

GRANT

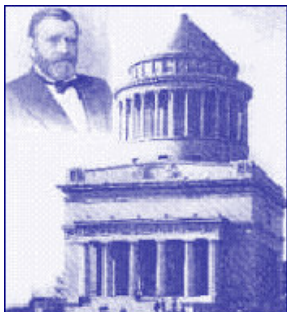
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PERFORMANCE AT GRANT'S TOMB HIGHLIGHTS USE ISSUES

The last issue of this newsletter began a series on Grant in the media. This summer, Grant's Tomb and the GMA found themselves in the news following a nationwide broadcast by NBC of a performance by Beyonce Knowles.

Although slated as part of Macy's Fourth of July celebration in New York City, the scene was indistinguishable from a pop concert any other time of the year. In another sense, the performance was inappropriate for the location — consisting, as it did, of lascivious choreography on the steps of Grant's Tomb by the barely clothed singer and her ensemble.

This raised the question of why Macy's and NBC sought — and were granted — permission by the National Park Service to use the Tomb. The regulations governing the NPS are clear enough: a permit for a special event shall be granted if the event contributes to visitor understanding of the significance of the site, and shall not be granted where the event would be contrary to the purpose for which the site was established. The July 4 production did not meet any reasonable interpretation of these regulations. It would have caused little stir in a standard concert venue, and indeed featured one of the year's most popular performers. But her performance had nothing to do with a presidential tomb and was jarring at such a location.

The *New York Daily News*, which ran an editorial calling the incident a form of desecration, took the lead in reporting

what became nationwide expressions of disapproval of the performance. Wrote one viewer: "I watched the NYC fireworks show on NBC with my seven year old son," who "loves to study history, and especially, the Civil War.... As we sat on the couch we were both dumbfounded by the musical performance. It was so inappropriate!" Even *TV Guide* had "Jeers" for Ms.

Knowles in its "Cheers and Jeers" section.

The GMA's objection came in the form of letters to NBC, the Interior Department, and the NPS. Responding for the federal government, a letter signed by an official on behalf of the NPS director admitted no

error, stating that "Macy's and NBC felt that this performance was appropriate for nationwide broadcasting. We do not feel that censorship would have been in order." This response was unfortunate on several levels. For one thing, federal regulations presume that government officials will exercise judgment them-

selves rather than allowing those seeking commercial use of a national park to set policy. Second, it is doubtful that NBC or Macy's attempted to assess the propriety of the performance at that location. NBC has not responded to criticism and seems more interested in avoiding the issue. A *Newsweek* reporter covering the story reported that NBC denied his request to view their tape of the performance.

Perhaps most regrettable is the attitude toward its own rules reflected in the NPS characterization of



Beyonce Knowles at Grant's Tomb

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the issue as one of "censorship." The NPS is the caretaker of the gravesites of innumerable Civil War veterans and an agency of a government that maintains several presidential gravesites. Few believe the concert permitted at Grant's Tomb would have been permitted at any of those locations. Yet by taking the position that denial of the permit application would have constituted censorship, the NPS has set a precedent that repudiates the appropriate use regulations that have been a staple of its role as protector of our cul-

tural heritage.

The July 4 incident is just one aspect of a broader issue. Ten years ago, a wide range of inappropriate activities occurring at the monument were brought to

of President Grant's final resting place, which fortunately would be addressed by the placement of security at the monument. Less severe but still pertinent forms of inappropriate ac-

and jogging) that occurred inside or on the Tomb proper (including the stairs and portico).

In the latter category of appropriate use issues, which never received the publicity devoted to desecration, is the issue of event permits granted by the NPS. Ten years ago, the issue was a seasonal concert in connection with Harlem Week — a fine cultural event in itself, but at the wrong location. The event featured blaring music and dancing on the Tomb's platform, as well as a commercial banner on the front pillars and an almost



Still shots from July 4. NBC reportedly has not released the tape.

public attention. Most alarming was the rampant vandalism and desecration

activities included certain recreational activities (such as rollerblading, sunbathing,

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GRANT'S TOMB IN FILM



Grant's Tomb has had a number of movie cameos over the years, but it has never been the star. If you watch carefully, however, you will find the monument in the following films — typically for a few seconds in montages, or serving as an anonymous backdrop for scenes that assume (or hope) the viewer will not be able to identify the location:

The Perils Of Pauline (1914): In a chapter of this famous serial, shot in Fort Lee, New Jersey, Pauline (Pearl White) is trapped in a runaway hot air balloon as it hovers precariously over the Tomb.

On The Town (1949): As part of a montage of Manhattan sites, sailors Frank Sinatra, Gene Kelly, and Jules Munchin are seen crossing Riverside Drive with the tomb dramatically in the background (if only for 3 seconds).

A Thousand Clowns (1966): Another Manhattan montage sees Jason Robards and Barbara Harris riding a tandem bike past the side of the Tomb.

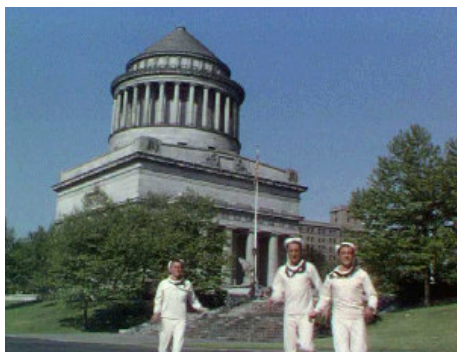
New Jack City (1991): A violent and very bloody shootout takes place on the plaza in front of the memorial.

Howard Stern's Private Parts (1997): Stern and two bikini-clad women cavort on the steps of the monument in front of a huge crowd of fans in a scene set in 1982 Washington, DC. The Tomb also could be seen in an earlier scene shot across the street and set in 1979 Detroit.

Fall (1997): Eric Schaffer and Amanda De Cadenet take a romantic stroll in

front of the Tomb in this pretentious film about a romance between a Manhattan cab driver and a supermodel.

Only one film stopped to reflect on the meaning of Grant's Tomb. In Frank



Scene from *On the Town* (1949)

Capra's classic *Mr. Deeds Goes To Town* (1939), patriotic bumpkin Gary Cooper visits Grant's Tomb with cynical reporter Jean Arthur. They arrive at dusk, providing the viewer with a beautiful image of the Tomb at twilight as dozens

of people are making their way inside. They stop for a second to soak it all in:

JEAN ARTHUR: Well, there you are. Grant's Tomb. I hope you aren't disappointed.

GARY COOPER: It's wonderful.

JEAN ARTHUR: To most people it's an awful letdown.

GARY COOPER: Huh?

JEAN ARTHUR: I said to most people it's a washout.

GARY COOPER: That depends on what you see.

JEAN ARTHUR: Now what do you see?

GARY COOPER: Me?, Oh, I see a small Ohio farm boy becoming a great soldier. I see thousands of marching men. I see General Lee with a broken heart surrendering. And I see the beginning of a new nation like Abraham Lincoln said. And I can see that Ohio boy becoming president. Things like that can only happen in America.

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completely barricaded entrance during visiting hours. The volume of the concert filled the Tomb as well as the plaza.

Most commercial use of the site is less obtrusive, but equally irrelevant; the Tomb has been used to shoot ads for any number of products in recent years, ranging from condoms to mouthwash. Use of the monument in movies is another story. In *New Jack City* (1991), the Tomb's plaza was the scene of a party that turned into a violent and bloody gunfight. In *Private Parts* (1997), the Tomb served as a fictitious monument in Washington, DC, at which Howard Stern held a large rally during the 1980's.

The building's commercial appeal comes from the open space with which it is associated and its ability to be cast as a generic government building. No doubt the site also is appealing for its price. Those who make use of Grant's Tomb need only cover their expenses and costs they directly incur. No extra payment need be included to foster the site's upkeep, let alone such needed additions as a visitor center.

This last point is true of the national park system in general and not unique to the site. Still, the indifference toward the meaning of Grant's Tomb by its users is stark. The site is being used not for what it is, but as a low-cost backdrop that users apparently hope their audience will not identify.

As a general matter, Grant's Tomb's plaza is the location in New York best

suited to parallel the role played by the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC. It may appropriately serve certain cultural purposes that do not specifically relate to President Grant.



Scene from *New Jack City* (1991)

One example of this has been the "Jazzmobile," which has presented jazz and popular music at the site for years – though it does so in its own mobile stage that sits in the plaza rather than on the steps or portico of the Tomb. (More vigilance is necessary, however, regarding spectator conduct at the Tomb.) As the GMA resolved in its last board meeting, the NPS should reform its permitting process at the site consistent with regulations so that use of the Tomb proper is better tailored to functions that are patriotic or that otherwise relate to the purpose of the monument. While greater flexibility in the use of the

plaza in front of Grant's Tomb may be appropriate, organizers of any event at that location should be required to observe a certain decorum that was not met on July 4 and on prior occasions.

cized as inappropriate.

Sen. Jeff Bingaman (NM) entered into the Congressional Record a column by Albert Eisele, the editor of a congressional newspaper, blasting the show for subjecting the Mall to crass

commercialism and a "display of erotic gyrations" by Britney Spears. Eisele called the entire display "nothing more than the desecration of a sacred space and an insult to the men and women of the U.S. military whom the event's promoters professed to honor."

The Senate in turn overwhelmingly voted to prevent a repeat of that incident by placing a limit on commercial use of the Mall. Far

from claiming censorship, Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton was quoted as saying, "This commercial extravaganza points out the

need to strengthen, revise and clarify the guidelines." To Bingaman, the Senate's action was "a good

place to start" to "prohibit increased commercialization in our national parks."

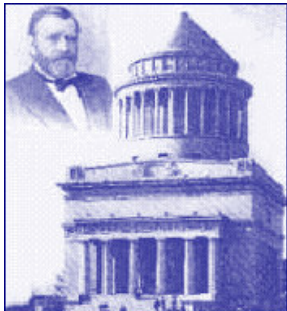
If federal action stops there, this starting point is also a finishing point – because this vigilant reaction by our highest federal offi-

The government's response following July 4 contrasts with what followed an amazingly parallel outcry regarding the NPS-

The site is being used not for what it is, but as a low-cost backdrop that users apparently hope their audience will not identify.

administered National Mall – the monument-laden area in the nation's capital. Exactly two months after the NBC broadcast at Grant's Tomb, a commercial "NFL Kickoff Live" show with various performers was staged at the Mall and widely criti-

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cially clearly contradicts the “censorship” characterization applied to Grant's Tomb by the agency Secretary Norton oversees. Does the left hand know what the right hand is doing? Eisele's article had sardonically asked, “[W]hat can we expect to see next? An ad for Viagra on the Washington Monument?” Yet a condom ad had aired at Grant's Tomb years before.

The contrast between the government's attitude toward the nation's most famous memorials and toward Grant's Tomb is stark. It calls into question whether, 10 years after it was a national scandal, the Tomb has truly ceased to be a stepchild site in the park system.

The difference between the two regions may turn out to be that one has the eyes and ears of top government policymakers, who can be expected to intervene, while the other has been far easier to ignore in

its comparative remoteness. Thus, an “appropriate use” issue at the National Mall will be taken on by the entire Senate while at the Tomb, it goes no farther than one NPS official signing for another.

So where do we go from here? The GMA has tried to keep sight of what could be the full part of the glass. Specifically, it has asked

perform at the monument. We hope anyone who can help advance such goals will contact us.

Local NPS officials would be glad to see a truly patriotic July 4 ceremony next year. The challenge may be moving NBC and Macy's to put their resources behind such a proposal. It is not encouraging to see that NBC has not replied at all to the GMA. Ms. Knowles' representatives, for that matter, also have avoided comment. The summer incident was already seen by the media as “yesterday's news” by the time the NPS and the Senate took different stands in September. While ignoring the issue is

an easy way down the path of least resistance, we hope the government will exercise leadership and not remain resigned to the disregard of its own standards at Grant's Tomb.



Scene from Howard Stern's *Private Parts* (1997)

the NPS to reach out to NBC and the surrounding community to encourage events at the site on July 4 that are patriotic in theme. Without looking very far, such local institutions as the Boys Choir of Harlem or the Manhattan School of Music could be invited to

WE ARE SADDENED TO REPORT THE DEATH OF JERRY RUSSELL, A LONGTIME ADVOCATE OF CIVIL WAR SITES WHO PLAYED AN INDISPENSABLE ROLE SPEARHEADING TODAY'S PRESERVATION MOVEMENT. THE GRANT MONUMENT ASSOCIATION IS GRATEFUL FOR HIS SUPPORT FROM THE EARLY DAYS OF OUR REVIVAL IN THE 1990S THROUGH THIS PAST YEAR. MEMORIALS MAY BE SENT TO: THE JERRY RUSSELL FUND, CIVIL WAR PRESERVATION TRUST, 11 PUBLIC SQUARE, SUITE 200, HAGERSTOWN, MD. 21740.

ATTENTION CIVIL WAR ENTHUSIASTS IN THE NEW YORK CITY AREA

THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE OF NEW YORK, founded in 1951, meets on the second Wednesday of each month from September to June at the Seventh Regiment Armory on Park Avenue between 66th and 67th Streets, 4th floor.

Each meeting features a talk about an aspect of the Civil War. Topics have included descriptions of land and naval engagements, strategies, tactics, artillery, cavalry, analysis of key military and political figures, slavery, politics, medicine, Reconstruction, maps, and transportation.

Meetings include dinner and speaker. Dues are \$40/year.

Each May, the Round Table sponsors a tour to a particular battle site. In 2003, the tour visited Brandy Station and the Wilderness in Virginia. This May, the tour will include Wilson's Creek in Missouri, and Pea Ridge and Prairie Grove in Arkansas.

For further details about the Round Table, please leave a message at 718-341-9811.

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___ \$100 ___ \$500 ___ Other - Indicate Amount \$ _____

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