



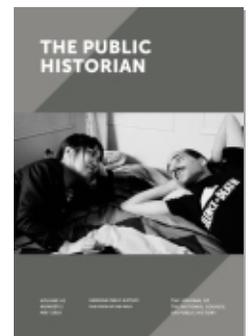
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Grey Literature and Untold Stories: United States National
Park Service Studies on LGBTQ History, Reconstruction, and
the Civil War to Civil Rights Commemoration

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Grey Literature and Untold Stories

United States National Park Service Studies on LGBTQ History,
Reconstruction, and the Civil War to Civil Rights Commemoration

Joan M. Zenzen

LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer History edited by Megan E. Springate. Washington, DC: National Park Foundation, 2016. 2 vols. xv + 624 pp. and 638 pp.; illustrations, notes, appendix, index; <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/tellingallamericansstories/lgbqtthemestudy.htm>.

The Era of Reconstruction, 1861-1900: A National Historic Landmarks Theme Study by Gregory P. Downs and Kate Masur. Washington, DC: National Park Service National Historic Landmarks Program, 2017. 157 pp.; illustrations, notes, bibliography, appendices; <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1207/07-28-2017-reconstruction-theme-study.htm>.

Civil War to Civil Rights Commemoration: Summary Report by Carol Shively. Washington, DC: National Park Service, 2016. 244 pp.; illustrations, appendices; <https://www.nps.gov/civilwar/upload/CIVIL-WAR-TO-CIVIL-RIGHTS-SUMMARY-REPORT-1-v2.pdf>.

After making the case for increasing the visibility of grey literature in the pages of *The Public Historian* at last year's National Council on Public History (NCPH) meeting, I was asked to write a review evaluating three recent publications of the National Park Service (NPS): two theme studies and one summary report. I have a real interest in reviews of grey literature since in my professional life, I write administrative histories for the federal government, especially NPS. I asked, however, to write a different kind of review, not as a subject-matter expert in appraising these works, but rather, as an evaluation of their effectiveness. That is, I wanted to examine how NPS, Congress, and academics have been using them since their publication.

To do so, I communicated with an array of NPS historians and asked for references of people outside the agency. I reached out to State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs). I contacted authors and then whomever they suggested I talk to. Many people were generous with their time and thoughts, in-person,

through emails, or during telephone calls. My research was not exhaustive, and the federal government shutdown in December 2018-January 2019, which furloughed NPS employees, complicated the ability of some to respond. I do have some conclusions, though, that I think fairly evaluate these works and point to some future uses.

The people I contacted generally agreed that the two theme studies will likely usher in more National Register and National Historic Landmarks (NHLs) in LGBTQ and Reconstruction history. NHL status has a high threshold, with about 2,600 designated properties currently; in contrast, more than 92,000 properties are registered on the National Register of Historic Places, also administered by NPS. Theme studies provide crucial information on how a property fits within American history. They aid in the development of nominations and the evaluation of potential sites. Both the LGBTQ and Era of Reconstruction theme studies cover topics never addressed in such a format, and, with their focus upon NHLs, they lay a crucial foundation for adding nationally significant sites to the premier list of recognition. National Register or NHL nomination does not guarantee preservation, but such designation does heighten awareness and hopefully pushes local governments to designate and protect through their own ordinances.

The SHPOs I talked to had found the two theme studies useful, with some qualifications. First, these two studies were still relatively new when I conducted my research, and their full impact remains to be seen. Second, the two studies have slightly different goals, making them valuable for different reasons. The Era of Reconstruction study surveys potential sites and provides the necessary national context to add to the number of nominations and hopefully designations of NHLs associated with Reconstruction. The LGBTQ study, in contrast, supplies a broader context that will serve as background for eventual nominations. There are few LGBTQ properties under consideration now, and thus this theme study intends to catalyze further work.

Third, money in the form of NPS grants will largely determine, at least in the short-term, how many nominations are written and thus how well-used these studies are. The Virginia SHPO noted that the Underrepresented Communities and African American Civil Rights NPS grant programs have spurred property owners, historic preservation groups, and other nonprofits to express interest in the National Register program and pursue writing nominations. Funding and staff limitations have kept Virginia from preparing nominations specifically for LGBTQ history and this office has not been able to update existing nominations to include their relevance to Reconstruction or LGBTQ history. New York State noted that NPS underrepresented community grants led to five completed nominations and many inventory forms. Grant money also helped in the development of an interactive website on LGBTQ history in New York City. The person I emailed at the North Carolina SHPO stated that she had only skimmed the theme studies but that if the state won some NPS grants, the studies would be useful in developing nominations.

The NPS National Capital Region (NCR) has had funding to support many projects related to these two theme studies. Kathryn Smith, the NCR NHL coordinator, conducted a survey of possible LGBTQ sites and sponsored a workshop for parks in the region. In terms of sites related to the Reconstruction era, National Capital Region Historian Dean Herrin is examining post-Civil War African American experiences, such as farming in the countryside outside Washington, DC, and with the Northeast Region and Southeast Region is studying African American schools from 1865 to 1900. Herrin also has funding for producing a graphic history of Reconstruction in the National Capital, aimed to eighteen- to thirty-five-year olds. Herrin views the Era of Reconstruction theme study as an excellent resource for explaining this complicated story.

The Era of Reconstruction theme study has attracted other attention. The Zinn Education Project, which promotes and supports teaching people's history across the United States, linked this theme study to its teaching materials on Reconstruction. Its website called the theme study "impressive" and singled out the introduction as "one of the better overviews of the Reconstruction era that we've seen, with the emphasis placed on the everyday citizens." (<https://www.zinnedproject.org/materials/nps-reconstruction-era-booklet/>)

The Era of Reconstruction theme study fed larger efforts to designate a national park unit. Congress in 2000 had pursued a Reconstruction Era national park unit in Beaufort, SC, but 2002 opposition by the Sons of Confederate Veterans stopped this attempt. In 2013, the theme study's two authors, Gregory P. Downs and Kate Masur, raised the visibility of Reconstruction in connection with the Civil War Sesquicentennial. Their efforts led to a 2014 meeting between historians and NPS staff, a first-ever NPS handbook on Reconstruction (2016), and the NHL theme study the following year. The right combination of factors coalesced, leading President Barack Obama in January 2017 to establish the Reconstruction Era National Monument, consisting of federally owned properties in the Beaufort area. In April 2018, Rep. James Clyburn (D-SC) introduced HR 5532 to change the name of the site to Reconstruction Era National Historical Park and to establish the Reconstruction Era National Historic Network. The network would consolidate efforts to disseminate information about Reconstruction and build a network of related sites. Masur spoke at the July 2018 House hearing on the proposed legislation. The House passed the bill in September 2018, but the bill died in Senate committee.

The LGBTQ theme study came out the same year that President Barack Obama used his executive authority through the Antiquities Act to create Stonewall National Monument. In 1999 Congress had passed legislation requiring the Secretary of the Interior to direct special resource studies, including one on civil rights sites in the country. The resulting 2002 Civil Rights Framework called for studies on underrepresented groups, including LGBTQ people, in the NHL and National Register programs. NPS work stalled. The Denver-based Gill Foundation in 2014 made a generous donation to the National Park Foundation to fund the LGBTQ

Heritage Initiative. That same year, NPS hosted a scholarly roundtable, which led directly to the theme study.

The fact that NPS did not fund the LGBTQ theme study may prompt some questions about the agency's commitment to this study and its topics. Some people might also wonder about the possibility of undue influence from the funder. On the other hand, outside money also indicates that NPS is acting in concert with a larger identified need for research on LGBTQ history. The LGBTQ theme study has prompted positive results, according to its editor Megan Springate. In an email to me, she noted an increase in National Register and NHL nominations, including the Pauli Murray Childhood Home in Durham, North Carolina; the Bayard Rustin Home in New York City; and The Women's Building in San Francisco. Springate also learned how someone searching for "queer" and "Miami" found the theme study and then posted on Twitter. That post led to more than 75,000 shares or likes on Twitter, making the theme study visible to a new audience.

The Summary Report of the Civil War to Civil Rights Commemoration is a well-illustrated and professionally produced mini-administrative history, which includes the vision and goals, lessons learned, and examples of programming for the five-year event conducted throughout the country. The report ties the initial commemorative planning for the Civil War 150th anniversary (CW150) to *Holding the High Ground* (1998), which called for an expanded vision for Civil War interpretation, including addressing slavery as the primary cause of the war. In 2011, the steering committee decided to expand the Civil War commemoration to include the fiftieth anniversary of the civil rights movement (CW2CR). NPS sought in its interpretive media, visitor experiences, and digital platforms to connect with and include diverse audiences. The agency held trainings with the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience to develop twenty-first-century dialogic audience-centered interpretive techniques. The summary report impressively documents specific events in which NPS reached beyond its traditional mode of action to engage new audiences. For example, when confronted with the uprisings in Ferguson, Missouri, NPS staff at the arch in St. Louis issued a permit to allow peaceful protests in front of the courthouse that had heard the *Dred Scott* case. NPS rangers also joined teachers at "Peace Schools" in local libraries when the schools were too dangerous attend.

The summary report leaves some questions, which if addressed, would bolster its utility in application to future projects. The report refers briefly to an internal discussion about whether combining the Civil War 150th and the Civil Rights 50th would strengthen or weaken both. The report fails to provide the reasons cited on either side of the debate, a loss of information that might inform subsequent anniversary planning. Another question relates to funding. This commemoration involved sixteen signature events that cost a total of \$7.5 million, with \$2.4 million from partners and almost \$4 million from the NPS Washington Office alone. The summary report mentions that organizers had to find funding, and that they did, but there is no discussion of how. Given that NPS was also fundraising for the NPS 1916–2016 Centennial (which required partners to raise money that the federal

government then matched 50–50), it is notable that CW2CR used more than twice the amount of federal funding than partner money (<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/centennial/nps-centennial-challenge-projects.htm>).

Former NPS Associate Director of Cultural Resources, Partnerships, and Science Stephanie Toothman shared with me that NPS has had continuing internal conversations about the legacy of the CW2CR commemoration. NPS in 2015 held a symposium that resulted in a commitment to galvanize service-wide resources in a community of practice informally called Arc to Equality. This effort is meant to recognize all Americans' stories, which the two theme studies also support. Toothman stated that these stories help highlight the country's progression, seen running through the national parks, in realizing the implicit promise of the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution. The two theme studies and summary report represent steps along the path toward equality.

This review essay started with my goal of assessing the usefulness of the two theme studies and summary report, and here I want to suggest other uses. The theme studies could provide context for exhibits (and historical studies), not just focused upon Reconstruction or LGBTQ history but also incorporating these topics in exhibits on other subjects. The LGBTQ theme study contains 32 chapters and more than 1,200 pages delving into the intimate, transparent, and opaque aspects of life for whites, African Americans, Latina/o, Asian Pacific Americans, and others. Any exhibit (or historical study) looking at military service, business and commerce, religion, health, art, sport and leisure, heritage, etc. would do well to refer to this theme study. Both theme studies offer possibilities for teachers and professors, as a background resource and as reading material in college and graduate courses. The courses do not have to be directly on Reconstruction or LGBTQ history; rather, teachers and professors could use these theme studies to broaden the information presented in their classes. In sum, grey literature has so much to offer, but only if people know it exists. Now you do.

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Joan M. Zenzen writes histories and conducts oral history interviews for the US federal government and non-profit organizations. She has written several administrative histories for the National Park Service, including about two Civil War battlefield parks. She is completing an administrative history of Rock Creek Park, a National Park Service unit in Washington, DC. She is based in the Washington, DC, area.