

## 2 CIVIC REFLECTION PLACES OF DISCOVERY

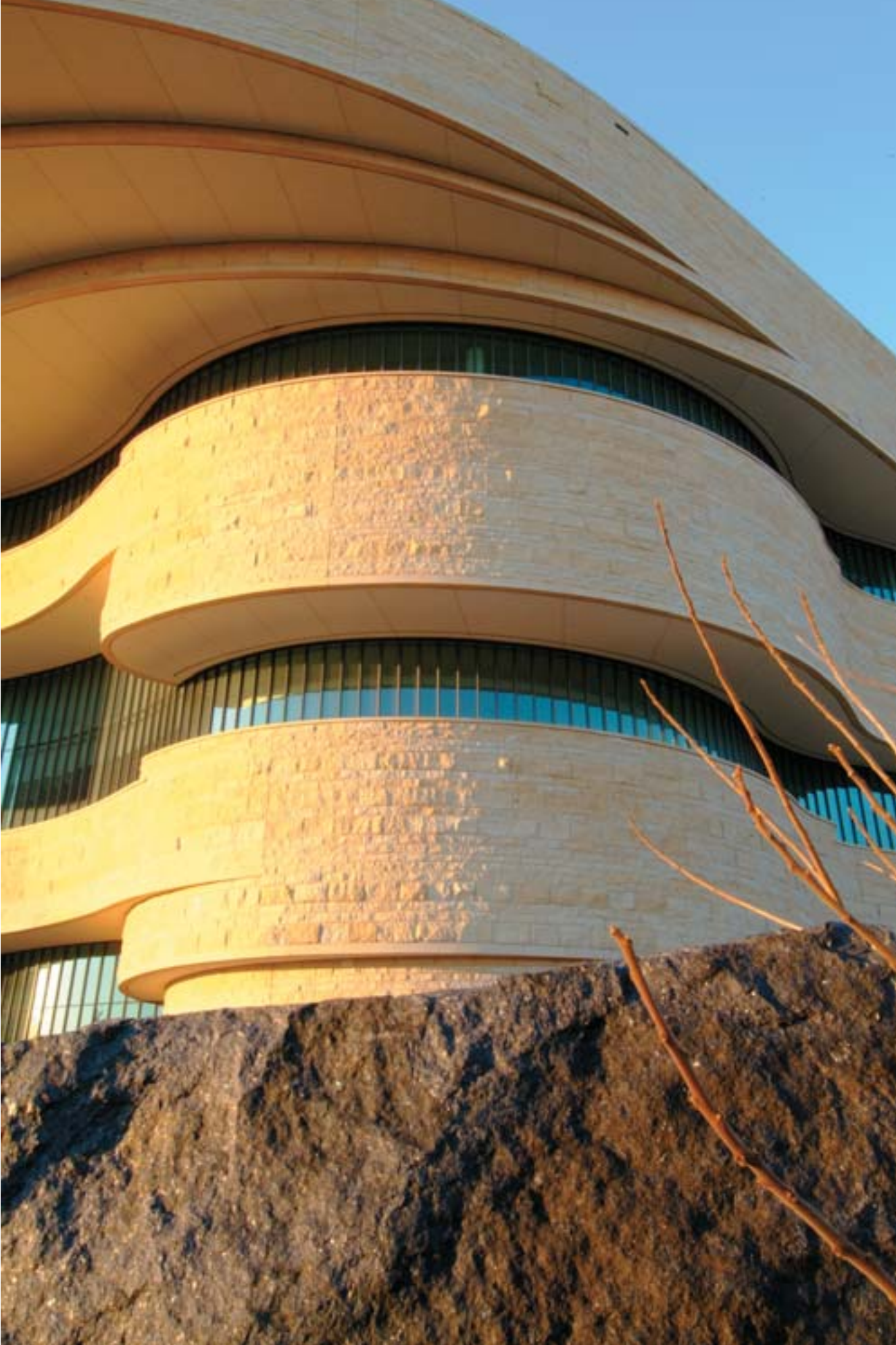
*“I do not claim a monopoly on an approach that puts native voices in charge of narratives; a number of museums are moving in the same direction. But none has done it at this level of magnitude.”*

*W. Richard West, Founding Director, Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian*

**NOT VERY LONG AGO THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN** opened in the shadow of the U.S. Capitol. With that grand event as our backdrop, today I want to discuss the museum’s emergence as a vital native place in America’s monumental and political center. This vitality has everything to do with our curatorial process, which sees native people themselves as a primary source of authority. The recalibration allows us to transcend historical definitions of what museums do, helping create a social space of great public import.

Fifteen years ago, my first boss at the Smithsonian, former Secretary Robert McCormick Adams, urged that this museum “move decisively from the older image of the museum as a temple with its superior self-governing priesthood.” His words were visionary at the time and they remain guideposts for us today. Dr. Adams’ remarks make me think of an incident in which a good friend led a number of distinguished visitors on a tour of the museum. Afterwards, one of his guests—a former trustee of one of America’s renowned art museums—exclaimed in exasperation, “I do not like this museum. It is not a collector’s museum. Something else is going on here.” Both Bob Adams and the exas-

RIGHT: THE SMITHSONIAN’S NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN IN WASHINGTON, DC.



DAVID ANDREWS/NPS



## “Earlier this fall, representatives of the Gwich’in Nation of Alaska and Canada

perated visitor had the museum pegged spot on. Something else is indeed going on here.

I do not claim a monopoly on an approach that puts native voices in charge of narratives; a number of museums are moving in the same direction. But none has done it at this level of magnitude.

**WHAT CAN YOU DO WHEN SOMEONE WRITES WITH INDIGNATION OF THE** Tohono O’odham’s response when asked to present 10 crucial moments in their history—and they chose as their first, birds teach people to call for rain, and as their last, in the year 2000, a desert walk for health?



The National Museum of the American Indian represents people from Tierra del Fuego in South America to the Arctic Circle in North America. As the frustrated trustee observed, it is not simply a palace of collections. The museum aspires to go beyond the artful presentation of its 800,000 objects to interpret ideas, peoples, and communities.

Putting native voices in charge requires the direct involvement of indigenous peoples. Scholars and curators must, in the words of my Smithsonian colleague Richard Kurin, recognize that knowledge exists in homes, villages, and slums; in fields, factories, and social halls.

This scholarship of inclusion has important implications. Exhibitions, the mainstays of museum presentation, may look quite different. But even more important is the shift in power.

Such changes are not taken lightly by critics with conventional ideas. Reviewing our opening, a *New York Times* writer objected to our “studious avoidance of scholarship,” voicing disdain for the choices made by the Tohono O’odham community of Arizona in the exhibit “Our Peoples.” In response, let me quote Roger Kennedy, director emeritus of the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History. Said he, “If he had a sense of humor, a critic of this sort might be worth attending even though tone deaf to the numinous and colorblind to the symbolic.”

The Tohono O’odham refuse to be talked down to. Their parable says, “With a smile we will listen to the elders who have earned our respect, but we will not be patronized by puppies.”

I’m with them.

As the director I have a moral and intellectual commitment to the simple yet fundamental proposition that native people present authoritative knowledge about themselves. Their presence offers our two million or so annual visitors real opportunities for learning. In the past two decades anthropology has moved well beyond the notion of native informants, the sometimes empty descriptiveness of a generation ago.

Clearly, there are multiple paths to interpretive legitimacy. Those of us who labor to develop new approaches should be granted the same respect as other truth seekers.

This approach takes us beyond the nature of the institution as a museum. As I watched some 30,000 people from all over the Americas at the museum’s opening, I had a sense that I was experiencing something far more significant than the unveiling of a dazzling new gem in the Smithsonian’s illustrious crown. The inauguration acknowledged at last the centrality of an entire set of peoples and cultures.

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Earlier this fall, representatives of the Gwich'in Nation of Alaska and Canada set up a day camp next to the museum, where they lob-

bied passersby about their opposition on religious and cultural grounds to legislation in Congress concerning the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. I applaud their choice of a protest site. For what links this event and our exhibitions is that both intend to promote social discourse.

This potential for civic engagement is our real offering to museum theory in the 21st century. Australian archeologist Claire Smith crystallized the meaning of our arrival on the National Mall in this way: “Museums shape our sense of historical memory and national museums shape our sense of national identity. This new national

museum is claiming moral territory for indigenous peoples, in the process reversing the impact of colonialism and asserting the unique place of native peoples past, present, and future.”

With humility and with the knowledge that much always remains to be done, I take pride in our accomplishments to date. We'll continue to rely on the inherent authority of native voices to provide new knowledge. But we will also reach beyond earlier conceptions of museums, which will allow these institutions to have far greater impact in the 21st century than they did in the 20th.

Excerpted from an edited transcript of the Scholars Forum: The National Park Service and Civic Reflection, January 14, 2006. W. Richard West, Jr., sits on Executive Council of the International Council of Museums; from 1998 to 2000, he served as Chair of the American Association of Museums. He is the first Native American to make partner at a national law firm. Contact West through the Smithsonian Office of Public Affairs at (202) 633-6985.



## DECLINING DEMOCRACY

**The importance of civic engagement is paramount in an era that is witnessing “a societal decline in historical literacy and political participation,” says Alexander Keyssar, professor of history and social policy at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government. He paints a picture of a society steadily absenting itself from the functions of democracy. From presidential elections to public meetings, participation is dwindling, with the lack of involvement extending to the PTA, the Red Cross, and the Boy Scouts.**

**In terms of historical literacy, the news is not good. Nearly 60 percent of all 12th graders score below minimal standards, he says. “Most do not know what the Monroe Doctrine was, how government spending affected the economy during the Depression, and that the Soviet Union was an ally of the United States during World War II.”**

**It’s a critical juncture in history, says Keyssar, noting research that shows civic engagement is vital to society’s survival. “Crime levels correlate with lack of civic involvement,” he says. “So does inequality of education. There’s even an argument that economic growth relates to civic engagement.”**

**With the high rates of immigration and the resultant changes in the social fabric, Keyssar wonders if we will be equipped to respond wisely. Though he applauds National Park Service efforts to promote civic engagement, he notes that the solution does not rest with any one institution.**

LEFT: CONVENING INSIDE THE MUSEUM.

## 2 CIVIC REFLECTION PLACES OF DISCOVERY

*“Look at what we have to work with at Gettysburg—over 1,400 monuments, most put up by veterans of the Civil War, primarily installed between the 1870s and the 1920s. These monuments cite the honor, the valor, the heroism of both Union and Confederate soldiers, with invariably a casualty list. None of them—zero—commemorate emancipation.”*

*John Latschar, Superintendent, Gettysburg National Military Park*

**GETTYSBURG IS A PLACE OF CONTESTED HISTORY, A PLACE OF MUCH** engagement and much dialogue. How much of it is civic or civil we’ll leave to others to judge. But it does reflect the cultural memory of our nation, as David Blight so ably pointed out in his remarkable book *Race and Reunion*.

And that’s because of a phenomenon that we label the “Myth of the Lost Cause,” which says that, number one, states’ rights, not slavery, was the cause of the Civil War; number two, the Confederacy lost only because of the overwhelming industrial and manpower advantages of the North, thus loss did not bring dishonor; and number three, slavery was a benign institution necessary for the protection of an inferior race.

This was the pervading view of the Civil War for almost 100 years—from roughly 1865 to perhaps 1964—aided and abetted by historians both amateur and academic. The myth has been debunked over the last four decades by the academic world. But not in our cultural memory, and not in the National Park Service—until fairly recently, in the 1980s.

Perhaps I’m incredibly fortunate—or unfortunate—because I understand both the origin and the persistence of the myth. I was raised in Virginia and South Carolina, and am the product of their school systems. I graduated from high school in 1965, just after the



RIGHT: LOUISIANA “SPIRIT TRIUMPHANT” STATUE, ERECTED AT GETTYSBURG IN 1971 BY SCULPTOR DONALD DE LUE.  
ABOVE: THE MISSISSIPPI STATE MONUMENT, ALSO BY DE LUE.









LEFT, RIGHT DAVID ANDREWS/NIPS

LEFT: THE GUTZON BORGLUM-DESIGNED NORTH CAROLINA STATE MONUMENT AT GETTYSBURG.  
BELOW: THE BATTLEFIELD LANDSCAPE.

## *“I quoted biblical examples justifying slavery in the past and discrimination against*

passage of the Civil Rights Act, and 11 years after *Brown v. Board*, which had not yet come to South Carolina because of the “all deliberate speed” clause of the Supreme Court.

So I grew up in a completely segregated culture. I was taught by my school, my church, and my society that segregation was proper and benign. I grew up in the era of Douglas Southall Freeman, whose credibility was only slightly below that of the King James Bible and slightly above the Revised Standard Version, which was still somewhat suspect. I grew up in the era where fluoridation of public water systems was clearly a communist plot.

Changing our cultural memory isn't easy. If you think it is, look at the controversy over putting a statue of the 16th President of the United States in Richmond. Ask former National Park Service Director Bob Stanton about the thousand postcards I received from a southern heritage coalition complaining that I was rewriting history.

Look at what we have to work with at Gettysburg—over 1,400 monuments, most put up by veterans of the Civil War, primarily installed between the 1870s and the 1920s. These monuments cite the honor, the valor, the heroism of both Union and Confederate soldiers, with invariably a casualty list. None of them—zero—commemorate emancipation.

**YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND OUR AUDIENCE. WE DID A SURVEY JUST BEFORE** laying out a management plan for the park. Forty percent of our visitors graduated from high school before the passage of the Civil Rights Act, and twenty-five percent were from former Confederate states. Gettysburg is an example of our inability to attract diverse members of the citizenship. Males heavily predominate over females of all races. And part of this is because we've concentrated on “who shot whom where” without talking about why they were shooting.

We've been working on this for a good seven or eight years. We want to engage folks with what the fighting was about. What did it mean? Why should you care?

There are two critical elements of support and thank goodness they have been there. The first is support from the academic community. As I like to say, academic folks deal in what I call the pure history, the research. The National Park Service deals in the applied history. We take the research and translate it into thought-provoking stories.

The second element is political cover. Thankfully we've been blessed with the kind of support that lets us talk to our public.

Our goal is not so much to teach—and this is not anything against teachers, but teaching has always struck me as passive. It's one way of learning. But to us the most compelling way is through self-discovery.

The U.S. Holocaust Museum is one of the best museums in the world. I was there studying the top floor, which is a prelude to the Holocaust as the German people are being mentally and emotionally prepared to accept discrimination. And on my way home—it was a presidential primary year—I heard a radio excerpt from a speech a candidate made that day. And the hair rose up on the back of my

*gay people today. And I quoted two Supreme Court justices—one from 1850 and one from 2003—predicting the mayhem that would befall American society if full civil rights were granted. And no one could tell me which statement was made when.”*

neck because he was using the same phrases, the same code words to justify discrimination as were on the walls of the Holocaust Museum. That was a point of self-discovery.

**A FEW YEARS AGO, I WAS ASKED TO ADDRESS A GROUP OF LAWYERS AND** jurists in York County, Pennsylvania. The American Bar Association was celebrating the 50th anniversary of *Brown v. Board*. And they were celebrating in feel-good style, as if all attorneys supported that decision in 1954. So here were 200 lawyers and judges in one room—too great an opportunity to resist. I took them through the layman's history of slavery from colonial days through the Civil War, through the Reconstruction and the Jim Crow era, all the way up to where we were that day. I tried to suggest that the story of American freedom has constantly evolved and always will. Just to make sure they left feeling uncomfortable, I quoted biblical examples justifying slavery in the past and discrimination against gay people today. And I quoted two Supreme Court justices—one from 1850 and one from 2003—predicting the mayhem that would befall American society if full civil rights were granted to all citizens. And no one could tell me which statement was made when.

Lincoln once said, “If we could first know where we are and wither we are tending we could then better judge what to do and how to do it.” If we can provide opportunities for increased historic literacy, civic engagement will follow. And perhaps our visitors will be better prepared to know what to do and how to do it as they go about our responsibility of defining this nation.

Excerpted from an edited transcript of the Scholars Forum: The National Park Service and Civic Reflection, January 14, 2006. John Latschar has been Superintendent of Gettysburg National Military Park since 1994. He is a Vietnam veteran and retired U.S. Army Reserve Lieutenant Colonel. Contact Latschar at Gettysburg, email [john\\_latschar@nps.gov](mailto:john_latschar@nps.gov).





## 2 CIVIC REFLECTION PLACES OF DISCOVERY

*“The managed contention can be over any kind of issue—the number of elk at Yellowstone, how to interpret Sand Creek. Visitors walk around a series of kiosks that host the advocates of different positions. Each visitor can choose two, who are brought out under the umbrella of managed contention, which is in the center. The contestants argue until they become uncivil, at which point they’re sent back to their kiosks. And as visitors leave, there are souvenirs that say things like ‘I survived the Managed Contention Site at Little Big Horn.’”*

*Patricia Limerick, Professor of History and Environmental Studies, University of Colorado*

**THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE IS ONE OF THE FEW AGENCIES ON THE PLANET** that has poetry in its enabling act—I’m thinking of those lines about preserving the parks unimpaired for future generations. Yet when you get to voter turnout, the most pathetic group—for reasons not their fault—are the people not born yet. They are very bad about showing up to vote for their interests.

Now, I have veteran experience when it comes to the word we’ve been using here, controversy. Part of the time I stirred it up myself. I loved controversy. It was huge fun. But those who have not seen me for a while may be surprised because I’ve gone through a life change. Where I was once contentious, I’m now congenial. And it’s a bitter disappointment, for some folks, to see what’s become of me. But this is what I’d concluded: When there is controversy, something like 80 percent of it is noise, and 20 percent is substantive. We must do what we can to diminish the 80 percent, so that we can pay proper attention to the rest. Reduce the noise and have much more productive conversations.

But part of my pitch today is to not suppress the conflict. One goal is to get high on the adrenaline. Adrenaline is a fine natural chemical. It’s just endlessly available in our systems. I’m very fond

of it as you can probably tell. Suppressing the conflict would be deadening; we wouldn’t want to do that. The goal is to state and explore the conflict with clarity, with civility, with tranquility.

History has a curious double role in controversy. All of our problems originated before our arrival on this planet. We are fond of sitting around blaming each other, but that is finally a goofy exercise. Historical figures generated the dilemmas we struggle with. It’s sometimes a frustration that we can’t resurrect historical figures in order to hang them.

So it seems to me there’s tranquility brought on by the notion that our problems have a deeper origin, which requires that we wrestle with them in ways that are more productive.

At the University of Colorado I hosted a series that brought together almost all of the secretaries of the interior. You try hosting Jim Watt in Boulder if you want an adrenaline-soaked experience. But he had a fine visit. He was seen as much more complex than we ever knew from the press reports.

Experiences like that gave me an idea that simply has not caught on yet—Managed Contention Sites. In the last 10 years, I have seen a desire for better public discourse on the part of people in



COLORADO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

ABOVE: ROBERT LINDNEUX'S 1936  
PAINTING OF THE 1864 SAND CREEK  
MASSACRE IN COLORADO  
TERRITORY.





BEN HAYS/BRHPHOTO.COM

## CHAMPIONING THE ENVIRONMENT

all kinds of circles. I have seen a willingness, even an eagerness, to defer to referees. The Managed Contention Site takes off from this enthusiasm for umpired circumstances.

The managed contention can be over any kind of issue—the number of elk at Yellowstone, how to interpret Sand Creek. Visitors walk around a series of kiosks that host the advocates of different positions. Each visitor can choose two, who are brought out under the umbrella of managed contention, which is in the center. The contestants argue until they become uncivil, at which point they're sent back to their kiosks. And as visitors leave, there are souvenirs that say things like "I survived the Managed Contention Site at Little Big Horn."

This is such a fine way of not attempting to change human nature—which is not going to happen anyway, ladies and gentlemen—but to take the contention and make it fun and festive.

**THERE IS ANOTHER TERM THAT YOU HAVE, PART OF THE POETRY OF THE** enabling act—the bit about enjoyment. We were not given that in higher education. I do not recall anyone saying we were supposed to provide enjoyment for ourselves or our students. What a privilege to work for an agency where enjoyment is your mandate. I'm jealous of that.

I'd like to tell you about what my late husband Jeff and I wore to a grad school Halloween party in 1975—and ask you to apply it to your work. Our friend Carol Bundy joined us. We went as the Id, the Ego, and the Super Ego. Guess who I was.

Jeff played the Ego and wore a nice brown suit. Carol played the Super Ego, hair all in a bun with a tight skirt and a hairbrush with which she was threatening the Ego all the time. I was wearing a rather suggestive fabric with Id in big red letters on the front. We had not studied psychology as carefully as we should have, but what we did bore some relation to Freud's model. The Id would walk up to a stranger and say one word, "Want." The Ego would come up behind and pull me back, saying to the stranger, "This is embarrassing, I'm sorry, the Id is getting out of control, but it really is a tribute to what a magnetic person you are." The Super Ego would be behind Jeff saying, "You've screwed this up again. We always go to parties and make fools of ourselves when you let the Id get out of control." We had many adventures and met people under difficult and interesting terms.

Usually, in civic engagement, we aim mainly at the super ego. We appeal to the stern and proper part of the personality. Some people, whose egos and super egos run the world, will respond. But there's an element of pleasure in it that I would really like to have accented. So let's not forget the enjoyment aspect. Be stimulated, be engaged.

Excerpted from an edited transcript of the Scholars Forum: The National Park Service and Civic Reflection, January 14, 2006. Patricia Nelson Limerick is chair of the University of Colorado Center of the American West, which she co-founded. She is a former president of the American Studies Association and the Western History Association whose works include *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* and *Something in the Soil: Legacies and Reckonings in the New West*. Contact her at the University of Colorado, email Patricia.Limerick@Colorado.EDU.

**"Civic engagement is not just about historic sites," says Rolf Diamant of the National Park Service. He cites a project in Great Smoky Mountains National Park where local schools and volunteers helped inventory critical species, learning skills they can apply in their own communities. Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park, where Diamant is superintendent, offers another fine example. At what was once the home of successive 19th century conservationists, programs such as "A Forest for Every Classroom: Learning to Make Choices for the Future" engage young people in the stewardship of public lands, including their own schoolyards and community open spaces. The park is also home to the Conservation Study Institute, which helps national parks and heritage areas develop new tools for community engagement.**

**"From its earliest days," Diamant says, "the National Park Service has demonstrated the best practices in a wide range of civic endeavors—in planning, preservation, architecture, and road construction." More recently, the agency has championed alternative transportation, sustainable design, and energy conservation, making the parks a vital laboratory for contemporary stewardship.**

**Diamant recalls the vision of Frederick Law Olmsted, who spoke of the movement to create the parks as "a refinement of the republic." Today, parks are places to learn about democracy, sustainability, and stewardship, making the country a better place to live for everyone.**

**National heritage areas exemplify this idea very well, Diamant says. The people he's met—such as Terrell Delphin, a descendent of Louisiana Creoles in Cane River National Heritage Area, and Herman Agoyo from the San Juan Pueblo in Northern Rio Grande National Heritage Area—speak with affection about what the link with the National Park System means to their communities. Relationships like these make the system more representative, he says. But most importantly, they give people a voice in preserving what they value most. Stewardship and democracy are both strengthened, critical to the refinement of the republic.**

LEFT: ONE OF THE THOUSANDS OF ELK AT YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK.





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*Conversation: William Cronon, Patricia Limerick, Michael Kammen, Larry Rivers, Eric Foner, Richard West, William Kornblum, Edward Linenthal, William Baker*

**WILLIAM CRONON: THE PROBLEM IS THE PAST IS INFINITE. FOR ME** historical literacy is more an inquiring backward, where we are on a journey to reach the place we’re in today.

The parks are brilliant for helping people make that journey. You thought this person or this place or this event was important. Now let’s figure out why it’s actually even more important or more interesting, more curious, more wonderful than you ever imagined. The burrowing deeper, the peeling back of the layers—that’s part of the entertainment and part of the education.

**PATRICIA LIMERICK: I CONSIDER IT A GREAT SUCCESS IF A STUDENT** comes out of a class believing the people of the past were fully alive. There’s a story about a little boy taken to see the Supreme Court in session. He’s sitting with his father listening to the attorneys argue. A fly comes into the chamber, buzzes around, and lands on one of the justices, who reaches to brush it off. And the boy grabs his father’s sleeve and says, “Look, one of the judges is alive!” That’s victory number one. The second challenge is getting across that change is contingent, improbable, unpredictable. We do not ride through time on a conveyor belt. We do not inherit trends to follow.

*William Cronon is Professor, History, Geography, and Environmental Studies, University of Wisconsin; Patricia Limerick is Professor of History and Environmental Studies, University of Colorado; Michael Kammen is Newton C. Farr Professor of American History and Culture at Cornell University and a member of the National Park System Advisory Board; Larry Rivers is President, Fort Valley State University, and a member of the National Park Service Advisory Board; Eric Foner is Dewitt Clinton Professor of History, Columbia University; Richard West is Founding Director, Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian; William Kornblum is Chair, Center for Urban Research, City University of New York, and Chief, National Park Service Cooperative Park Studies Unit; Edward Linenthal is Professor of History at the University of Indiana and Editor of the Journal of American History; William Baker is President and CEO of New York PBS station WNET and a member of the National Park System Advisory Board.*

LEFT: LINCOLN’S WRITING DESK, THE LINCOLN HOME NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE IN SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS.



*“As much as I’d like to say the answer is get them off the computer and into a park, audiences of the future have to see themselves in these places, too. But it takes commitment. You have to understand the magnitude of the task and be willing to bite it off.”*

My favorite thing is a game called “Astonish the Immigrant” where we bring back a pioneer to examine what they would’ve least seen coming. You waste your time if you do airplanes because there were sketches of dirigibles during the Gold Rush. Internet, well, I don’t know, is that a world away from the telegraph?

I would take the person to a court trying a case over predator control. Because the first thing the pioneers wanted to do was protect the livestock. So you take the person into the courtroom and say, “Over there are attorneys who went to law school to represent coyotes in court.” At that point, the pioneer would say, “Take me back. This is too much.” An historian friend of mine reminded me that it’s not the first time predators have attorneys, but it’s the first time animal predators have them.

**MICHAEL KAMMEN:** Many years ago I taught a survey course in U.S. History. We devoted a week to World War II. After the first lecture, on the international dimension, a group of students came up, puzzled, “Do you mean to tell me, professor, that in this war that you’re talking about, the Germans and the Italians and the Japanese were all on the same side?”

You don’t want to be patronizing because you’ll get a bad course evaluation. I said, “Yes, they were on the same side.” And then with wonderful innocence a student said, “Well, who won?”

Historical literacy does involve excitement and discovery, but there are basics we hope to include.

**WILLIAM CRONON:** I have colleagues who endlessly berate their undergraduates for how stupid they are. You’re not going to go anywhere from that point. As a teacher you meet people where they are. You begin the journey there. You look for the teachable moments when the past isn’t the past anymore. When it’s real people making real choices about real problems.

**LARRY RIVERS:** During my generation when my mother got mad, I had to stay in the house. This generation, you punish them by sending them outside. They will not get off that computer. We’ve been talking about philosophy, about controversy, about how to revise things. What good is it if we don’t attract our young people? We can’t run away from the blog.

**ERIC FONER:** Every institution in the country is facing these questions. Orchestras want to build an audience for the next generation; so do ballet companies and art museums. Audiences are built from what people experience early. You’ve got to take them when they’re young.

**RICHARD WEST:** I hate to come off as a slight dissenter. But somehow institutions, if they’re going to have hooks into diverse generations, have to transform themselves from the inside. That’s a long-range proposition.

As much as I’d like to say the answer is get them off the computer and into a park, audiences of the future have to see themselves in these places, too. But it takes commitment. You have to understand the magnitude of the task and be willing to bite it off.

**WILLIAM KORNBUM:** Yes, the more you engage the person when they’re young, the more likely they are to engage others in the future. One of the most moving experiences I’ve had in the last few years was at the Lincoln Home in Springfield, Illinois. And there was a little kid next to me who said to his parents, “Look at that little desk. How did he get himself down into it?” And that started a conversation right there in the room. I’m going to start crying here because it was so moving, this child wanting to know more about Lincoln writing at that desk.

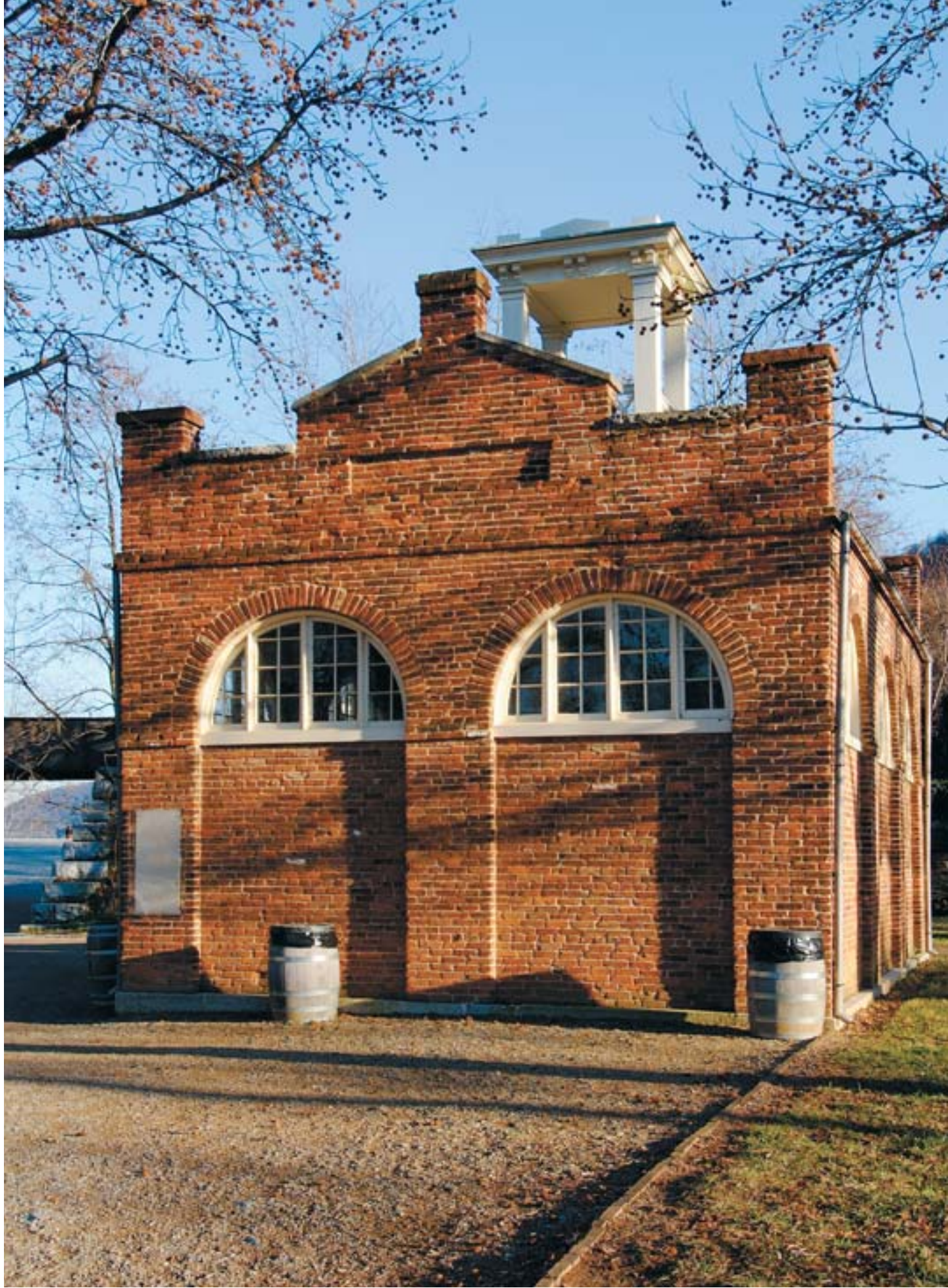
We talk about teachable moments. Now this kid is going to bring his children and his grandchildren to this place to try to have that experience.

**EDWARD LINENTHAL:** The late Shaiké Weinberg, former director of the Holocaust Museum, always described the museum as a story. And I don’t know if this has changed, but the average time a visitor spends in a museum on the Mall is something like 45 minutes. The average time a visitor spends in the Holocaust Museum is 2 1/2 hours. My oldest son, a normal 14-year-old, spent 3 1/2 hours in the permanent exhibition.

At the Little Big Horn, when the name was changed from the Custer Battlefield National Monument, that made a real difference because people felt they had a stake in the story. Former Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell came and said, “I feel now like I belong here.”

**RICHARD WEST:** The power of the story, the fact that you’re so moved by what you saw, is because it has great personal resonance to you. It is this experience of inquiry, beginning with a person’s experience, that can be taken somewhere else, expanded. And frankly the person





DAVID ANDREWS/NPS





LEFT GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK. RIGHT LITTLE BIGHORN BATTLEFIELD NATIONAL MONUMENT

LEFT: A VIEW OF THE COLORADO RIVER FROM TOROWEAP OVERLOOK IN THE WESTERN END OF GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK. BELOW: "SPIRIT WARRIORS" AT LITTLE BIG HORN BATTLEFIELD.

*“At the Little Big Horn, when the name was changed from the Custer Battlefield National Monument, that made a real difference because people felt they had a stake in the story. Former Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell came and said, ‘I feel now like I belong here.’”*

may leave with questions rather than answers when they walk out the door. The questions may be every bit as important.

**MICHAEL KAMMEN:** The book *The Presence of the Past* surveyed 1,500 people about how they got engaged by history. The majority response was, “My family.” I hate to admit it, but there were six categories and school was at the bottom. It was the least interesting and least trusted.

**WILLIAM CRONON:** I want to come back to the word enjoyment. I think the word is a little misleading because it tempts us into Disney space. Nobody enjoys the Holocaust Museum. All human beings, but

**WILLIAM BAKER:** We understand that media are very critical, meaning television, radio, Internet, print, etcetera. We have to get into the drinking water where the Park Service used to be. Especially when



maybe especially adolescents, desperately want authentic experience. They desperately want something real in their lives.

My son is 14 years old and a video gamer par excellence. This past summer I took him on a float trip through the Grand Canyon, which is one of my holy places. It was profound for my son. A group of college boys adopted him. The social experience was as important as the canyon and the river. At the end of the trip—it brings tears to my eyes—my son was a man. No video game comes close to that kind of profundity. I don’t know that he would have willingly floated down the Grand Canyon, but it made a big difference to him.

**MICHAEL KAMMEN:** I want to ask for your responses to a pair of initiatives the education committee has been discussing. One involves the National Park Service website. Can it be made more exciting to conceivably begin to compete with grabbing the attention of the children we’ve been discussing?

The other initiative touches directly on what several of the panelists have said. And that involves creating a series of television programs that would engage young people especially, though we hope their parents as well.

small controversies wind up being amplified in wrong ways. So the committee challenged the people in the Service itself. We want to create a show, which we are working on, with the title “National Park Stories.” We have professionals in the television business working on it.

In public TV, games are powerful ways to bring young kids into learning. There may be ways to use the website for that purpose.

**RICHARD WEST:** At the National Museum of the American Indian, very early on we created what we refer to as the fourth museum. That is our effort to bring the museum beyond its boundaries through a spectrum of means.

You can’t always expect everybody to come to a national park, but consider the educational resources that already sit within the National Park System. There are all kinds of possibilities.

Excerpted from an edited transcript of the Scholars Forum: The National Park Service and Civic Reflection, January 14, 2006.