The Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery Opens “One Life: Grant and Lee” Exhibition Recognizes America’s Two Greatest Civil War Generals

The next installation of the National Portrait Gallery’s “One Life” series considers the lives of generals Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee as they were intertwined during the Civil War. Open July 4 through May 25, 2015, “One Life: Grant and Lee” explores the rivalry between the two generals as one of the most memorable in American military history. The press preview will be held July 1, 10 to 11:30 a.m.

“When comparing and contrasting the personalities of Generals Grant and Lee and how they led their armies, it becomes apparent that there is no ‘one way’ to become an effective leader,” said Kim Sajet, the director of the National Portrait Gallery. “Each man brought his own innate talents to the battlefield and adapted to each changing circumstance. Through images primarily sourced from our collections, visitors will recognize that Grant and Lee were well-matched rivals who, when the time came to lay aside their weapons, worked together to broker a lasting peace whose legacy continues today.”

Lee—a polished and seemingly invincible Confederate commander in the east—encountered Grant—a rough and tumble soldier who had surprising success in the west—in the Virginia campaigns of 1864 and 1865. Grant and Lee both stand alone as genuine influencers in their impact on America, but their legacies are also are the product of their relationship to each other.

Each embodied the society for which they fought, and their clash became a harbinger of the evolution of warfare in the 20th century. Ultimately, the Union would prevail, in part because of its adoption of a total war philosophy of destroying armies and resources.

“One Life: Grant and Lee” uses images drawn mostly from the Portrait Gallery’s collections, with a key loan featured in the show: Winslow Homer’s painting titled, “Skirmish in the Wilderness,”
from the New Britain Museum of American Art. The exhibition uses portrait photography, documentary drawings and artists’ renderings of important events during the final year of the war in the east. The show also includes death masks of each man.

David C. Ward, the museum’s senior historian, is the curator of this exhibition. This is Ward’s third “One Life” exhibition focused on influential figures of the Civil War. Ward curated “One Life: Walt Whitman” in 2006 and “One Life: Abraham Lincoln” in 2009.

The National Portrait Gallery’s “One Life” room has focused on the lives and influence of Katharine Graham, Martin Luther King Jr., President Abraham Lincoln, Sandra Day O’Connor, Thomas Paine, Elvis Presley and President Ronald Reagan.

The National Portrait Gallery continues to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Civil War, fought from 1861 to 1865, with rotating permanent collection installations. These presentations, which mark each year of the war, complement the installation of objects from the Civil War that are on long-term display in the exhibition “American Origins.” A curator and historian from the museum have co-edited a modern-day reader that pairs current and historic poetry and photographs in response to the Civil War titled Lines in Long Array.

In addition, the building that houses the museum at Eighth and F streets N.W. served as a Civil War barracks and hospital to Union soldiers and was the site of Lincoln’s second inaugural ball March 6, 1865, as the war was nearing its conclusion.

**National Portrait Gallery**

The Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery tells the history of America through the individuals who have shaped its culture. Through the visual arts, performing arts and new media, the Portrait Gallery portrays poets and presidents, visionaries and villains, actors and activists whose lives tell the American story. The National Portrait Gallery, part of the Donald W. Reynolds Center for American Art and Portraiture, is located at Eighth and F streets N.W., Washington, D.C. Smithsonian Information: (202) 633-1000. Website: npg.si.edu; Facebook facebook.com/npg.smithsonian; Instagram http://instagram.com smithsoniannpg; blog face2face.si.edu; Twitter twitter.com/npg; YouTube youtube.com/NatlPortraitGallery;

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