

The Washington that you see today had its birth over two centuries ago in a rational yet visionary design unprecedented in its scale. The style of urban planning then current in Europe and the neoclassical design of the grounds for the Palace of Versailles influenced Pierre Charles L'Enfant's plan for the city and its core mall area. Brilliantly adapting those ideas to Washington's terrain, L'Enfant placed the Capitol on Jenkins Hill and the President's House on a lower terrace that then overlooked the Potomac River. Between them ran Pennsylvania Avenue, to symbolize the separate but connected branches of government. The spirit of that plan lives in the city still.

Present-day shoreline
Shoreline in Ellcott's 1792 plan
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1790

The result of a compromise between northern and southern interests, the Residence Act authorizes President Washington to choose a site for the Nation's Capital on the Potomac River. Andrew Ellcott, aided by Benjamin Baneker, surveys a 10-mile square that encompasses parts of Maryland and Virginia. The core of L'Enfant's 1791 plan is the triangle created

by the Capitol, White House, and Mall. The plan calls for grand avenues that radiate from many plazas. The White House cornerstone is laid October 13, 1792; it is the oldest federal structure in Washington.

1800

The Senate chamber of the Capitol, designed by Dr. William Thornton, is completed, and Congress moves from

Philadelphia to Washington. President John Adams and Abigail Adams move into the unfinished President's House. The House chamber is completed in 1807. A covered walkway links Senate and House chambers.

1810

Workers begin converting Tiber Creek into L'Enfant's planned canal. It follows what is now Constitution Ave-

nue, then turns in front of the Capitol.

1814

Benjamin Latrobe starts rebuilding the Capitol after its burning by the British in the War of 1812. By 1829, William Bulfinch completes the work, sheathing the dome designed by Thornton in copper.

1836

Robert Mills' winning design for a monument

to George Washington calls for a great obelisk with a colonnaded base. His Treasury building, begun the same year, obstructs the line-of-sight L'Enfant intended between the Capitol and White House.

1846

The portion of the District of Columbia that had been annexed from Virginia is restored to the Commonwealth.

1848

Construction begins on the Washington Monument. Sandy soil where L'Enfant had specified a monument prevents its siting at the exact intersection of the axes. Work slows after 1854 as the anti-foreign Know-Nothing Party seizes the monument to protest Pope Pius IX's contribution of a memorial stone. Rising sectionalism obstructs progress beyond 1858.

1851

Landscape architect Andrew Jackson Downing submits a plan for a national park on the Mall, calling for a series of natural gardens. Only his plan for the Smithsonian gardens is adopted, although the Department of Agriculture garden and other parts of the Mall reflect his influence. Downing's curving paths and varied foliage are quite different from L'Enfant's

geometric plan, in which imposing residences line a grand avenue—though L'Enfant's well-defined axes remain intact. Today, Constitution Gardens evokes the memory of Downing's plan.

1861

During the Civil War Washington is transformed from a quiet town into a thriving wartime capital. The population booms. In the decades after the

war the city's continuing vitality is evident in ambitious projects that bring new life to the National Mall area.

1872

The Washington City Canal is covered over. The Baltimore & Potomac Railroad builds a station on the Mall where the canal had run between 6th and 7th streets and lays tracks across the Mall. (The National Gallery

of Art now stands at the site of the station, which was demolished in 1907.)

1874

Frederick Law Olmsted's landscape plan for the Capitol calls for terraces that enhance the building's setting on Capitol Hill.

1878

Work resumes on the Washington Monument (dedicated 1885).

1884

Reclamation of the mudflats begins from the Washington Monument to today's Potomac shoreline, forming what are now East and West Potomac parks.

1902

The McMillan Commission proposes a reflecting pool west of the Washington Monument, a memorial to Lincoln, a major memorial south of the

Washington Monument, and a bridge between the memorial to Lincoln and Arlington National Cemetery. It suggests government buildings in the area between Pennsylvania Avenue and the National Mall (Federal Triangle). A goal is to restore the open, geometric quality L'Enfant planned for the Mall.

1932

Having used borrowed quarters for 143 years,

the Supreme Court moves to its own building.

1971

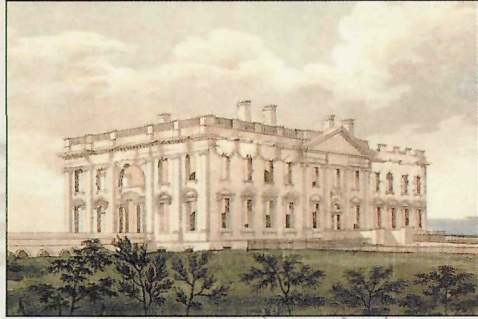
Constitution Gardens replaces the Mall's World War I era temporary structures, in time for the 1976 Bicentennial.

1998

The National Capital Planning Commission recommends developing North and South Capitol streets, and removing

railroad tracks and a freeway that divide the city. To reinforce the connection between the Capitol and the Anacostia River, the commission suggests improving the Anacostia waterfront and linking waterfront areas, from Georgetown to the National Arboretum.

1814



James Hoban designed the White House in the style of a 1700s manor house. As shown here, the British in 1814 re-

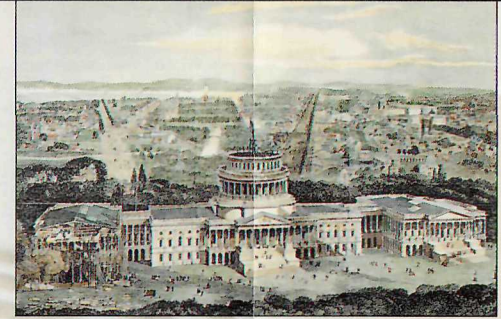
duced the building to a burned-out shell during the War of 1812. Under Hoban's direction it was rebuilt by 1817.

1848



The Capitol as it appeared with its early copper dome, before work on the extended wings and the current dome began in the 1850s.

1861



President Lincoln insisted that work on the new Capitol dome continue during the Civil War. It was completed in 1863. This view also shows the Washington

Canal, the Smithsonian building on the Mall, and the unfinished Washington Monument in the distance.

1902



Left: This painting is an update to the McMillan Commission Lincoln Memorial concept. It shows the proposed memorial to Lincoln and the bridge linking it to Arlington National Cemetery.

1998



Above: The plan for Washington, DC, in the 21st century as proposed by the National Capital Planning Commission, shows the Capitol as the focal point of the city. The plan links the Capitol to the

rest of the city and an improved riverfront via landscaped and revitalized streets. The plan builds on the legacy of the L'Enfant and McMillan Commission plans.

Planned as the seat of government, Washington, DC, is a young city that powerfully evokes the past, serves as a treasury of a nation's heritage, and provides a home to hundreds of thousands of people. The Nation's Capital can be seen from many perspectives, all of which are understood better after a visit to its heart—the National Mall area. The Mall's formal structures, ceremonial spaces, and carefully planned vistas have roots in earlier European capitals designed to showcase autocratic regimes. But these are, in Walt Whitman's words, democratic vistas, where the American people assemble to play, attend cultural events, or petition the government for change. In 1933 the stewardship of the National Mall area passed to the

National Park Service. Park rangers will help you get the most out of a visit, whether you see the Lincoln Memorial, ascend the Washington Monument, or just relax and enjoy the beauty of our national green.

In Washington, DC, you can view the magnificent buildings that house the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches of government—the White House, Capitol, and Supreme Court. Washington is also where the United States commemorates the men and women who served and sacrificed their lives during many of this nation's wars. Less well-known than some memorials but quite moving is the DC War Memorial on which are engraved

the names of local veterans who paid the ultimate price during World War I. Some of the nation's great presidents—those to whom the nation is indebted for their leadership during the republic's formative years or during later crises—are honored here: Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, Franklin D. Roosevelt. Smaller, quieter places like the Frederick Douglass National Historic Site and the Sewall-Belmont House commemorate the struggles waged for equality before the law. The National Archives, Smithsonian Institution, and National Gallery of Art stand here as repositories of things the nation holds significant because they are beautiful, rare, instructive, or because they help us remember.

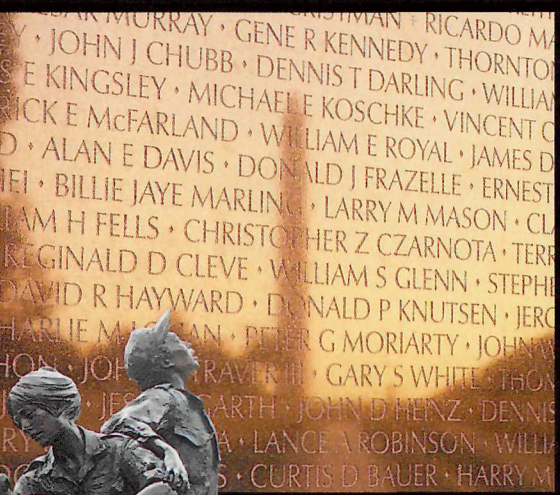
Architecturally the buildings and monuments of Washington, DC, are powerful, often handsome, sometimes controversial, but they are most important in what they say about us. We read in each the changing concerns, attitudes, and tastes of the culture that built them. Beyond the sites and structures, beyond the events and people they commemorate, are the truths they embody: justice, equality, courage, honor—the tools of a free society. Just as the National Mall is the symbolic heart of Washington, Washington is the symbolic center of the United States. This city celebrates our common heritage as well as the diverse culture that is our source of renewal; it is a place that defines us as a people.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE SITES
GEORGE WASHINGTON MEMORIAL PARKWAY: U.S. Marine Corps War Memorial; Arlington House, the Robert E. Lee Memorial; Netherlands Carillon; Theodore Roosevelt Memorial; Lyndon Baines Johnson Memorial Grove; Lady Bird Johnson Park.
CHESAPEAKE AND OHIO CANAL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK: Francis Scott Key Memorial; Old Stone House; Georgetown Waterfront Park.
ROCK CREEK PARK: Nature Center.
NATIONAL MALL AND MEMORIAL PARKS: Constitution Gardens; Lincoln Memorial; Vietnam Veterans Memorial; Korean War Veterans Memorial; Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial;

Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial; World War II Memorial; African American Civil War Memorial; Washington Monument; Thomas Jefferson Memorial; Old Post Office Tower; East Potomac Park; Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site; Ford's Theatre National Historic Site.
PRESIDENT'S PARK: The White House; White House Visitor Center; Ellipse.
NATIONAL CAPITAL PARKS-EAST: Mary McLeod Bethune Council House National Historic Site; Carter G. Woodson Home National Historic Site; Capitol Hill Parks; Anacostia Park; Frederick Douglass National Historic Site.



The White House, set within a national park, is the president's home and office. It is the center of the Executive Branch and the place where the president receives foreign dignitaries.



The Vietnam Women's Memorial (right).

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall lists the names of servicemen and women who died in the conflict or remain unaccounted for.

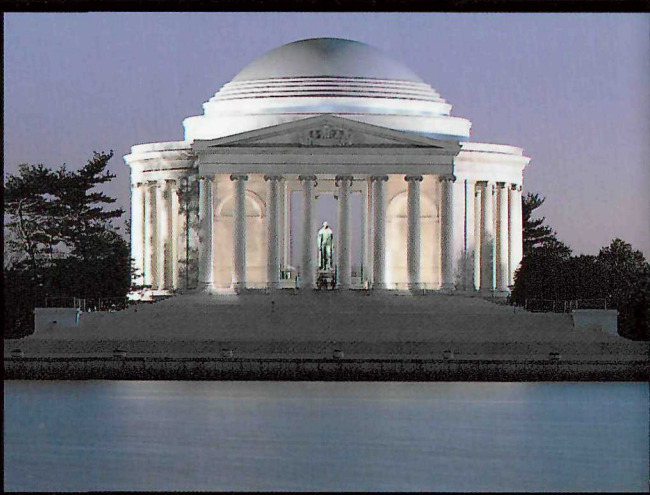


The Lincoln Memorial reflects the design of ancient Greek temples. To make the memorial an effective terminus to the National Mall, the

building was rotated 90°, placing the entrance on a long side. Within, the statue of Lincoln faces the Capitol.



The U.S. Marine Corps War Memorial depicts the moment when Marines raised the flag over Mount Suribachi on Iwo Jima during World War II.



Thomas Jefferson was influenced by classical models typified by the colonnaded, domed Pantheon in Rome—the inspiration for his Rotunda at the University of Virginia.

The design for the Thomas Jefferson Memorial echoes those structures.



The World War II Memorial honors 16 million Americans who served in uniform and the millions who supported the war effort at home. The Freedom

Wall's gold stars revere the 405,399 Americans who died in history's most devastating war.

Seeing the Nation's Capital

Days and Hours Open
Many sites are closed on Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. Sites may also close for renovation, or tours may be temporarily suspended.

Daily hours vary seasonally. Plan ahead—always check before you visit a site.

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