

National Press Club Address
Terrence D. Jones
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A Case for America's National Parks: Through the Artist's Lens

Thank you, Donna, for that generous introduction. I am delighted to have this opportunity to join you and the members of the National Press Club once again.

I would also like to welcome the members of the Wolf Trap Foundation Board and our partner, the National Park Service. I offer special thanks to our friends from PNC, which returns as the premier sponsor of Wolf Trap's summer season.

I am indeed sorry that Judy Collins could not be with us today due to illness. However she is with us in spirit today and a little later in the program, I will read a letter that Judy has asked me to share with you.

I begin with a quote from the iconic photographer and conservationist Ansel Adams:

"No man has the right to dictate what other men should perceive, create or produce, but all should be encouraged to reveal themselves, their perceptions and emotions, and to build confidence in the creative spirit."

Upon hearing Adams's name, how many of us can resist seeing in our mind's eye his breathtaking photographs of the majestic western landscapes of Yellowstone or of the moon rising in Yosemite? They are masterful works of art that both document – and celebrate – the grace and magnificence of America's National Parks.

Today I want to speak with you about the inextricable link between our National Parks and the arts – and share some lessons I have learned during a recent, extended journey through our parks that should inform how we address and successfully manage our resources – natural, cultural, and artistic, in these times of significant challenge and change.

As a proud member of the arts community here in the nation's capital, as a grateful servant to the arts during a 40-year professional career, and as an avid photographer myself, I return to Adams's words because they speak so eloquently to the collective and pluralistic power of the arts and creativity in our world: "...All should be encouraged to reveal themselves...and to build confidence in the creative spirit."

Adams found this creative spirit in the natural settings of our National Parks. Let me ask: How many in the audience today have been to one of America's 391 National Park sites? I would venture to say it was a positive experience, a memorable experience – and perhaps even a life changing experience.

So try to imagine life without our National Parks: imagine rows of condos on the south rim of the Grand Canyon or a high rise business complex in the Tetons, or closer to home, there would be no Rock Creek Park for family picnics, and no National Mall on which to revel in the spirit of this nation – oh yes, and no Wolf Trap? Unthinkable – the parks are a part of our national psyche – they are America! Or as Wallace Stegner once said, “National Parks are the best idea we ever had.” Now try to imagine your life without the arts – no National Symphony, no community theater, no favorite movies or Broadway shows, no dance classes for the kids, no pop music, not even *American Idol* (yes, I know some of you could do without that one)...but you get my point.

Our lives and the arts are inseparable – even if we are not aware of it. Open any magazine, turn on the radio or TV or your iPod, open any website – the arts are there!

But why the connection between the arts and the parks? Well in part because our National Parks *began* as a preservation of spirit. After all, it was the painter and writer George Catlin who in 1832 first called for protection of western lands as part of a national park system. The works of photographer Carleton Watkins led President Lincoln to sign legislation preserving Yosemite Valley. And the glorious paintings by Thomas Moran, Albert Bierstadt, and others of the Hudson River School influenced Congress to pass legislation creating Yellowstone as the first National Park in 1872 and President Wilson to establish the National Park Service in 1916.

These artists recognized the power of our nation’s grandiose geography and its impact. Or as Albert Einstein put it, “Look at nature and you will understand everything better.”

It is not particularly surprising that the arts played a major role in advancing the cause of the National Parks as the arts at the time were part and parcel of our educational system. Music, literature, and visual arts were an integral part of any education. Even in the most rural communities, nurturing artistic talent was a given. It was a social skill that was valued and contributed to enriching the community.

So what has happened? Over the years, the arts somehow became the political capital that meant “elitist” – or perhaps worse, a simple “nicety,” easily dismissed – despite the fact that the arts remained an important adhesive in communities across the country in both urban and rural settings.

For example, in the “No Child Left Behind” legislation, the arts were established as a core subject, yet a recent study identifies a trend toward decreased instruction time for art and music. At a time when our economy demands the most competent, creative, and innovative workforce on earth, misperceptions about the arts are causing us to miss the opportunity to properly educate our children to meet the demands of the future.

Just as our environment is imperiled through consequences of human activity, so, too, are the arts imperiled. Daily reports announce yet another museum, symphony orchestra, or performing arts center pulling back on programs, or even closing. From large national

presenters to local community theaters to pre-school, elementary, and high school arts and music programs, our industry is down – but I also know that we are not *out*.

When the National Parks were created, they were intended to preserve the land, spirit, and culture that make us American. Now, as our socio-economic system seems in disarray, to preserve and support the artistic spirit of creativity is imperative not only to foster that mentality among individuals but also to give the population a sense of confidence in the intrinsic power of art. We, as Americans, need to preserve the creative spirit – much as we preserved the natural world with our National Parks.

In some cases this is actually happening within the National Parks themselves – a result of forward-thinking superintendents and their talented interpretive staffs.

I observed examples of this first hand when, as part of my research trip last fall, I had the distinct pleasure of witnessing our National Parks through a lens perhaps not as monumental as Ansel Adams's – but in a way that underscored and deepened my core belief in the important role that our National Parks play.

To the surprise of some, our National Parks are a very diverse set of places in this country; they celebrate and reflect both the natural beauty and the cultural and creative landscape. We easily see the splendor of the parks when we visit but we often fail to look at the inside, the human side, which truly tells us who we are as a nation.

On this most recent journey – a three-month solo trek covering more than 85 National Parks, national monuments, historic sites, and national rivers and trails – I was deeply moved by the ways that our National Parks reflect the stories of our nation's history and relate them to our modern world, and how interpretation through the arts of these collective experiences can bring those multi-layered stories to life.

Let me share a couple of examples with you:

- In September I visited Marsh Billings Rockefeller National Historical Park. It is an example of early environmentalism and conservation offering a balance of forestry and farming in Vermont, and it serves as a current example of sustainability and environmental education with far reaching impact. They have developed an innovative project utilizing poetry to connect visitors to the forest.
- Later in the trip I stopped at Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site in Topeka, Kansas. It is an emotionally stirring example of triumph, hope, and courage, and uses new video art and technology to engage visitors and enhance outreach as it transports us to the tumultuous times of the Civil Rights movement.
- And on a clear, brisk day in October, I was welcomed to Mount Rushmore National Memorial, where Superintendent Gerard Baker, a member of the Mandan and Hidatsa Tribes, has helped encourage greater understanding between the millions of visitors and the Native American population of the region by utilizing performance and cultural offerings as part of their outreach program.

It is the sum of these and many other stories that give us insight into America – of what our country is physically, culturally, and even spiritually.

While I represented Wolf Trap throughout this journey, I also found that as an individual, as an artist, and as an ordinary citizen, the parallels between the arts and the Parks are unmistakable. Americans relate deeply to their natural surroundings and the artistic aspects that are found there.

Naturalist John Muir reflected on the tremendous impact of nature on our souls. His insightful words still ring true today: “Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountain is going home; that wildness is necessity; that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as foundations of timber and irrigating rivers, but as foundations of life.”

I submit that the similar roles played by our National Parks and the arts – particularly at this critical juncture in our nation’s history – mean that our support for and commitment to *both* is now more important than ever before.

Both the arts and our Parks offer opportunities for reflection, respite, and insight – and historical perspective – all very much needed in these challenging times. They nurture and help us sustain the confidence and spirit required to apply creative thinking to achieve solutions, to persevere, and even to thrive during life’s greatest challenges.

I find it inspiring that the Museum of Modern Art opened its doors for the very first time just ten days after October 29, 1929 – that Black Monday signaling the Great Depression. Rather than delay or cancel their plans, the leaders of that great institution pressed on, and a *New York Times* reporter wrote that within weeks the Museum had established itself as “as a multidisciplinary cultural hub in a time of economic woe.”

I am certain those leaders realized the risk of their endeavor, just as the artists who explored and documented the awesome natural landscapes of what would become our earliest National Parks knew of the perils they would face. Yet today, our lives are made better because of the vision and unyielding commitment of those early pioneers.

Just as our National Parks offer accessible ways to engage with the natural beauty and cultural context of our environs, the wide range of arts available to us today – from musicals mounted on high school stages and community art installations, to university performances and online, on-demand entertainment – means there is truly something for everyone.

So, in developing a plan to move forward, the arts need to be an important part of not only providing pleasure, but also giving input into the corporate system as a creative component that speaks to the unconventional in these challenging times. As described in Richard Florida’s *The Rise of the Creative Class*, there is an ongoing sea change in people’s choices and attitude asserting that creativity is at the heart of the new economic model.

Nationally, the nonprofit arts industry, just the nonprofit sector, generates over \$166 billion in economic activity every year. That activity has a significant impact, accounting for nearly 6 million full time jobs and generating nearly \$30 billion in local, state and federal tax revenue. That certainly makes the arts more than just a “nicety.”

So how do we move forward? First and foremost, I suggest we remain optimistic – something artists are known for. Through the leadership of good friends like Bill Ivey, Bob Lynch, and others the arts have been “at the table” as this new Administration has faced the most difficult economic situation in generations – while tackling other vexing issues both here and abroad.

And the conversation in our field has been lively!

Some have called for an “arts industry bail-out.” Others have fought for more funding for the National Endowment for the Arts, and I was pleased to see that the recently approved stimulus package includes additional resources for that critical agency. Still others, like Quincy Jones, have argued for an arts “czar” – a cabinet-level position to coordinate arts policy. While all of these concepts have merit at some level, I suggest a slightly different framework for our thinking.

- First, we do need to improve coordination of arts policy at the national level – if not through a cabinet-level position, then through a Presidentially appointed, cross-functional working group of experts. And there may already be some good news on that front, as reports indicate the President will establish a White House staff position to oversee arts and culture issues. That is a good start.
- Secondly, the Obama Administration has issued a challenge by calling for arts education for all children and by emphasizing the critical role of early childhood education – something we know a great deal about at the Wolf Trap Institute for Early Learning through the Arts. If this is to succeed, it must be acted upon locally. Supporting the arts in this country should include deliberate measures and strategic decisions to ensure every child has access to excellent arts education taught by highly qualified arts specialists in our local schools, which is then reinforced by arts institutions and artists.
- And finally, the most basic level: *we* must support the arts – buy a ticket and go to a show, join a choir, volunteer at your community theater; involve yourself and your family in the arts!

The arts – and our National Parks – heal us. They bring us together. They teach us and instill a love for inquiry and learning. They help us imagine, innovate, and succeed – in creating leaders and in creating economies.

If our world is shaped and sculpted by individual ingenuity, painted by brushstrokes of infinite thought, and scored by human harmony, why then has it taken us so long to *see* that the arts provide a natural opportunity to take that chance to look at things differently?

Just as our National Parks challenge and change our understanding of who we are and where we live, the arts allow us to endure and triumph in difficult times.

So this afternoon, I invite you to consider the role and relevance of the arts – and our National Parks – in your lives, including at Wolf Trap which, of course, is *your* National Park for the Performing Arts.

I hope you will journey with us this summer as we look through a new lens to explore the wondrous and varied nature of *all* that the arts – on our stages – have to offer.

I can think of no better place to embark on this journey than with our signature artistic adventure series, Wolf Trap's *Face of America*. This year we celebrate Glacier National Park in Montana with a commission created by renowned choreographer Trey McIntyre.

The world premiere of McIntyre's new work, *The Sun Road*, will allow patrons to experience Glacier National Park through the dancer's "lens" with live performance at the Filene Center backed by high definition video of the dancers captured onsite in the National Park.

The summer dance offerings continue with an eclectic mix from the explosive Rasta Thomas' *Bad Boys of Dance*, the popular and sophisticated Aspen Santa Fe Ballet, and icons of modern dance, the Merce Cunningham Dance Company. All three companies are making their Wolf Trap debuts.

As is our tradition, Wolf Trap partners with the National Symphony Orchestra to present an array of inspired performances throughout the summer. With NSO @ Wolf Trap festival Conductor Emil de Cou once again at the helm, the Symphony will take a country music journey with LeAnn Rimes, present Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*, and share the stage with renowned violinist Sarah Chang.

The NSO also provides the live music for several nights of high definition big screen magic including *The Wizard of Oz* and the Discovery Channel/BBC production of *Blue Planet*.

And it would not be summer at Wolf Trap without the man who has garnered every prestigious achievement award under the sun, the legendary Marvin Hamlisch. Patrons can catch Marvin in his singular offering of *Hamlisch Conducts Hamlisch* as he leads the NSO in music from *A Chorus Line*, *The Sting*, *The Way We Were*, and many others!

The Wolf Trap Opera Company proudly presents two new, full-scale productions at The Barns this summer: Mozart's *Così fan tutte* and The Barns debut of Monteverdi's *The Return of Ulysses*. While at the Filene Center, the Company will present a multimedia concert version of Puccini's *La bohème*.

Once again, we feature several legendary artists in their Wolf Trap debuts. To kick off that list, we welcome Rock and Roll Hall of Famer Jackson Browne for the first time.

Among other major debuts are the country-pop duo Loggins and Messina, pop-rock icon Pat Benatar, and the complete high definition, large screen version of *Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* accompanied live by orchestra and chorus.

We are also thrilled to welcome the Wolf Trap theatrical debut of Disney's smash hit *High School Musical* and the Tony Award-winning *42nd Street*. We will also offer the popular *Pirates of Penzance*, and *Riverdance* in its record breaking 12th season at the Filene Center.

Wolf Trap's celebration of live performance continues with the *Three Girls & Their Buddy Tour*, featuring a collaborative evening with Emmylou Harris, Patty Griffin, Shawn Colvin, and Buddy Miller; you will hear Talking Heads front man David Byrne; an evening of eclectic world music with Pink Martini; the constantly evolving sound of Elvis Costello; the sultry jazz of Diana Krall; and pioneers of new wave pop, The B-52s.

Several extended evenings devoted to some of music's most exciting genres are in the summer lineup, including Wolf Trap's 20th Annual Louisiana Swamp Romp, The Ultimate Doo-Wop Show, our immensely popular Hippiefest, and the 80's Regeneration Tour.

Additionally, we welcome back America's voice Garrison Keillor in *A Prairie Home Companion*, that philosopher comedian Bill Cosby, as well as Bonnie Raitt, the Steve Miller Band, the Beach Boys, John Prine, B.B. King, Hall & Oates, Tom Jones, Tony Bennett, Smokey Robinson, Crosby Stills & Nash, and the Gipsy Kings. And all of this is just a brief glimpse of what lies ahead for the summer of 2009 at America's National Park for the Performing Arts! So join us for a little summer respite and reflection through the arts – in your National Park – and offer a bit of economic stimulation of your own!

And now as I promised earlier, a few words from Judy Collins. As many of you know, Judy has been a friend of Wolf Trap since its earliest days. And she captured me as a "forever fan" with her Wildflower album – and still captivates me and millions of fans today as she continues to create music of hope, love, and healing.

A Letter from Judy Collins

Dear Members of the Press, distinguished guests, Terre Jones, and all my friends from the museums, concert stages, and performing arts centers here in Washington DC and around the country, and all other Friends of the arts – of beauty, of music, dance, painting, and other forms inspired by our muses of the past and the present:

I am so sorry not to be able to join you today in person – but I would not want to inflict my coughing, hacking persona on man nor beast, both of whom I am sure are amidst this illustrious gathering. We have gone to the moon, challenged the moguls of industry, and are going to get the vote for Washington DC, but we still can't cure the common cold. As Gay Talese said of Frank Sinatra, Mr. Sinatra has a cold. I may not be able to sing, but I

can write. I am delighted to have been asked to be here and to share some of my thoughts on art and music.

At this point when I speak I usually break into a few bars of *Both Sides Now*. (This is where you sing, Terre, and invite everyone to join you!) Or, you might want to ask everyone to turn on their iPods or iPhones or Palm Pilots or whatever for a moment.

I have been making music since I was a child, trained to play the piano then inspired to learn the guitar and move from Mozart to Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie, and Stephen Sondheim. The arts, for me, have always been there. I have been fortunate to be able to make my living, find my fiercest joy and create solace in other people's lives because of my training, my instincts, and because of places like Wolf Trap.

Although there *is* no other place like Wolf Trap, believe me, and in these fifty years (exactly, this month), since I have been making my living making music I have seen most of the performing centers on this continent, and many in other parts of the world.

I have been singing at Wolf Trap nearly every year since it opened, first with the National Symphony conducted by Christian Badia in 1979, and then with my own musical directors and a host of talented musician, singers, and performers. Wolf Trap is one of the treasures in my own life, and I have been privileged to be able to sing there, among the birds and flowers, rain or shine (even in the temporary shed after the fire), among the eager, devoted fans of the arts who flock to hear the music that heals them. Now, as always during difficult times as well as triumphant times, we need the arts, the music, the thrill of being in the night air and hearing the sounds of the voices and the instruments that inspire us, that convince us we have another round in us, that make all our struggles and fears and challenges worth the effort.

Sadly, in recent times, we have fallen from the path. We take art and music and recess, even, out of our schools. When our children are disturbed and show signs of obesity, depression, dysfunction, and sorrow, we send them for art therapy, music therapy, exercise therapy, and recess. The cart has definitely swung way out in front of the horse.

My vision for the future of the arts is that the Obama administration, with all of your help, will bring the emphasis back to the arts, particularly in our schools and in the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities; to encourage individuals and the youth of America to explore their possibilities. I would hope that private industry as well as the government will re-charge their efforts in this direction, putting their energy and enthusiasm back into the arts, where it belongs, where we inspire quality of thought and action, of ethics and imagination, of individuality and conviction.

Wolf Trap's concerts – its workshops and spaces for creativity at The Barns and the wonderful, open-armed, uplifting theater that is Wolf Trap – welcome the visitor to an experience of joy, in music and art and dance. And today, we need all the joy we can get.

A recital in a high school, a dance at a home, a poem read to the kids over breakfast, can so easily help heal a troubled moment or a troubled time.

My thanks to everyone who make the arts possible, who provide the spaces and the advertising and the environment where we can be lifted to the stars. May that endeavor, so essential to the soul, continue in the years to come. My thanks to Terre Jones, to Ann McKee, and Peter Zimmerman at Wolf Trap and especially to Mrs. Shouse, who knew we need the nurturing of the arts, and gave her Wolf Trap Farm to the country, as a National Park and a National Treasure. Thank you all for being here to carry on this great surge of the arts in the 21st Century.

Here's to artistic freedom and artistic healing, and support for the arts in every city and every small town in the USA. The arts are what make us tick, and make us who we are, in the broad daylight and soul-searching midnight. Thank you for listening.

~ Judy Collins

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