

# FILM COMMENT

## Short Take: The Illinois Parables

(Deborah Stratman, USA, Anthology Film Archives run, Opening November 16)

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By Nick Pinkerton (/author/nick-pinkerton/) in the November/December 2016  
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By the numbers, Deborah Stratman's new experimental documentary *The Illinois Parables* runs about 60 minutes, comprising a dozen vignettes from the history of the territory which comprises the present-day Land of Lincoln, who doesn't figure at all in the film's idiosyncratic (though chronologically organized) timeline, stretching from 1400 to 1985. *The Illinois Parables*, however, does nothing by the numbers, constantly redefining its approach.

The early chapters are largely devoted to landscapes, including the Cahokia Mounds and the shores of the Mississippi where the Trail of Tears crossed. Shooting on 16mm, Stratman has produced one of the most quietly radiant movies of recent memory, working in the Midwestern palette of gray, green, and brown, relieved by the occasional snowfall. From these sections, which breathe in the aura at scenes of historical import in a manner that recalls the Straubs of *From the Clouds to the Resistance* or *Itinéraire de Jean Bricard*, Stratman moves on to other diverse techniques, incorporating archival footage and audio collage to revisit the devastation of the Tri-State Tornado, undertaking a reenactment of a reenactment of the death of Black Panther Fred Hampton at the hands of the FBI and Chicago police, and even seeming to sprout wings to view landscape sculptures by Michael Heizer from on high.

Threading the needle between the abstruse and the didactic, Stratman takes a cacophony of documents, murals, dioramas, testimonials, plaques, and other markers on the land, and locates strange harmonies among them.