhere, the author offers an expanded history on what Africans

did and how they did it. *American Founders* charts a history of African leadership in American civilization, and though much of this history is framed by slavery and oppression, Proenza-Coles lays bare the events of African civilization in the Americas over a 500 year span.

Even the most studied African bibliophile will find new information in *American Founders*. Proenza-Coles traces the peripheral events in history that would impact the largest transport of human beings: the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. The author shows the impact of the Mongolian and Ottoman empires on world affairs. There is the role of European imperial courts in the start of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. This multitude of events and mixed-race individuals included in the book underscores that black and white Americans share the same history, and in many cases, the same ancestry. *American Founders* is meant to celebrate this shared heritage and strengthen these bonds. ☀

¹ See asalh.org/400-years/official-400-years-of-perseverance-event/

² Nikole Hannah-Jones, "Project 1619," *New York Times Magazine*, August 2019.

³ Ibid, p. 4-5.

⁴ Howard Dodson statement in the UNESCO produced DVD, "Slave Routes: A Global Vision," 2010.

⁵ Sheila Walker, director, *Slave Routes: A Global Vision* video, UNESCO, 2010, available for viewing at www.unesco.org/archives/multimedia/document-1637-eng-2/.

