



District Comics: An Unconventional History of Washington, DC

Matt Dembicki (Editor) , Michael G. Rhode , Troy-Jeffrey Allen (Contributor) , Brooke A. Allen (Contributor) , Rand Arrington (Contributor) , Grant Jeffrey Barrus (Contributor) , Carolyn Belefsky (Contributor) , Michael Brace (Contributor) , more... Scott O. Brown (Contributor) , Joe Carabeo (Contributor) , Andrew Cohen (Contributor) , Peter S. Conrad (Contributor) , Michael Cowgill (Contributor) , Kevin Czapiewski (Contributor) , Carol Dembicki (Contributor) , Sean Fahey (Contributor) , Rebecca Goldfield (Contributor) , Chad Lambert (Contributor) , Jim Ottaviani (Contributor) , Borja Peña (Contributor) , Dale Rawlings (Contributor) , Kevin Rawlings (Contributor) , Kevin Rechin (Contributor) , Michael Rhode (Contributor) , Rafer Roberts (Contributor) , Gregory Robison (Contributor) , Jason Rodriguez (Contributor) , Nick Sousanis (Contributor) , Wendy Strang-Frost (Contributor) , Jacob Warrenfeltz (Contributor) , Tabitha Whissemore (Contributor) , Tom Williams (Contributor) , Paul W. Zdepski (Contributor) ...less

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District Comics is a graphic anthology featuring lesser-known stories about Washington, DC, from its earliest days as a rustic settlement along the swampy banks of the Potomac to the modern-day metropolis. Spanning 1794-2009, *District Comics* stops along the way for a duel, a drink in the Senate's speakeasy, a look into the punk scene, and much more.

Featuring stories by:

Scott O. Brown, award-winning man of comics and Harvey Award nominee

Chad Lambert, five-time Howard E. Day Memorial Prize finalist and writer for *Kung Fu Panda* and *Megamind*

Jim Ottaviani, creator of *The New York Times* bestseller *Feynman*

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From Reader Review District Comics: An Unconventional History of Washington, DC for online ebook

Zach says

Very enjoyable.

Contributors utilize a variety of styles to convey several stories about the history of DC.

What I most enjoyed is that many of the stories focused on the so called "little people" or people behind the scenes and their perspectives on history--the bugler at President Kennedy's funeral, a bartender who waited on a spy, a bootlegger who kept his Congressional customers satisfied (to paraphrase Simon and Garfunkel).

Overall a nice read for anyone interested in DC's history who also appreciates graphic novels!

Helen says

This graphic novel is an extremely entertaining and surprising compendium of vignettes about District of Columbia history, colorful characters, etc, ranging from a man who supplied liquor to Congress during Prohibition, to an unfortunate FBI agent who was mistakenly taken for Hansen by the CIA and whose life was subsequently ruined when he was mistakenly arrested and let go by the FBI, from the story of a DC punk band to the story of the bugler who played taps at JFK's burial at Arlington, from the story of the female teen sculptress whose statue of Lincoln stands in the Capitol rotunda to that of an enterprising shoe-shine man who got the law prohibiting street bootblack stands changed, and many more stories.

Various writers, artists, etc worked on each vignette - the writing was effective and the drawing was I suppose reflective of the often incredible stories. It was even more exciting that each vignette was in a different style - made for more variety and interest.

There was even a story on the first giant panda cub born in DC, as well as stories within stories, such as that contained within the vignette entitled Spytini, wherein a character in the main/contemporary story - what the vignette is about - relates a vivid story of a long ago character who used to frequent the bar, and that story becomes the background of the drink - the Spytini - he's about to serve to a customer.

There are interesting stories throughout Washington, starting with its inception - these mini-histories illuminate obscure (and some not-so-obscure) aspects of Washington history. I thought this volume represents a wonderful effort to present Washington history - or some aspects of it - entertainingly, in a volume that definitely holds the reader's attention!

Audrey Babkirk Wellons says

There are some really interesting stories in here from all walks of Washington DC history, but the majority of the comic art just didn't wow me. And neither did the storytelling--a few were told in a kind of tired frame story (e.g., "Son, did I ever tell the story of so-and-so . . . ?"), others had a really contrived way of making

facts into first-person history (e.g., the story of a single reporter that saw X event happen), and some were more like descriptions than narratives.

I was disappointed overall, but the stories that are good are worth reading (if not necessarily worth *seeing*).

Christian says

District Comics was interesting. The unique history kept me in the book however I found that the stories were not expanded on enough. There needed to be fewer stories that went into greater detail. The writing was not up to an adult reader's standards. They were more for a middle school student. The graphics were ok but the lettering was absolutely horrible. This distracted from the artwork. Over all a 3/5 but I still enjoyed it more than other books I've read in the past. (It was a great Christmas gift.)

Raina says

It's a great concept - a bunch of short nonfiction pieces, chronologically arranged, about the history of a particular city. In this case, Washington, D.C.

Dembicki, the editor, is good at that part of this process of creating a collection. Of coming up with a hooky concept.

However, if I'd realized he was also the mind behind Trickster: Native American Tales, A Graphic Collection, I might have steered clear.

And my caution would have been legit... The execution quality of these pieces is pretty mixed, and I'd say that generally they're way too text heavy. Like he recruits authors who are subject experts, who don't actually know the art of writing for the comic medium. It's the same problem I had with Trickster. That and I was rarely a big fan of the art styles.

HOWEVER, I LOVE obscure history. And this book is full of it. Multiple times, after reading one of the pieces, I found myself googling the actual people or phenomena covered, and getting lost on the interwebs learning about the things.

Particularly notable:

the fact that Washington DC was built to be the capitol city, and really didn't exist as a place before that the creation of the Army Medical Museum (particularly as a groundbreaking scientific resource)

Lavinia "Vinnie" Ream! Totally a historical figure I would have written a paper about in college.

JAMES HAMPTON! Srsly, this one led me to watch a half hour lecture/ppt on YouTube. SO fascinating.
the creation of the subway stations

the design of the special police badge for Obama's inauguration

Some great information in here, and in a form in which I actually consumed it.

I just wish the telling was a bit more consistent in quality.

Lani says

A hit or miss collection of illustrated history and some more personal tales of the District. Presumably by local artists since I had about 5 sign my copy at SPX last year.

The variety of styles was nice, though a few were particularly awful in concept and art or tried to reach farther than a strip in a compilation can manage. Mostly I enjoyed the hidden tidbits of history like the boot black going to court to be a street vendor, or the illustrated words of Whitman and his encounters with dying soldiers during the Civil War.

Diane says

This was just "OK" for me. I enjoyed learning little known historical facts about D.C., but some were better than others. There were those that I didn't particularly like the vehicles they used to bring the story to life. An example would be the attempted assassination of President Truman by some Puerto Rican Nationalists which ended with a gun fight in front of Blair House. I just so happened to have read a book on that last year, so I knew the details of what happened. The author of the comic chose to insert a newspaper reporter and a rookie photographer within the narrative and it took away from the actual story. It made no sense. I can understand the contributors of the book trying to find a way to present these historical stories in an interesting way, but it was hit or miss with me.

courtney Prior says

I was thrilled to find this in the KC library. I loved the later stories, especially the one about the metro.

Dave says

I received this as a gift some time ago, glanced at it and set it aside. This past week I returned. I was particularly interested in the comic on the design of the Metro and the Vietnam War Memorial. There were other comics that interested me in flashes.

However, my inexperience as a graphic novel reader arrived in bumbling fashion. I had trouble appreciating the words and the pictures together and I didn't always know whether to read left to right or up and down. I think that added some dissatisfaction.

Alger says

This is a volume that cries out for editorial control. The approach appears to have been "choose a DC themed story that interests you and develop it". This resulted in a book that is very uneven. Some few of the stories are excellently told tales of little known people who created or typify the city ("101 miles of Monument"

really stands out here, along with "Dark was the Night").

But most are under-researched event stories ("Burn, Washington, Burn" for example) or biographies that take ten pages to relay the contents of a one paragraph Wikipedia entry ("Vinnie and Abe" is the stand out in this category). A number are only tangentially related to DC at all ("Rolling Thunder" has almost nothing to do with DC, although it could have but the author did not even try to make it relevant, and it is boring to boot).

Because it is an anthology I can cut some slack, but a number of these efforts should have been sent back for rework or just rejected at the draft stage. The biggest failure of the book is that it simply jumps over an awful lot of crucial events. We skip from the War of 1812 to the 1860s and get four stories about the Civil War era, and then suddenly it is 1932. Then it's 1950, and from there the book floats around the past couple of decades for half the book. We essentially miss every formative event in the building of the city, most of the crucial eras that formed the population of the city, and the subject bias is weirdly white for a city that is more than half black. Instead of a telling of the exciting U Street Renaissance and the legacy of Howard University that gave the world Zora Neale Hurston and Duke Ellington, we get Ronald Reagan and squirrels. Instead of the formidable Frederick Douglass and Anacosta we get the overly detailed story of the guy that played taps wrong at JFK's funeral. Instead of the destructive 1968 riots that defined DC for three decades, we get a weirdly empty story about the man who designed the police badge for the 2008 presidential inauguration. What about the black migration into the city looking for opportunity? Using that premise, even that embarrassingly awful movie "The Butler" captured the soul of DC better than this book. Equally, the book is missing the very important fact that the city is almost entirely a creature of the Federal Government (and what a great story the DC statehood fight would have made too).

Essentially this is a book without a center, or even the mission to tell a coherent or meaningful history of the city. The expected audience is clearly the kinds of people who would buy a comics anthology just because it is about their city. This certainly guaranteed the DC library system would buy a few copies anyway. In short I was greatly disappointed with what should have been an interesting book.

Thomas Simpson says

I thought that this was going to be a history of DC as a graphic novel, instead it's the Fantasia of DC history: several unrelated vignettes in completely different artistic styles that range from average to extraordinary. My favorites were the ones from the 1960s onwards, especially "Dark was the Night," "Spytini," "101 Miles of Monument," "Ego Shine," and "Design and Detail." These ones particularly highlighted the qualities that I wanted to see, as a resident of the District because they're the stories of real district residents who aren't politicians and live in the parts of DC outside the National Mall and Capitol Hill. Worth the read for any resident of DC.

Michael Rhode says

I'm an author of a story in the book so don't trust my rating

Jessica Fure says

Ran through this in an hour at the library. I didn't skip, or skim - I read it completely and loved it. Even the stories I liked less - maybe the art wasn't my favorite, maybe the story didn't flow as well as others - were good. But more often than not, this book was one perfect, compelling note after another. I don't even CARE about DC's history, even though I live here - give me NYC or London any day - and yet, I could still tell this book had rolled up why people love this town, making me understand it a little more.

Emilia P says

I really liked this as an idea, and liked a lot of the comics individually, and appreciated the variety of tales, but it didn't all come together for me, in the end. I suppose that is the nature of an anthology. Read if you have a soft spot for this weird little town, I suppose. Or spies, or military medical history, or tin foil altars. Yep. It's all there.

Lkking says

Short essays in graphic novel format. Little known facts and stories from and about Washington, D.C. Didn't know about the shrine in the garage or the falsely accused spy or the attempt on Truman's life or any of most of the other tales. Interesting read.
