



# ***THE SIGNPOST***

## **3rd Quarter 2020**

Hello members of the Park Rangers Association of California! We are trying a new template for this Quarter's Signpost newsletter. [Let us know what you think!](#)

We hope you are all staying safe and healthy during this strange and stressful year.

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## **This Month's Articles**



*PRAC  
Supports BLM*

A Statement from the  
Park Rangers  
Association Board of  
Directors

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*Under the  
Flat Hat*

President Matt Cerkel  
writes about Parks  
and being a Park  
Ranger in light of the  
Black Lives Matter  
Movement

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*2021 Conference  
Cancelled*

But keep reading to  
find out about an  
exciting online  
speaker's series that  
we are planning!

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# Statement of Support



Photo Credit: Annette Bernhardt

The Park Ranger's Association of California stands in solidarity with George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Steve Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Tony McDade, Rayshard Brooks and the millions of Black people who have lost their lives to violence upheld by White supremacy. These public lynchings have rightfully sparked a long overdue global shift that is evident in the massive protest movement. We know that these are not isolated events but a culmination of over 400 years of racialized terror against Black people. For over half of the United States' history, slavery was legal. Even after emancipation, Black people have experienced segregation, mass incarceration, barriers to resources and ongoing disenfranchisement.

It would be a dangerous mistake to believe that racial violence is isolated to the distant past — when in fact it continues to exist within our own communities. As law enforcement officers, we have a very conflicting past steeped in a culture of complicity and we need to rectify that legacy by having more people of color involved in our profession who are working as peace officers within our communities. As a group whose primary pursuit is to provide an open forum for California and Nevada park rangers, we recognize that racial justice is at the forefront of the effort to ensure justice, equity and inclusion in the public safety

profession.

We commit to an ongoing process of self-reflection and collaborative growth that is the fight against white supremacy. We commit to the hard work of understanding how racism and white supremacy culture shows up in our profession and the hard work of dismantling it.

We shall listen closely and talk openly about the ongoing history of systemic racism and inequities experienced by Black people in America. We shall come together across the divides and talk about the ways that we as public servants can heal and advance the changes needed across our organizations and our communities.

We shall strive to uplift and celebrate the voices of African-Americans in our community. In the weeks and months ahead, we look forward to continuing the conversation and to ensuring shared action that is purposeful, relevant and inclusive.

It is our obligation to future generations and our Black community members at work and home to respond to this call to action. We will uplift and amplify Black voices. We will review our internal processes to prioritize the advancement and empowerment of Black people. We will continue to promote healing by facing the injustices we are part of, and supporting those in our community, who are directly impacted by institutionalized oppression.

~ The Park Rangers Association of California Board of Directors

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# Under the Flat Hat



PRAC President Matt Cerkel

The recent murder of George Floyd by a police officer and the resulting nationwide Black Lives Matter protests against systemic racism has impacted us all. I've been a peace officer for 25 years and what happened to George Floyd sickened and outraged me. As a white male who grew up in Marin County I cannot fully understand the racist experiences African Americans and other people of color face regularly in our society, but I know it is wrong. In the park setting I'm used to I have never had someone report me as suspicious because of my skin color or ethnicity, but I know this occurs. When I'm off-duty and out of uniform and I tell someone to put their dog on a leash in the park, I've never had that person then threaten to call the police and tell the dispatcher I'm threatening their life, which is exactly what happened to an African American birdwatcher in New York's Central Park the

same weekend George Floyd was murdered. Stories like these happen so often they can no longer be ignored.

As California becomes more ethnically diverse, we as park rangers need the tools to more effectively interact with visitors with different backgrounds, some of which may view law enforcement and authority figures with suspicion or distrust. A story I like to tell that reflects this occurred about six years ago when I was on foot patrol of a remote trail on Mount Tamalpais. I arrived at the top of a steep section of trail at about the same time as an African American male in his early to mid-20s. I could tell he was having a great time on this hike from his body language and facial expressions. We started talking and it was clear we both enjoyed the outdoors and hiking. About five or ten minutes later, his girlfriend, also African American, arrived at our location. When she saw me talking to her boyfriend I saw distrust and anger in her facial expressions and eyes. Perhaps from her point of view she saw a white law enforcement officer talking to a young black man and assumed I was profiling him, when in fact he and I were having a great conversation about the outdoors. I never had a chance to find out because shortly after she arrived, two women, who happened to be white, arrived at our location and they had a dog off leash. I had to make a law enforcement contact with them because there was a posted leash law. I wish I would have had a chance to talk longer with this African American couple because it could have been a chance to break down barriers and it was perhaps a missed opportunity to spark the idea of being a park ranger for the young man, who had an obvious love of the outdoors.

American has a complicated and at times shameful history of racial and ethnic injustice and some of our parks tell that story. When Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence and stated, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal," he also owned slaves. Over 180 years later, when Martin Luther King, Jr. stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and gave his "I Have a Dream" speech, he quoted The

Declaration of Independence with the hope we would all be equal someday. He knew our society was still working on that goal in 1963; and nearly 60 years later, we still are. When MLK gave his famous speech, he was guarded by a National Park Ranger, who later stated the speech “helped me realize that everyone in the world has certain inalienable rights.”

Parks like African Burial Ground National Monument, Angel Island State Park, Manzanar National Historic Site and Big Hole National Battlefield tell some of our most shameful stories in relations to race and ethnicity. Parks like China Camp State Park, Natchez National Historical Park and Yosemite National Park have stories of African and Chinese Americans when they faced overt and legally sanctioned racism. Other parks like Martin Luther King, Jr National Historical Park and Cesar E. Chavez National Monument recognize African and Hispanic Americans who led movements that bettered our society and brought us closer to the dream of us all being equal.

Does your park have a story to tell when it comes to race and ethnicity? My park has the story of Eldridge Grade, the first road to the top of Mount Tamalpais built by Chinese American workers in 1884, two years after the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed.

We must all work to ensure the dream that all men and women are equal. Recently, I’ve noticed more people of color coming to the park I work in, this I believe is partly due to the ongoing Shelter-in-Place and other COVID related orders which has resulted in record levels of visitation. Our parks are refuge from the stress of the ongoing pandemic. We should use this as an opportunity to make our parks and society more inclusive and strive for equal justice for all.

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# 2021 Conference Cancelled; Online Series is Being Planned



March 4, 2020

*We had no idea how lucky we were!*

Out of an abundance of caution, the Board of the Park Rangers Association of California has decided to cancel the 2021 California Parks Training Conference due to the ongoing COVID19 pandemic. In its place PRAC is planning to have an online speakers series for our members in late winter and early spring. If you have a suggestion for a speaker please contact Matt Cerkel by emailing [matt@calranger.org](mailto:matt@calranger.org) or using the button below.

**Have an idea for a speaker or topic?**

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Thanks for reading! Please [let us know](#) if you have ideas for what you would like to see in future issues of *The Signpost*.

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