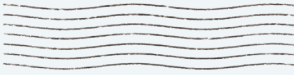




## LETTER FROM WOODSTOCK



# Picturing the Cost of Freedom *Rolf Diamant*

One of the advantages of an online journal is the opportunity to link to digital content residing elsewhere on the web. It is an opportunity I have seldom taken advantage of—until now.

For this 30th “Letter from Woodstock” I am going to lean heavily on video to augment my prose. Given that this issue of *Parks Stewardship Forum* (PSF) is focused on the recognition of the LGBTQIA+ community’s role in parks and protected areas, I have chosen to highlight a few short videos that address human dignity and human rights in America’s national park system. Two of the videos specifically deal with LGBTQIA+-related subjects, such as the establishment of Stonewall National Monument in New York City, while several others more broadly serve to remind us that our parks and recreation spaces are places where lessons of mutual respect, civil rights, and empathy can be constantly learned and reinforced. Each of the short features, in its own way, emphasizes that national parks belong to us all; every person—whether visitor or employee—should feel comfortable and welcome. Lastly, all the films

illustrate people’s deeply felt personal connections with park places and stories.

One of the problems of communications in our current online culture is the vast quantity of written and particularly visual content, on any imaginable subject, that competes for our attention. The universe of national park-related videos is overwhelming. Even when commercial, promotional, tourism, and entertainment content is screened out, a careful internet search can be a time-consuming, hit-and-miss undertaking. So, for this reason, I decided to curate and recommend a handful of engaging and impactful videos, made over the previous decade, that I hope will complement this issue of *PSF*.

I do so with humility and offer a disclaimer in advance. These are short videos that I like for a variety

of admittedly subjective reasons. My criteria are my own. I chose five videos that I believe are thought-provoking and emotionally evocative. For reasons previously stated, it is very likely that I missed many good videos that my searches simply did not surface. If you have any further recommendations, I'd be happy to receive a link (please send to the PSF editors at [psf@georgewright.org](mailto:psf@georgewright.org)).

What is clear from this exercise, however subjective and imperfect as it may be, is that we need park and recreation-related institutions, such as university departments and public agencies, to help catalogue and curate this ever-growing body of visual work for everyone's benefit. If someone is already doing something like this, I would love to hear about it. Absent such an organized effort, there is a risk that much good material will never be widely disseminated. Web links are broken, or videos simply disappear into the vast, seemingly endless sea of YouTube.

So, here are my selections.

### **THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE AT HARRIET TUBMAN NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK**

<https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1594/oclp-multimedia.htm>

On one level this six-and-a-half-minute video introduces the cultural landscape at Harriet Tubman National Historical Park and the staff of the National Park Service (NPS) Olmsted Center of Landscape Preservation doing their careful work recording the historical evolution of this small property in Auburn, New York. On another level this video is a powerful testament by Tubman descendants and community leaders of the park's meaning and role in their lives today. The film ends with Rev. Paul Carter's evocative observation:

So often we think that because we were born in a free country, that is just something we are supposed to have. But freedom is not free;



**JUDITH BRYANT**  
HARRIET TUBMAN DESCENDANT

somewhere, somehow someone paid the cost for our freedom.

The Tubman video is one of series of eight well-made short films that also features Gettysburg National Military Park, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, Women’s Rights National Historical Park, Martin Van Buren National Historic Site, Saint-Gaudens National Historical Park, Appomattox Courthouse National Historical Park, and Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park. The playlist can be found at

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLkDUwFjiRpmONMJ7TZWAzNFjR2X6gj\\_w](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLkDUwFjiRpmONMJ7TZWAzNFjR2X6gj_w)

The videos were made by the NPS Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation several years ago. Venessa Hartsuiker, a gifted cinematographer on the Olmsted Center staff, directed, filmed, and edited these videos.

She has since left the National Park Service, but this fascinating trove of films remains.

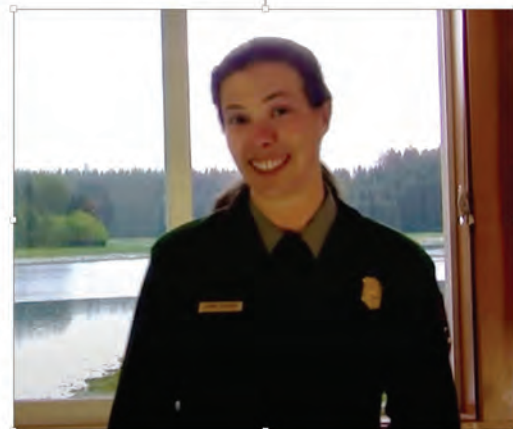
### **PRIDE. STRENGTH, COURAGE, AND DIVERSITY— LGBTQ IN THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE IN ALASKA**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xG8beeCgmNQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5tjKNJE73o>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=obk5GQ49bwl>

Originally conceived by Denali National Park Ranger Timothy Rains, this series of three videos, each approximately 10 minutes in length, was created by the NPS Alaska Regional Office to celebrate the annual observance in June of LGBTQ Pride Month. The thirteen NPS employees who volunteered to tell their stories came from across Alaska, including Denali National Park and Preserve, Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve, Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park, Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve, and the Alaska Regional Office in Anchorage. The interviewees



are archaeologists, law enforcement rangers, historic preservation specialists, bear technicians, museum curators, and park interpreters.

The videos are basic and lack the higher production qualities of many of the other films I’ve flagged, but they are moving nevertheless. This Alaska project is as much an introduction to the NPS LGBTQIA+ community as it is an introduction to the breadth of the agency’s work force and the strong sense of purpose that is shared among NPS employees. As Raines wrote, the videos “provided a way for those of us working in the remote areas of the state an opportunity to connect and create that strong sense of community.”

### YOU ARE THE PARKS

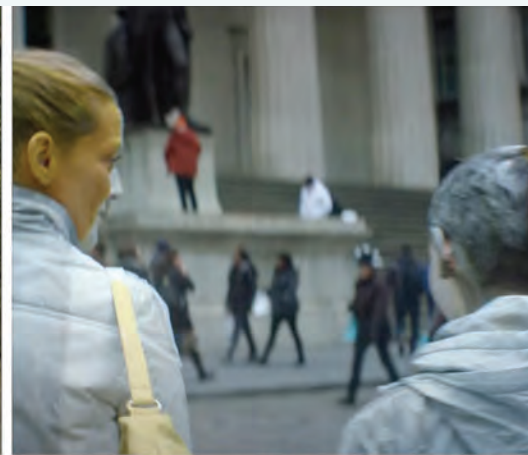
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIUEpRfdTMM>

Much video content came out of the 2016 NPS Centennial, particularly from the National Park Foundation’s (NPF’s) “Find Your Park” campaign.

NPF worked with Grey New York, a leading advertising agency, to produce a lot of video content. Grey’s production team on “You Are the Parks,” a public service announcement (PSA), included no less than four “creative directors.”

I am the son of someone who was in this business, and at one point in my father’s career he worked at Grey. When I think of all the talent and immense resources that have been expended for far less worthy advertising campaigns, I can only think how enormously pleased and proud my dad would have been if he had lived to have an opportunity to help the national parks. In my opinion, the investment in this brief one-minute video directed by Floyd Russ, was well worth it.

Of course, the video optimistically portrays a country that presumably embraces all its people. We know we have far to go before this is really a reality in much of America. For example, Zion National Park, featured in this video, is in Utah, a state that recently passed



a law effectively banning gender-affirming care to transgender patients under the age of 18. But if—despite such barriers—the national park system can embrace the full richness and diversity of our society, and model behaviors based on collective stewardship, mutual respect, and access for all, then the system might fairly claim the widely embraced distinction that it is one of America’s best ideas.

In “You Are The Parks” a handful of people, each in full body paint, embark on three parallel journeys to rural and urban park settings: Zion, California’s Muir Woods National Monument, and New York’s Federal Hall National Memorial. When they finally arrive at their park destinations they blend in perfectly with their respective environments in a colorful mosaic of people and place. The message from NPF is simple but to the point: “Regardless of age, background, or where you live, the national parks are a part of you. But they also can’t exist without you. You are the parks.”

There was a zany side to this NPF-sponsored campaign. In doing research for this “Letter,” I came across an unknown—but hilarious—video directed by Sam Holst, which I am including as a bonus: <https://www.shootonline.com/video/best-work-you-may-never-see-grey-ny-director-sam-holst-depict-us-vs-every-day%C2%A0-national-park>. I don’t know it was ever used by NPF as a PSA, and it is not archived on YouTube. It should be.

### ARTIST AND PRESIDIO ACTIVATOR FAVIANNA RODRIGUEZ ON “ANCESTRAL FUTURISM” AT PRESIDIO TUNNEL TOPS

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PhPW0HfeXFQ>

Sometimes a message is communicated with so much enthusiasm that it lifts you off your feet. Exuberantly

narrated by artist Favianna Rodriguez, this pulsating three-minute video introduces her participatory artwork at the newly opened Presidio Tunnel Tops, a new park space in the NPS-administered Presidio of San Francisco. As a designated “Presidio Activator,” Rodriguez is one of a group of Bay Area artists and activists working proactively to make Tunnel Tops a welcoming and inclusive space for BIPOC communities historically underrepresented in national parks. The video was produced by the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, in partnership with the Presidio Trust and National Park Service. The Parks Conservancy has plenty of other video content on their website at: <https://www.parksconservancy.org/videos>.

### ANNOUNCING THE STONEWALL NATIONAL MONUMENT

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ywtvJyXDWkk>

If one person has risen to the status of a genuine star in this highly selective genre of national park-related short films, it is former President Barack Obama. This excellent video introducing Stonewall National Monument to the public was produced by the Obama White House staff. It opens and closes with Obama





demonstrating his considerable skills as a narrator and orator. I admit I was not impressed by his somewhat canned performance in the recent glossy Netflix series on great national parks of the world. Though it is always entertaining to see baby animals, the series advances the same old reductionist view of national parks that overlooks and undervalues everything but wilderness. This is not the Obama who stood before a packed auditorium at the dedication of Pullman National Monument (now National Historical Park) in Chicago and declared, “We think of our national monuments as these amazing vistas, and mountains, and rivers. But part of what we’re preserving here is also history.” And that national parks also preserve intangible values like “dignity and opportunity ... as undeniable and worth protecting as the Grand Canyon or the Great Smoky Mountains.” For my money, Obama should have made a few more simple videos like this one.

Despite this articulate presidential assist, the primary voices in this three-and-a-half-minute introduction to the Stonewall National Monument are four LGBTQIA+ activists, Stonewall veterans, whose poignant recollections remind us of what Rev. Carter at the Tubman site said: “Freedom is not free; somewhere, somehow, someone paid the cost for our freedom.”

The video ends with a clip from Obama’s second inauguration. I clearly remember listening to that speech ten years ago. To be honest, I never thought I would hear a president in an inauguration address to the nation recognize the national park system’s indispensable role preserving symbolic touchstones of the American civil rights movement—and then name-check places such as Women’s Rights National Historical Park, Stonewall National Monument, Selma-to-Montgomery National Historic Trail, and

National Mall and Memorial Parks. The national parks referenced by Obama were not the usual iconic ones frequently hyped by political leaders to promote American exceptionalism, but parks that encourage an honest, if at times painful, reckoning with our ongoing struggle to overcome intolerance, prejudice, and discrimination in building a more perfect union.

On that January afternoon in 2013, this is what President Obama said:

We, the people, declare today that the most evident of truths—that all of us are created equal—is the star that guides us still; just as it guided our forebears through Seneca Falls, and Selma, and Stonewall; just as it guided all those men and women, sung and unsung, who left footprints along this great Mall, to hear a preacher say that we cannot walk alone; to hear a King proclaim that our individual freedom is inextricably bound to the freedom of every soul on Earth.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ray Dinnant". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent loop at the end.

*The views expressed in Parks Stewardship Forum editorial columns are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official positions of the University of California, Berkeley, Institute for Parks, People, and Biodiversity, or the George Wright Society.*



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**On the cover of this issue**

“Strength,” a Tarot illustration representing a radiation of power coupled with inner understanding and love. | [HENRY CRAWFORD ADAMS](#)