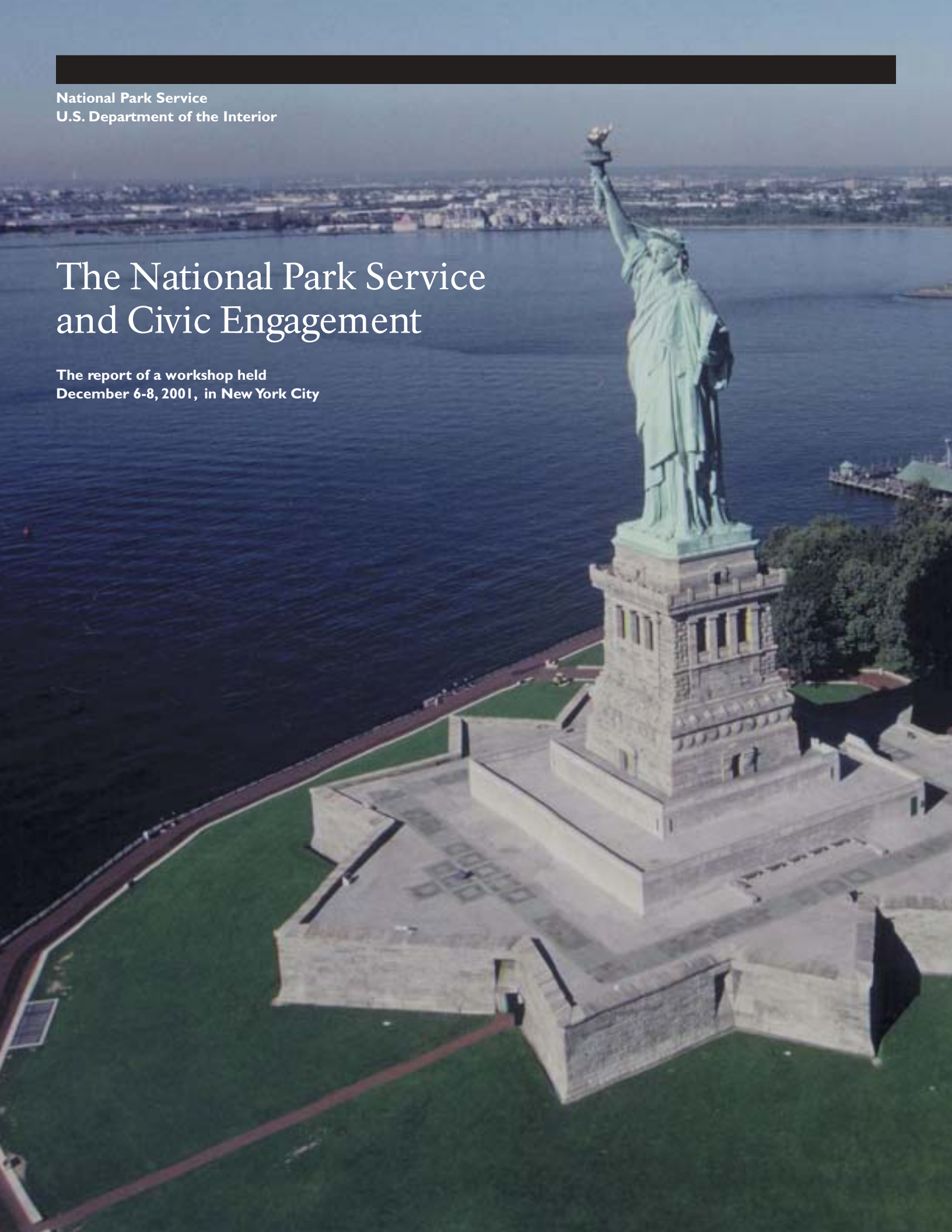


National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

The National Park Service and Civic Engagement

The report of a workshop held
December 6-8, 2001, in New York City



Acknowledgments

The workshop was developed by Marty Blatt, Rolf Diamant, David Glassberg, John Maounis, Liz Sevchenko, Catherine Turton, and Gay Vietzke.

Special thanks are extended to Marty Blatt and Patricia Roeser without whom the workshop would not have been so well organized and executed. And, special thanks to John Maounis and Gay Vietzke who played such a pivotal role in the publication of this report.

The project team would like to recognize Northeast Regional Director Marie Rust for her leadership and support of this effort.

Special thanks go to all who attended the meeting in New York City and made it such a success.

The team was assisted in developing this report by Melinda Fine of Fine Consulting, New York City; Edward T. Linenthal of the University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh; and Janet Greenstein Potter of JGPotter & Associates, Philadelphia.

Heritage Partners of Boston, Massachusetts, were the designers.



IN REPLY REFER TO:

United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Northeast Region
United States Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106

Dear Reader:

I am pleased to share with you this summary of an important meeting, The National Park Service and Civic Engagement.

In response to a number of critical challenges in our parks and programs, I asked that superintendents, educational and interpretive specialists, and resource professionals of the Northeast Region organize this workshop. The objective was to begin a discussion within our agency that we hope will encourage all parks to embrace civic engagement as the essential foundation and framework for creating plans and developing programs. More than fifty National Park Service professionals and partners gathered in New York City for three days in December 2001 to explore opportunities that exist in national parks for civic discussion of the American experience. Providing such opportunities is important to keeping the parks relevant to the public. Only by ensuring their relevance will we be able to sustain the parks into the future.

The National Park Service bears enormous responsibility to democracy, not only through the hundreds of sites that it manages, but also through its role as administrator of the National Historic Landmarks program and as keeper of the National Register of Historic Places. Last year, the National Park System Advisory Board challenged us to encourage the exploration of the American past and hold civic discussions about the American experience. The board proclaimed, "Parks are places to stimulate an understanding of history in its larger context, not just as human experience, but as the sum of the interconnection of all living things and forces that shape the earth."

At the civic engagement workshop, park superintendents and representatives of cultural and educational organizations described impressive park-community partnerships, where demonstrated gains have been made through carefully guided collaborative planning. Yet participants also stated that the level of attention to community engagement is not consistent on an agency-wide basis. For example, too often stakeholders are brought in to approve "plans" that are already near implementation. In addition, collaboration is sometimes inhibited by an imbalance in the sharing of power between parks and the communities. If work is to become truly collaborative, we must reckon with these sorts of deficiencies.

I encourage you to spend some time with this report and to discuss the implications of this effort with your colleagues and staff. Let this be the beginning of a significant shift in the way we do business.

Sincerely,

Marie Rust
Northeast Regional Director



The places that commemorate sad history are not places in which we wallow, or wallow in remorse, but instead places in which we may be moved to a new resolve, to be better citizens. . . . Explaining history from a variety of angles makes it not only more interesting, but also more true. When it is more true, more people come to feel that they have a part in it. That is where patriotism and loyalty intersect with truth.

—John Hope Franklin, Ph.D.

Parks should be not just recreational destinations, but springboards, for personal journeys of intellectual and cultural enrichment. . . . [We] must ensure that the American story is told faithfully, completely, and accurately. . . . Our nation's history is our civic glue.

Summary

The National Park Service manages extraordinary places that include some of the nation's most significant natural and heritage resources. This situation presents both an opportunity and a challenge. In a report published in 2001, *Rethinking the National Parks for the 21st Century*, the National Park System Advisory Board called on the National Park Service to fulfill its promise in the 21st century. The board asserted that "In many ways, the National Park Service is our nation's Department of Heritage. . . . Parks should be not just recreational destinations, but springboards, for personal journeys of intellectual and cultural enrichment. . . . [We] must ensure that the American story is told faithfully, completely, and accurately. . . . Our nation's history is our civic glue."

From December 6–8, 2001, more than fifty people from inside and outside the National Park Service participated in a workshop called The National Park Service and Civic Engagement, convened by NPS Northeast Regional Director Marie Rust. The meeting brought together park managers, resource specialists, public historians, scholars, and museum professionals to discuss how national parks can become centers for civic engagement.

During this discussion, workshop participants sought to pursue the recommendations of the National Park System Advisory Board and to build on similar concepts articulated in NPS policy, as well as changes in interpretive programming that have been developed during the past decade. Drawing from experience, participants argued for broadening historical context, for giving expression to diverse American voices, and for strengthening the public's understanding of the contemporary relevance of heritage resources. They described NPS efforts to infuse culturally diverse stories into all park programs and to reinforce visitors' understanding of the contemporary relevance of historical events.

They asserted that protection of cultural and natural resources requires sustained and genuine collaboration with a wide spectrum of partners beyond the NPS.

Through a series of case studies, the group learned about already established civic engagement processes and explored how similar practices might be incorporated into park sites and programs. The participants developed a vision statement and a series of recommendations for core activities, for multiple approaches to educational partnering and civic involvement, and for preliminary actions that will lead to a focused and deliberate expansion of the NPS civic engagement effort.

Background and Overview

In July 2001, the National Park System Advisory Board published a report called *Rethinking the National Parks for the 21st Century*. Among its numerous important recommendations was a challenge:

In many ways, the National Park Service is our nation's Department of Heritage. . . . Parks should be not just recreational destinations, but springboards for personal journeys of intellectual and cultural enrichment. . . . [We] must ensure that the American story is told faithfully, completely, and accurately. . . . Our nation's history is our civic glue.

In response to this challenge, the NPS convened a December 2001 meeting, The National Park Service and Civic Engagement. Under the leadership of Marie Rust, Northeast Regional Director of the National Park Service, this intensive workshop brought together more than fifty park managers, resource specialists, public historians, scholars, and museum professionals. The principal goals of the workshop were to have participants:

- **examine the implications of civic engagement for the NPS**

The museum becomes a center where people gather to meet and converse, a place that celebrates the richness of individual and collective experience, and a participant in collaborative problem solving. It is an active, visible player in civic life, a safe haven, and a trusted incubator of change.

- **understand how civic engagement will further realize the goals of the NPS in general and those of individual sites and programs in particular**
- **identify important civic issues that should be addressed by the NPS**
- **leave the workshop inspired to develop and institute civic engagement projects for the NPS**

At the workshop, Kim Igoe of the American Association of Museums (AAM) and Esther Mackintosh of the Federation of State Humanities Councils described successful civic engagement initiatives. Ms. Igoe referred to the AAM publication *Mastering Civic Engagement: A Challenge to Museums*, in which Ellen Hirzy states, “The museum becomes a center where people gather to meet and converse, a place that celebrates the richness of individual and collective experience, and a participant in collaborative problem solving. It is an active, visible player in civic life, a safe haven, and a trusted incubator of change.” Ms. Mackintosh reported that over a four-year period, board members of the Federation of State Humanities Councils have convened for “a series of facilitated discussions of shared readings...about vital issues and theory in civic life.” These discussions enabled councils to develop civic-engagement programs with their visitors and stakeholders.

Conference participants were encouraged by the long-standing commitment of the NPS to preservation of heritage resources that diversify the national landscape of remembrance through an expanded interpretation—consulting with a broad range of stakeholders and giving voice to an extensive variety of Americans. In the 1960s and 1970s, a widening of the historical lens influenced a series of congressional acts that had direct consequences for NPS management, program development, and interpretation of the parks. Passage of the 1990 *Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act*, and its ongoing implementation, have changed the way parks work with Native American tribes, to become a truly consultative and power-sharing

relationship, which continues to have a profound effect on all NPS activities with tribes, communities, and other stakeholders.

To enable visitors to understand the past and not simply celebrate it, Congress established parks in the 1990s such as Manzanar National Historic Site, Cane River Creole National Historical Park, and Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site. It authorized changing the name of Custer Battlefield National Monument to Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument. In 1994, the NPS revised its Thematic Framework, which now calls for a conceptual approach to history, focused on the stories of ordinary people. A 1998 report from the superintendents of Civil War battlefields, *Holding the High Ground: Principles and Strategies for Managing and Interpreting Civil War Battlefield Landscapes*, provided direction for placing battlefield stories within the social, economic, and political context of the period.

At the Discovery 2000 conference, Dr. John Hope Franklin, chair of the National Park System Advisory Board, stated in his keynote address:

The places that commemorate sad history are not places in which we wallow, or wallow in remorse, but instead places in which we may be moved to a new resolve, to be better citizens. . . . Explaining history from a variety of angles makes it not only more interesting, but also more true. When it is more true, more people come to feel that they have a part in it. That is where patriotism and loyalty intersect with truth.

With this profoundly democratic vision of history before us, the National Park Service of the 21st century must use its rich resources—infused with the civic engagement process—in new, more powerful ways. The December 2001 workshop and this report on civic engagement are the first steps in mapping our direction.

Slave quarters at the Magnolia Plantation, Cane River Creole National Historical Park.



Carmie Henry Research Center at Northwestern State University

Protecting Heritage Resources

NPS decisions about the significance and integrity of a place are shaped not only by the standards, guidelines, and criteria that define our policies, but also by the time and context in which the decisions are made. Unresolved, controversial, and divisive issues within contemporary American society present particular challenges for resource evaluation. The concept of resource significance—particularly as defined by the criteria for listing in the National Register of Historic Places—has undergone profound rethinking in the last decade. Our evolving interpretation of those criteria is not yet consistently reflected in how NPS evaluates resources for purposes of documentation and designation.

At one of the most basic levels, the very act of naming a park frames how its resources will be preserved, how its stories will be conveyed, and as a consequence, who will feel invited or precluded. In Oklahoma, for example, the Native American community has objected to the name “Washita Battlefield National Historic Site” to describe Lt. Col. George Custer’s 1868 attack on a sleeping Cheyenne Village. As former park superintendent Sarah Craighead noted at the workshop, it is “interesting. . . how even in 1996 [when the site was established], we can create a park that interprets an unprovoked attack on one of the greatest peace chiefs of the Cheyenne tribe and call it a battle.”

The treatment of resources is not a neutral act, but reflects the values we place on resources. For example Laura Gates, superintendent of Cane River Creole National Historical Park and Heritage Area, observed:

Natchitoches [where Cane River is located] has a decades-long commitment to historic preservation, primarily in the white community that, by its nature, was predisposed in favor of the plantation houses to the neglect of the slave quarters and other outbuildings. This, of course, led to interpretation that left large parts of the story out. When the park was established, a considerable amount of money was put into research on the history, architecture, landscape, and, most importantly, the communities that continued to be involved or associated with the park and its stories. This research helped us better understand the park and the communities by involving those communities in aspects of the research.

Manzanar National Historic Site

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, people of Japanese ancestry, both citizens and resident aliens, were considered potential saboteurs and spies. Nearly 120,000 of them were forced to move into camps in remote, desolate areas of the interior. At the Manzanar War Relocation Center, in the desert of eastern California, more than 10,000 men, women, and children lived in 576 primitive barracks. Soldiers were under orders to shoot anyone who attempted an escape through the barbed-wire fence. From eight watchtowers, they guarded the so-called dangerous enemy aliens, whose activities included the creation of stone walkways, planting beds, and rock gardens in an effort to beautify their surroundings.

Today, visitors to Manzanar National Historic Site, where few structures remain, have difficulty

comprehending the harsh conditions that the internees endured. More importantly, according to park superintendent Frank Hays, “Some visitors have mentioned that because of [the camp’s] location near such beautiful mountains, the camp experience could not have been so bad. The camp has been likened to a summer camp in the mountains rather than an internment camp that has an important story to tell.”

Japanese-Americans have been concerned about whether the full significance of this historic episode would be adequately revealed. The Manzanar Committee, a Los Angeles-based activist group, was instrumental in having the camp designated as a unit of the National Park System and has stated, “We strongly recommend the reconstruction of some of the rock gardens located throughout the camp area to give the viewer an enhanced visitor experience. We support the placement of one or more barracks in the demonstration blocks. A demonstration block would not be complete without the inclusion of latrines, a mess hall, and laundry building. It is absolutely essential that one or more guard towers be reconstructed.”

Collaboration between the Manzanar Committee and members of the National Park Service staff produced direct results. As Mr. Hays explained during the workshop, “The approved General Management Plan for Manzanar calls for reconstruction of the camp’s barbed-wire fence and camp entrance sign, and both of these projects have now been completed. . . . We will be reconstructing one guard tower in the next few years and are attempting to relocate and restore one or more of the camp barracks buildings. . . .”



Origami placed on the fence at the Manzanar National Historic Site after September 11, 2001.

Reconstructed entrance sign to Manzanar War Relocation Center.



Stonewall National Historic Landmark

Gay rights is one of the most contested issues in American society. On June 28, 1969, during an era when harassment of gay establishments was routine, police raided the Stonewall Inn, a bar at 51-53 Christopher Street in Manhattan’s Greenwich Village. They were met with resistance, which erupted into six days and nights of riots, demonstrations, and protests.

Bill Bolger, National Historic Landmarks Program Manager for the NPS Northeast Region, described the controversial early-1990s proposal to grant landmark status to the Stonewall site. The date of the event fell short of the National Park Service “fifty-year” rule for designation; and the interior of the Stonewall Inn had been changed, which constituted a violation of the program’s requirements for architectural integrity. Of most significance, however, was uncertainty about deeming gay rights a legitimate civil rights issue. Bolger noted, “There was by no means consensus on this issue, even among members of other civil rights organizations.” A five-year-long process ensued, which ultimately supported granting landmark status to the site, including the inn, the adjacent Christopher Park, and the surrounding streets. As Bolger observed, “The designation of the Stonewall District may still be controversial for many people. [National Historic Landmark] designation is one of the highest levels of official recognition that can be accorded a historic resource. It is not surprising that history so current and debated will generate disagreement.”



Exterior of the Stonewall Inn, now a National Historic Landmark.

In our efforts to honor both the Union and Confederate forces which fought on our battlefields, our interpretive programs had been avoiding discussions of what they were fighting about. For blacks. . . it has always been abundantly clear. . . [that] the sole purpose of the Confederate States of America was to protect and preserve the institution of slavery. . . .”

Interpreting the Nation’s Stories

The report from the National Park System Advisory Board declares:

The study of our nation’s history, formal and informal, is an essential part of our civic education. In a democratic society such as ours, it is important to understand the journey of liberty and justice, together with the economic, social, religious, and other forces that barred or opened the ways for our ancestors, and the distances yet to be covered. Visits to historic places, whether managed by the National Park Service or by others, allow us to take the measure of our history in immediate ways. Parks should be not just recreational destinations, but springboards for personal journeys of intellectual and cultural enrichment.

The National Park Service must ensure that the American story is told faithfully, completely, and accurately. The story is often noble, but sometimes shameful and sad. In an age of growing cultural diversity, the service must continually ask whether the way in which it tells these stories has meaning for all our citizens. The service must look anew at the process and make improvements. For example, the relationship between environmental and human history should be seamlessly presented as inseparable chapters of our life on this planet.

Workshop participants described ways the NPS can fulfill this vision.

Gettysburg National Military Park

The Gettysburg battlefield contains more than 1,400 monuments, memorials, tablets, and markers that were erected between the 1870s and the 1920s. Park superintendent John Latschar told the workshop that in effect “. . . the monumentation of Gettysburg is a physical manifestation of the reconciliationist memory of the Civil War.” This perspective focuses on reconciliation between the North and the South, attributing their schism to misunderstandings and struggles over states’ rights, rather than bitter differences over slavery. It therefore marginalizes slavery as a cause of the Civil War and downplays the centrality of race in American history.

Dr. Latschar explained that in the past “. . . our interpretive programs traditionally emphasized ‘safe’ reconciliationist topics. We discussed [the] battle and tactics, the decisions of generals, the

moving of regiments and batteries, the engagement of opposing units, and tales of heroism and valor. . . . Internally, we call this type of interpretation ‘who shot whom, where.’” He described the effect of this approach. “In our efforts to honor both the Union and Confederate forces which fought on our battlefields, our interpretive programs had been avoiding discussions of what they were fighting about. For blacks. . . it has always been abundantly clear. . . [that] the sole purpose of the Confederate States of America was to protect and preserve the institution of slavery. . . .” Many Confederates themselves, in sermons, pamphlets, public pronouncements, and secession documents, clearly voiced the centrality of slavery to Southern society. They feared the election of Abraham Lincoln would lead to the end of their way of life.

In 1995, a public symposium was held marking the 100th anniversary of Gettysburg’s designation as a National Military Park. Dr. Latschar gave a talk in which he said, “Our Civil War parks have failed to appeal to the black population of America.” He told the civic engagement workshop that he later received substantial criticism from some constituencies for suggesting the park may need to broaden its interpretation in order to become relevant to a wider range of citizens and potential visitors. For example, the Secretary of the Interior received 1,100 postcards from the Southern Heritage Coalition demanding that the National Park Service “return to its unaligned and apolitical policies of the past, presenting history, not opinions.”

Nonetheless, Gettysburg National Military Park has since sought to expand its contextual interpretation of the battle by addressing slavery and the impact of the Civil War on the civilian population. Dr. Latschar said that in 1998, the National Park Service received invaluable advice from the Organization of American Historians about how to present the story of Gettysburg within the larger story of the causes and consequences of the Civil War. In addition, after a 1998 conference in Nashville, the superintendents of NPS Civil War sites published *Holding the High Ground: Principles and Strategies for Managing and Interpreting Civil War Battlefield Landscapes*. This document recommended the development of interpretive stories that would “establish . . . [each] site’s particular place in the continuum of war; illuminate the social, economic, and cultural issues that caused or were affected by the war; illustrate the breadth of human experience during the period; and establish the relevance of the war to people today.”



A school program at Gettysburg National Military Park now incorporates greater historical context and discussion about the causes of the war.

The entire visitor experience is being designed to encourage individual introspection and to provoke dialogue among visitors.

Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site

When it opens in 2003, the Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site (“Brown”) will present the history of a landmark decision by the United States Supreme Court. On May 14, 1954, the court unanimously declared that racial segregation was illegal in the nation’s public schools. On its docket eighteen months earlier, the court had cases from five states challenging the constitutionality of “separate but equal” education. It decided to consolidate them under one name, *Oliver Brown et al. v. the Board of Education of Topeka*, and put Kansas first on the agenda, to dilute the perception that the segregation question was principally a Southern issue.

Central to the Brown site is the 1926 Monroe Elementary School. One of four Topeka schools that were part of the court proceedings, it will include a visitor center, research center, and forum where public discussions can occur. As park superintendent Stephen Adams explained at the workshop, the overarching programmatic approach is to “create opportunities for every visitor to form intellectual and emotional connections with the meanings and significance of Brown, and to move beyond the tangible facts of the case to the universal concepts of opportunity, inclusion, decency, human rights, citizenship, the rule of law, and individual and group achievement. . . . The entire visitor experience is being designed to encourage individual introspection and to provoke dialogue among visitors.”

The park’s General Management Plan embraces interpretive themes that address these priorities: (1) the Constitution and other founding documents; (2) the social, political, and economic context of Brown (broadly encompassing slavery, the Civil War and Reconstruction, relevant Constitutional amendments, Jim Crow

discrimination, and race relations); (3) the history of segregation and the legal history of the school integration movement; (4) the history of the five cases that comprise Brown v. Board of Education and the 1954 Supreme Court decision; the personal experiences of those involved in the case; the nation’s reactions to the decision; and the consequences of the decision.

Although site planning and curriculum development are well underway, significant challenges remain. For example, Brown’s educational program, The Concept of Discovery and Discourse, includes having park rangers facilitate meetings and discussions among visitors about unresolved issues, such as race relations. Not all of the park staff are comfortable with the site’s interpretive approach. “Too often,” Mr. Adams commented, “we hide behind ‘interpretive neutrality.’” Some rangers are troubled by having to discuss controversial and sensitive issues, and some of them resist having to give open and frank attention to conflicting points of view.

A Forest for Every Classroom

A Forest for Every Classroom is a place-based, resource-and-civic-learning model, now serving as a pilot project in high schools across the state of Vermont. As a cooperative effort from a variety of nonprofit educational organizations and public land-management agencies, its primary objective is building civic responsibility for environmental stewardship. Rolf Diamant, superintendent of Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park in Woodstock told the workshop, “Stewardship is about individually and collectively taking care of special places. . . . Only when the public has a greater sense of environmental stewardship in the big picture will national park sites be held in perpetuity.”

Monroe School at the Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site.



Stewardship is about individually and collectively taking care of special places. . . . Only when the public has a greater sense of environmental stewardship in the big picture will national park sites be held in perpetuity.



Students from Rutland High School participate in the Forest for Every Classroom program.

A Vermont high-school student learns forest stewardship.

Knowing that civic engagement is critical for sustained environmental stewardship, the partners working on this project invited the Vermont public to participate in its conceptualization and development. Over a two-month period, five diverse groups of citizens, comprising teachers, foresters, conservationists, loggers, and woodworkers, met in a series of forums to discuss what forest stewardship means and what the next generation of forest stewards should be taught in local schools. Emerging from these conversations was a collaborative vision, which urged the development of students' citizenship skills and "understanding of place." These priorities underlie the resultant model's professional development and curricular focus.

The model weaves together several interrelated teaching strategies: place-based education, service learning, civic education, and conflict resolution. According to Mr. Diamant, it focuses on developing an understanding of forests as "complex and dynamic systems of natural and cultural resources," as well as building concrete citizenship skills, such as the capacity to "analyze and communicate information for creative, real-world problem-solving." In a situation where the high-school population is underserved in terms of environmental education, this approach commits to forging stronger bonds between students and communities and their local woodlands through a broad, multisector partnership with teachers. It seeks to build long-term, in-depth relationships among schools, private and public stewards, and forest users. In the broadest context, as Mr. Diamant explained, it emphasizes critical thinking about making choices, so that students may become "effective citizens in democratic processes" through stewardship.

Partnering in Preservation and Education

The National Park Service interacts with a wide variety of communities across the United States and abroad. Workshop participants agreed that collaboration is important for every aspect of park planning and management—from site designation, to development, to interpretative programming, to stewardship. Participants concurred that reciprocally beneficial collaboration with relevant communities is, in fact, critical to sustaining a powerful National Park System and produces the following benefits:

- **Promoting Environmental Stewardship**

National parks are not hermetically sealed entities, separate from the larger natural environment. Managers of park resources and leaders of external advocacy organizations agreed that collaboration with others is essential for protecting the ecology of national parks and for realizing the broader mission of environmental stewardship.

- **Strengthening Historical and Cultural Richness**

Across-the-board collaboration with stakeholder constituencies makes it more likely that stories will be told from multiple points of view. This work should include outside scholarly experts and take place at all stages of park planning, development, and programming. These efforts will help ensure acceptance by the community and historical accuracy of the program and will provide heightened educational experiences for the visiting public.

- **Extending and Sustaining Civic Responsibility**

National parks are managed by dedicated staff, yet the natural and cultural resources the staff protects belong to everyone. When the NPS pursues relationship building with a broad range of stakeholder communities, it fosters widespread investment in stewardship of the nation's rich resources. Long-term reciprocal and institutionalized partnerships extend the level of civic responsibility for resource protection.

Workshop participants agreed on the importance of developing sustained, genuinely collaborative relationships with key stakeholders in managing and interpreting resources.

We see ourselves as a neighbor. The three most important things to know as a superintendent are relationships, relationships, relationships.



Visitors tour the King family home at Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site.

Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site

The immediate neighborhood in Atlanta, Georgia, plays an important role in the life of the Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site. According to park superintendent Frank Catroppa, when the site was established, tension arose between the NPS and the local people. The park displaced the community center, and the promised replacement facility did not materialize (for reasons beyond the control of the NPS). In response to this situation, the National Park Service has sought ways to build goodwill by providing services that benefit both the park and the community. Besides helping to revitalize the residential district surrounding the park, the NPS makes park facilities available for community functions, supplies trailers for a community library in the parking lot, and sponsors a program for local residents called DREAM [Developing Racial Equality through Arts and Music]. Building goodwill and trust is critical. NPS staff members regularly attend community meetings, cooperate on projects with neighborhood churches, and “work hard to be as responsive as possible to community requests,” Mr. Catroppa explained. “We see ourselves as a neighbor. The three most important things to know as a superintendent are relationships, relationships, relationships.”

Washita Battlefield National Historic Site

Washita Battlefield National Historic Site was established in 1996 to mark Lt. Col. George Custer’s 1868 attack on the Cheyenne tribe.

Park superintendent Sarah Craighead told the workshop that congressional legislation to establish Washita (and nearby Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site) called for “opportunities for American Indian groups. . . to be involved in the formulation of plans and educational programs for the national historic site.” Designation and development of the park have involved close collaboration between the NPS, tribal elders, the Oklahoma Historical Society, and various other state and local partners. Three strategic approaches have been utilized.

In the first approach, park management initiated working relationships not only with tribal government leaders, but also with religious leaders. While important, this strategy brought forth differences of opinion within the tribe about which spiritual leaders are indeed representative and even about whether consultation with spiritual leaders should occur in the first place.



Blanket Ceremony at Washita Battlefield National Historic Site.

We are coming to understand that parks become richer when we see them through the cultures of people whose ancestors once lived there. . . . Throughout the National Park Service, this kind of knowledge may be lost as aging bearers of traditional culture die without the opportunity to fully share their deep understanding of the nature and spirit of a place. Place names, migration routes, harvesting practices, prayers and songs may be lost forever. These irreplaceable connections should be nurtured and conserved for future generations. —Rethinking the National Parks for the 21st Century

A second, but more successful, approach has involved creating a “cultural liaison” position to facilitate cooperation between the tribe and the NPS, who shared the cost of the first year’s salary. This Native American employee works closely with both entities. His initial goal was to develop a consultation guideline that Ms. Craighead described as being “realistic for all parties, affordable for everyone involved,” [allowing] the tribe to tell us how [it] would like to collaborate, and [giving] the park important information we need to develop the park and educate the public.”

A third approach, and one that has been highly effective, honors the living culture of the tribe. This method is responsive to both tribal concerns and NPS policy, which commits to an interpretation of historical events that addresses the broader social, economic, and political context in which these events occurred; conveys the meaning of these events from multiple perspectives; and elucidates the legacy and enduring relevance of these events.

Inspired by such objectives, the NPS, the Cheyenne tribe, the Oklahoma Department of Tourism and Recreation, the Oklahoma Historical Society, and others have established the Cheyenne Heritage Trail. This 420-mile-long route, passing through twelve historic and cultural sites, helps visitors experience the heritage of the Cheyenne people and other tribes that lived in western Oklahoma. Ms. Craighead commented that it “gives visitors the opportunity to explore not only Native American culture, but also the idea of westward expansion, cultural conflict, and the Plains Indian wars as a part of Western history.” Because this collaboration was so successful, the partnership that established the trail received the 2001 Park Partnership Award for Heritage Education from the National Park Foundation.

The International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience

The International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience was founded in 1999 by nine agencies and organizations from around the world, including the Northeast Region of the National Park Service and the Lower East Side Tenement Museum of New York City, an affiliated site of the NPS. The central purpose of the coalition is the strengthening of connections between the past and the present. Ruth Abram, president of the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, told participants at the workshop that she regards “stimulating dialogue and promoting humanitarian and democratic values” as a primary function of the coalition. Its goal is to “transform historic sites into places of citizen engagement, where visitors are invited and encouraged to address the contemporary implications of the topic interpreted at [each] site.” Historic sites the world over “are important not because of the stories they tell, although we cherish those stories—whether about the formation of the Grand Canyon or the story of immigration—but rather because in those stories are lessons so powerful, that if fully understood, [they] could transform and improve our lives.”

American citizens are not alone, of course, in yearning for opportunities to shape their future by making sense of their past. In countries where the values of freedom and democracy are well established, but perhaps not always fully realized, and in countries where democracy is still in its infancy, individuals and organizations can use history as an “activist tool” to strengthen humanitarian principles and protections. Coalition members seek to further these efforts by serving as resources for sites with interlocking stories and histories, acting as repositories for threatened historical records and resources, sharing information about successful civic-engagement methods, and providing technical assistance to other historic sites of conscience.

Envisioning an NPS Agenda for Civic Engagement

The National Park Service is the keeper of many of the nation's most significant natural resources and cultural heritage sites. It serves also as a national leader in heritage education. To enhance these crucial roles in American life, workshop participants proposed that the NPS implement civic engagement throughout its parks and programs.

Core NPS activities will continue to improve through civic engagement:

- **Heritage resources are identified and protected that exemplify the fullness of the nation's history and culture and its rich diversity.**
- **Interpretation, curriculum-based education, and other public programming connect the heritage of the nation to its contemporary environmental, social, and cultural issues. Parks serve as important centers for democracy and as places to learn and reflect about American identity and the responsibilities of citizenship.**
- **Significant resources are preserved through park and regional planning and cooperative stewardship strategies. Partnerships characterize park designation, planning, development, and management.**

For the NPS, civic engagement will require the use of multiple approaches:

- **Civic dialogue techniques for interpretation, education, planning, and other forms of presentation and public involvement.**
- **Inclusive, comprehensive park planning for engaging stakeholder groups and communities in public discussions about the management and preservation of park and heritage resources.**
- **Consistent NPS involvement in community and regional planning for addressing issues relevant to the protection of significant natural and cultural resources.**

- **Partnerships with academic institutions and other educational organizations for incorporating the multiple perspectives of current scholarship.**

Workshop participants recommended the following preliminary actions:

- **Publishing and distributing a civic-engagement report from this workshop.**
- **Holding additional workshops in other parts of the country.**
- **Providing professional-development opportunities for park managers, interpreters, and resource managers to cultivate broader context in interpretation, to facilitate work with communities on complex issues, and to embrace civic engagement in day-to-day park operations.**
- **Convening an NPS-wide working group on civic engagement to advance the initiative.**
- **Creating an internal Website to facilitate communication throughout the NPS and to promote successes in the agency.**

Rethinking the National Parks for the 21st Century concludes with this observation:

As a nation, we protect our heritage to ensure a more complete understanding of the forces that shape our lives and future. National parks are key institutions created for that purpose, chapters in the ever-expanding story of America. . . . By caring for the parks and conveying the park ethic, we care for ourselves and act on behalf of the future. The larger purpose of this mission is to build a citizenry that is committed to conserving its heritage and its home on earth.

In this sense, national parks are implicitly centers of civic engagement, and the effort described in this report serves simply to make that intention more explicit. Yet this shift is far more than rhetorical. Indeed, the case studies presented here suggest that successful civic engagement requires focused and deliberate attention. Fully implemented, civic engagement will enable the National Park Service to realize its mission for the 21st century.

Participants in the Workshop

Ruth Abram, Lower East Side Tenement Museum
Steve Adams, Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site, NPS
Michael Adlerstein, Northeast Region, NPS
Audrey Ambrosino, Lowell National Historical Park, NPS
Pierre Beaudet, Québec Service Center, Parks Canada
Jerry Belson, Southeast Region, NPS
Marty Blatt, Boston National Historical Park, NPS
Bill Bolger, Philadelphia Support Office, NPS
Frank Catroppa, Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site, NPS
Delia Clark, Antioch New England Institute
Sarah Craighead, Washita Battlefield National Historic Site, NPS
Rolf Diamant, Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park, NPS
Kathy Dilonardo, Philadelphia Support Office, NPS
Melinda Fine, Fine Consulting
Eric Foner, Columbia University
Laura Gates, Cane River Creole National Historical Park, NPS
David Glassberg, University of Massachusetts, Amherst
Kerri Greenidge, Boston African American National Historic Site, NPS
Bob Grogg, Harpers Ferry Center, NPS
Joanne Hanley, Fort Necessity National Battlefield, Friendship Hill National Historic Site, Johnstown
Flood National Memorial, and Allegheny Portage Railroad National Historic Site, NPS
Judy Hart, Rosie the Riveter/World War II Homefront National Historical Park, NPS
Frank Hays, Manzanar National Historic Site, NPS
Christine Hoepfner, Gateway National Recreation Area, NPS
David Hollenberg, Northeast Region, NPS
Kim Igoe, American Association of Museums
Pam Korza, Animating Democracy Initiative, Americans for the Arts
John Latschar, Gettysburg National Military Park, NPS
Terry Latschar, Gettysburg National Military Park, NPS
Ed Linenthal, University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh
Esther Mackintosh, Federation of State Humanities Councils
John Mao unis, Northeast Region, NPS
Charles Markis, Sagamore Hill National Historic Site, NPS
Pat McCrary, Lowell National Historical Park, NPS
Nora Mitchell, Conservation Study Institute, NPS
Tara Morrison, Philadelphia Support Office, NPS
Linda Neal, Governors Island National Monument, NPS
Dwight Pitcaithley, Washington Office, NPS
Barbara Pollarine, Valley Forge National Historical Park, NPS
Patti Reilly, Boston Support Office, NPS
Patricia Roeser, Boston National Historical Park, NPS
Connie Rudd, Shenandoah National Park, NPS
Marie Rust, Northeast Region, NPS
Liz Sevckenko, Lower East Side Tenement Museum
Edie Shean-Hammond, Northeast Region, NPS
Jim Shevock, Pacific West Region, NPS
Russ Smith, Philadelphia Support Office, NPS
Catherine Turton, Philadelphia Support Office, NPS
Gay Vietzke, Northeast Region, NPS
Pamela Beth West, National Capital Museum Resource Center, NPS
Eileen Woodford, National Parks Conservation Association



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

The National Park Service
and Civic Engagement

Northeast Regional Office
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street, 5th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19106

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA