



Civic Engagement

An Update on Civic Engagement in the National Park Service

The Northeast Region is committed to building a seamless network of parks that embraces civic engagement as the essential framework and foundation for creating plans and developing programs in national parks. This newsletter, which is the first in a series of regular updates, describes the key activities by the Northeast Region of the NPS to promote civic engagement.

Civic Engagement Workshop - Atlanta, Georgia

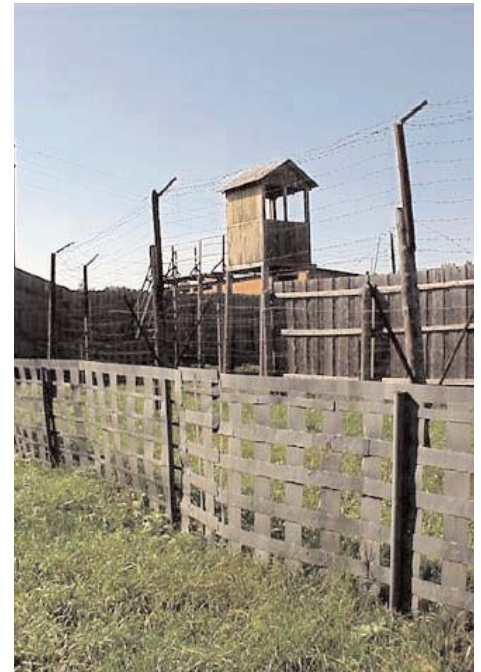
Building on the foundation of the New York City workshop, a group of approximately fifty NPS managers, historians, cultural resource specialists, and museum professionals met in Atlanta, Georgia from December 4-6, 2002. The Atlanta workshop furthered the initiative by using issues, stories, and perspectives particularly relevant to the southeastern United States as a prism through which to examine civic engagement and its potential for transforming historic sites and museums.

Northeast Regional Director Marie Rust set the stage with reflections on the foundation laid in New York and the Civic Engagement's role in ensuring that the Park Service continues to move forward in its commitment to telling stories that are both more complete and more accurate. Chief Historian Dwight Pitcaithley brought civic engagement closer to participants through placing it in the context of broader trends both within the NPS and the fields of public history and resource stewardship. The mission of the National Park Service has always been dynamic and flexible. The changes of the past 25 years, particularly the renewed focus upon the educational mission, have set the stage for embracing civic engagement. Interpretation, education, partnerships, preservation and planning are

already core NPS activities. Civic Engagement holds the promise of enriching all of them through a new focus on parks' and partners' potential roles in civic life. Making these historical and cultural sites active centers of democracy and citizen engagement both augments and transforms their traditional function.

“working with communities to tell the whole story through preservation, interpretation, and education”

Meeting in Lower Manhattan in December 2001, the first Civic Engagement Workshop found its moral center at Ground Zero and in the historical and philosophical questions surrounding the events of September 11th. In Atlanta, moral grounding came in the form of the case study/example of the “Without Sanctuary” exhibit of lynching photography at Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site and the struggles of the Gulag Museum at Perm-36, Russia, to preserve the memory and physical remains of repression. As the stories were told, MLK Superintendent Frank Catroppa and Gulag Museum Director Victor Shmyrov emerged as inspirations to all involved. A team presentation on the difficulty of finding a place for “Without Sanctuary” in Atlanta, the viewing of (continued to page 2)



A reconstructed guard tower at the maximum security unit, Gulag Museum at Perm-36, Russia.

What is Civic Engagement? For the National Park Service, civic engagement is an institutional commitment to engage communities in its mission through the public planning process, in interpretive and educational programming, and directly in preserving significant resources. It is a mechanism for achieving Secretary Norton’s Four C’s: *consultation, cooperation, communication*--all in the service of *conservation*. Civic Engagement is a refocusing of current NPS efforts to partner with communities, fulfill the NPS education mission, broaden contexts, and work with partners to preserve sites that represent the fullness of the American experience. Civic Engagement ties these diverse efforts together into a coherent whole.

Envisioning an NPS Agenda for Civic

Engagement: (from *National Park Service & Civic Engagement: a report of the workshop held December 6-8, 2001, in New York City*)

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 citizens.
- 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 the 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.

the exhibit, and the discussion surrounding Shmyrov's presentation firmly grounded the workshop in the reality of civic engagement "on the ground" - challenging and rewarding, but sometimes costly and painful.

Presentations covered a wide variety of themes relevant to NPS sites, such as slavery, immigration and race, civil rights, and political and racial violence. Todd Moyer of the Tuskegee Airmen Oral History Project reflected on the process of creating a park in which the "associated people" are themselves the cultural resource. The primary goal of the Project is that the words and stories of those who participated in the Tuskegee experience will directly engage visitors through the educational program at Tuskegee Airmen NHS. Yet the interview process itself is also a form of civic engagement, weaving the interviewer, the interviewee, and the subject material together into a complex web of reflection and consciousness-raising.

Jeff West of the 6th Floor Museum spoke of the assassination of John F. Kennedy and of creating exhibits and programs around experiences and events the public would prefer to forget. The necessity to engage the effected community and family members was essential to presenting the events in appropriate context and easing the city's uncomfortableness with their role in the tragedy.

Frank Catroppa, Superintendent, Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site. When no other cultural institutions in Atlanta were willing to consider hosting *Without Sanctuary*, Frank Catroppa stepped forward to offer his site. When race relations sharply deteriorated in a neighboring school district, he repeatedly approached district officials with the suggestion of bringing students to the exhibit or taking the exhibit film to them. When critics charged that the exhibit would only deepen racial tensions in the city, he accepted the risks inherent in telling the whole story, providing over 150,000 people the opportunity to engage with a chapter of the American past.

Beverly Robertson of the National Civil Rights Museum drew participants' attention to engaging contemporary issues through her description of the museum's planned expansion exhibit, "What Happened to the Dream?". The legacy of the civil rights movement is both contested and controversial, symbiotically intertwined with contemporary political issues. These intersections between historical and contemporary issues are at the



Community members in "Without Sanctuary" discussion at MLK.



NPS historian Worth Long interviews former Tuskegee pilot cadet Ernest Haywood at his home in Detroit, Michigan, June 2001 (Bill Mansfield, NPS photo).

heart of civic engagement. Examples of other sites and museums are often the best inspiration and guidance for colleagues' efforts.

Victor Shmyrov, Director, Gulag Museum at Perm-36, Russia. One of the principal driving forces behind the museum, Victor Shmyrov's dedication to using the history of forced labor camps to cultivate a sense of responsibility for the nation's past and inspire commitment to democracy and human rights is palpable. The challenges of preserving a past that most Russians would prefer to forget have been enormous, including a government unwilling to release any information regarding the camps, yet the museum presses on in its commitment to ensuring that the memory of political repression leads the way to a civil and democratic future. As a university professor, his political discussions with students in the late 1980's constituted some of the nation's first public sphere civic dialogues since the advent of Communism.

Nick Franco, Superintendent of Angel Island State Park in California described the visioning workshops conducted as part of the site's planning efforts. Teachers, historians, community leaders and representatives of the National Park Service, with state park staff, convened to create the park vision-without rules and preconceptions of what was meaningful about the place. Mr. Franco noted that partnerships can be effective only if each

partner has full participation, trust, and effective, frequent communication. Tara Morrison of the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom suggested that historical significance lies more in people, events and stories than in physical places, and that new, more flexible venues must be developed to commemorate sites of significance within traditionally underserved communities. Victor Shmyrov placed the challenge of implementing civic engagement in America into international context as he described how the Gulag Museum at Perm-36, Russia has worked with former guards and prisoners alike to choose resource treatments that ensure the physical resources and the stories of the Gulag system will be survive. At a place like the Gulag, the actual preservation of the site has become a mechanism for engaging the population in a discussion of a nation's past and its future.

Discussion often returned to the theme of willingness to trust the public. Many participants suggested that if context expands, multiple voices would be given an opportunity to speak, and the historiographical process would become visible. Most visitors would support this shift in approach even if they did not agree with all of a site's interpretations. A key point seemed to be moving beyond the "box" approach in which various groups are expected to exhibit interest only in "their" stories and toward a truly inclusive history in which the human element receives the greatest stress, experiences are contextualized, and all are encouraged to relate to the lives and histories of others.

As Ed Linenthal of the University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh reminded workshop participants, we can praise ourselves for remembering because it costs us little to do so. Post-Oklahoma City and 9/11 American society is rife with the rhetoric of "never again" and "always remember," yet far too often our so-called remembering is shallow, sensationalized and commercialized. Conversely, true remembrance and commemoration of sites of tragedy and violence involves both acceptance of responsibility and willingness to confront the "toxic narrative" - the truth that those who suffered are more often victims than martyrs, that violence is frequently senseless, and that no

amount of narrative closure will erase the scars and remove the effects of tragedy.

Comprised predominantly of key NPS personnel largely drawn from the Northeast Region, the December 2001 NYC workshop was an exploratory conversation centered around defining the concept of civic engagement and brainstorming about ways in which it could further institutional goals. Building on a year of thought and action, the December 2002 Atlanta workshop expanded the loop geographically, institutionally and conceptually. The high number of case studies and attendees from outside the NPS contributed both a fresh perspective and a reminder that although civic engagement is aimed at reshaping the way the National Park Service thinks about itself and its mission, it is also part of an international movement within the museum profession toward engaging issues of civic responsibility. Parks and historic sites both inside and outside of the National Park Service have potential to place themselves in the civic life of their communities by demonstrating through their actions commitment to the present as well as to the past.

Clarity regarding the purpose, focus and content of civic engagement within the National Park Service has clearly matured over the course of the New York and Atlanta events. The workshops have served to stimulate participants' thinking concerning how the various themes and strategies relating to the NPS's role in fostering civic engagement might be knitted together into one conversation. Many have expressed interest in repeat-



Japanese brides walking across a bridge at Angel Island.

ing the workshop on an annual basis, validating organizers' belief that the two events have successfully moved the agenda forward for participants, both organizationally and personally. An annual workshop would provide an ongoing forum for dialogue, peer feedback for those involved in new civic engagement ventures, and regular opportunities to introduce others to the topic and involve new voices in the discussion.

Preserving Memory: Seminars in the Preservation and Presentation of History for National Park Service Managers

Complementing the larger, nationwide discussions generated by both the New York City and Atlanta workshops, smaller seminars are being held throughout the Northeast Region to give park superintendents, program managers, and park partners opportunities to think about and discuss the way we conceive of places and manage their preservation and interpretation. The seminars, entitled "Preserving Memory," explore the issues, dilemmas, and challenges that arise in presenting and preserving America's heritage. Led by Ed Linenthal, Professor of Religion and American Culture at University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh, the seminars are discussion-based and participants read articles and case studies dealing with a variety of topics and issues. Participants also keep a writing portfolio to be used as a resource throughout the seminar and are encouraged to argue a point out on paper or reflect on readings or discussion.

"A well facilitated open discussion of some of the most difficult issues [the NPS] faces. In an organization where there is so little opportunity for reflection and thoughtful discussion, this seminar is very valuable."

Each seminar, although following the same general format, includes local NPS case stud-



Paige L. Chargois of *Hope in the City* discusses race and civic dialogue with the Richmond Preserving Memory Seminar participants.

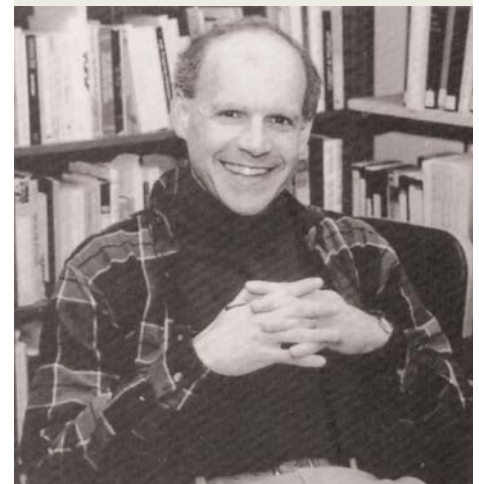
ies designed to ground the seminar discussions in a real life national park situation. The seminars encourage NPS staff, managers and partners to think broadly and critically about the value and meaning of their park stories

"This was really excellent in every way. Ed is a terrific teacher - thoughtful and provocative. I feel so privileged to have been able to attend. I was describing one day's discussion to a neighbor one evening and she said, 'Wow! You have such a great job.' She's right."

and the associated physical resources. The first seminars, held at Valley Forge NHP, Golden Gate NRA, and Richmond National Battlefield Park generated much positive response. Participants noted the value of the seminars in providing a chance for personal and professional reflection, discussing difficult ideas freely in a "safe" environment, and in revealing, through the case studies, the conflicts and dilemmas in interpretation and resource management. Additional seminars are planned for 2003 (see Schedule of Events below.)

Biography: Edward T. Linenthal

Edward T. Linenthal is the Edward M. Penson Professor of Religious and American Culture and Chancellor's Public Scholar at the University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh. Dr. Linenthal has spent his career exploring how history is created and conveyed in the public arena. He is the author of numerous publications including *Sacred Ground: Americans and Their Battlefields* (1994), *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Memorial* (1995), and the *Unfinished Bombing: Oklahoma City in the American Memory* (2001).





Moton School, a National Historic Landmark representing segregated education in America.

Other Civic Engagement Projects

To support Civic Engagement in the NPS, the following resources are being developed and will be available by the end of the fiscal year.

Civic Engagement Bibliography

The Civic Engagement Bibliography is a compilation of relevant articles, books, essays and exhibit reviews by a wide variety of scholars, public historians, interpreters, and museum and cultural resource professionals. Arranged topically around such themes as "museums' civic function," "interpreting controversial issues," "museums/historic sites and social service roles," "nuts and bolts," "engaging communities," and "background materials," the annotated bibliography will serve as a resource for those interested in exploring the various aspects of civic engagement. Through annotation and layout, the bibliography seeks to make itself useful both for those seeking additional perspectives on specific topics and those in search of generalized background reading.

National Historic Landmark Civic Engagement Survey

The National Historic Landmarks (NHL) Program Civic Engagement Survey is an ongoing attempt to explore and document the civic engagement potential of National Historic Landmark properties. The survey identifies broader themes and sites embodying these themes and suggests possible interpretive questions and approaches to highlight their presence. Besides providing a clearer idea of the unique opportunities the NHL

program can offer civic engagement, the survey will be the basis for a database linking themes and sites. These connections will provide a network for individual Landmarks exploring related topics, hopefully creating opportunities for the sharing of information, resources and experiences, as well as enlarging the context in which themes of conscience are interpreted.

Civic Engagement Website

A website that facilitates communication and information-sharing will be developed to support the initiative's goals. Although only in its early planning stages, the website will be interactive and will provide access to downloadable resources, civic engagement case studies, and online discussions.

Civic Engagement Bibliography

For more information on the bibliography, contact Shaun Eyring at (shaun_eyring@nps.gov).

National Historic Landmark Civic Engagement Survey

To learn more about this National Historic Landmarks project, contact Bonnie Halda at (bonnie_halda@nps.gov).

Civic Engagement Website

To provide input on the web project, contact Shaun Eyring at (shaun_eyring@nps.gov).

Websites for Reference:

American Association of Museums is a resource exploring the engagement between American communities and their museums.

(<http://www.aam-us.org/initiatives/m&c/index.cfm>)

Pew Partnerships Civic Engagement Program contains information about research and analysis on the involvement of citizens in civic life.

(<http://www.pew-partnership.org/programs/civicEngagement/index.html>)

National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) contains information pertinent to President Bush's *We the People Special Initiative* aimed at strengthening the American people's knowledge of their history.

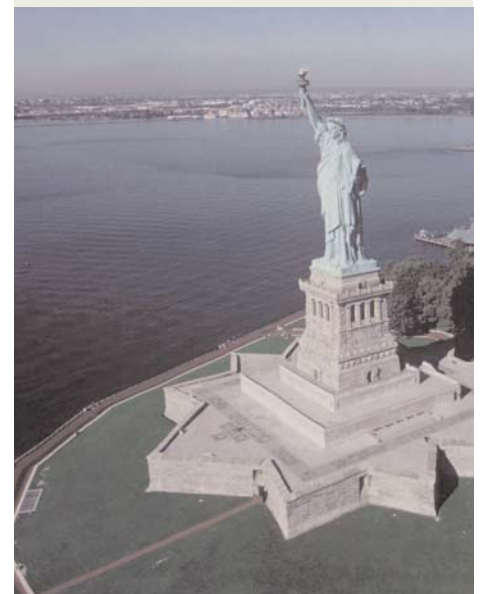
(<http://www.neh.fed.us/howweare/wtpbudget2004.html>)

The National Park Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance programs have compiled Community Toolbox containing methods for working with communities.

(<http://www.nps.gov/phsoltcatoolbox/index.htm>)

The National Park Service and Civic Engagement materials are available at the following address.

(<http://www.nps.gov/nero/civic/>).





EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

The Civic Engagement Newsletter is a publication of the Northeast Region.

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Tentative Schedule of Events

April 14, 2003.....	Civic Engagement Panel Session at CR2003/George Wright Society meeting, San Diego
May 1-3, 2003:	The Memory of Catastrophe: Oklahoma City National Memorial
Summer/Fall 2003:	Preserving Memory Seminars: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Hampton National Historic Site ■ Lowell National Historical Park ■ Independence National Historical Park ■ March-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park
September 2003.....	Preserving Memory Seminar: The Civil War in American Memory, Richmond, VA
Spring 2004.....	Using History to Shape the Future: A Workshop for National Historic Landmark Stewards (title not yet definite)
Spring/Summer 2004.....	Conference on African Americans and the Civil War, Petersburg National Battlefield