



Steps of a Nation

Washington D.C., a Historical Portrait



Washington Monument at sunset with lake reflections.



Lincoln Memorial at sunset provides a study in reflections.

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Cover: Detail of columns and marble steps at the Supreme Court.



Washington D.C.

Only a tiny slice of America's sprawling land mass, yet brimming with legend, history, and power, Washington, District of Columbia is the political heart of the country. Named after George Washington and Christopher Columbus, the enclave on the shores of the Potomac River reflects the influence on the nation's first president and spirit of adventure of its most famous explorer. Anchored by three neoclassical buildings representing America's levels of government, the US Capitol building, the White House, and the Supreme Court, some of the country's finest museums and galleries, and a stunning collection of monuments that play tribute to the county's past, Washington D.C. is a remarkable capital city. It's rise to prominence exhibits the strength and potential of a young, emerging nation. Washington, D.C. is a vibrant work in progress; it's offerings regularly updated and enhanced to reflect the country's history. A potent fusion of politics and culture that pays homage to the Country's past as it looks towards the future. (Philipson 7)

Left: Cherry blossoms framing the Washington Monument.

Right: Cherry blossoms framing the Jefferson Memorial.



The White House in Washington DC, is where the President of the United States of America lives.



Three Branches of Government

The Constitution created three separate branches of government. Each branch has its own powers and areas of influence. At the same time, the Constitution created a system of checks and balances that ensured no one branch would reign supreme. The three branches are: the Legislative Branch, housed in the United States Capitol Building, the Executive Branch, found in the White House on Pennsylvania Ave, and finally the Judicial Branch which can be located in the United States Supreme Court Building.

Left: The Capitol, located in Washington, DC, is the building in which the United States Congress meets. It is at the east end of the National Mall.

Right: The U.S. Supreme Court building in Washington DC was designed by Cass Gilbert and built from 1931 to 1935.

The White House

The Heart and power center of Washington, D.C., the White House sits prominently among the city's most important sites, the National Mall, the Federal Triangle, the Treasury Building, and Lafayette Square. Serving as the primary office of the President of the United States and home to his family, the neoclassical mansion at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue is undoubtedly America's most distinguished address. In a city where history, power and legend unite, the White House remains one of Washington, D.C.'s most enduring symbols. (Philipson 37)



Attracting thousands of visitors each day, the White House has served as the official home to the presidents since 1800. Although George Washington supervised its design and early construction, he was the only president not to inhabit its stately halls, passing away a year before its completion. (Blank 15)

Left: Picture of the back of the White House taken from the Washington Monument.

White House framed by cherry blossoms. The city's famous Cherry Trees, a gift from Japan in 1912, are mainly of the Yoshino variety. Thousands of tourists visit the area for the National Cherry Blossom Festival in March and April. (Nowitz 18)



George Washington laid the cornerstone of the Capitol on September 18, 1793, but work on the building continued for many decades to come. (Worck 10)

Capitol Building

Sitting atop Capitol Hill is perhaps the most majestic building in all of Washington D.C., the neoclassical United States Capitol Building. Visible from any point in the city, the lavish structure represents immense power: it houses the two legislative bodies of Congress, the Senate and the House of Representatives. The United States Capitol Building is not only the symbolic centerpiece of American politics, it also literally sits at the center of the country's capitol. Washington's quadrants radiate from the Capitol Building and its grounds, which span almost 300 acres, truly making it the center of Washington D.C. (Philipson 22)

Left: The U.S. Capitol in the morning reflecting off the water.

Right: The enormous fresco, "The Apotheosis of Washington," completed in 1865 by Italian artist Constantino Brumidi, caps the capital's 96-foot-diameter Rotunda. (Worck 10)



A close up of the front of the Supreme Court Building. Although in existence since 1789 the Supreme Court, charged with "judicial review" of all branches of government and government officials, did not have its own building until 1935. (Worek 78)

The Columns of the Supreme Court.

Right: US Supreme Court in Washington DC. It represents politics, power, government, justice, & human rights.



Supreme Court

Large Bronze doors make an impressive gateway into the Supreme Court. Inside the building, magnificent friezes illustrate the history of law and lawmakers throughout the ages. Representations of historical figures from Confucius and Moses to Charlemagne and King Louis IX of France grace the walls of the courtroom, along side a frieze depicting the Ten Commandments.

The highest judicial authority in America, the Supreme Court of the United States moved out of the Capitol Building in 1935 and into this distinguished building of it's own. With the court's motto "Equal Justice Under Law" etched into its facade, and the imposing stone figures of the Contemplation of Justice and the Guardian of Law flanking its steps, the Supreme Court of the United States' grandiose home reflects its power. (Philipson 9)





Opened in 2004 the National Museum of the American Indian is a strikingly handsome structure whose undulating sand-colored limestone walls distinguish it from the rest of the buildings along the Mall. (Worek 4)



Left: The Smithsonian American Art Museum is part of the Smithsonian Institution. It shares the Reynolds Center with the National Portrait Gallery.

Right: Reflection of the American Flag flying outside the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC.

Washington's Museums

In the bustling world of Washington DC, the only thing more hip than being a celebrity is being a history buff; DC may be the only place in the world where the high-school history nerds are now revered as the “cool kids.” Whether you’re looking to appreciate the incredible remnants of American culture or looking to increase your knowledge of the history of the world, Washington DC has a museum that caters to any yen. From the world-famous Smithsonian to the smaller, less-known galleries chronicling the roots of art in African American culture, the ways to immerse yourself in historical beauty are limitless. Even if you lived your entire life in Washington DC, you might still be surprised by the amount of street corner nooks and crannies where knowledge and appreciation are served on a silver platter. (Washington, DC Museums)



The International Spy Museum is the only public Museum in the United States dedicated solely to the art and adventure of espionage. Besides tools of the trade (both ancient and modern), biographies of famous spymasters and numerous audio-visual displays, the museum boasts interactive exhibits. (Worek 35)

Below: The ornate red brick building with intricately carved sandstone trim and distinctive slate 2nd Empire style mansard roof can't be missed and belongs to the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.



Known as the "Cast," this Norman-style red-sandstone building, dating from 1855, is the oldest on the Mall and the symbolic head of the Smithsonian Institution which comprises of 19 museums, nine research centers and a zoological park. (Worek 74)

Right: Picture of the front facade of the newly opened Newsium. Here you can see 80 newspaper front pages from around the world, enlarged and updated daily.





Designed by renowned architect I.M. Pei, the modern structure of the Washington's National Gallery of Art's East building houses the museum's extensive collection of modern and contemporary art. (Philipson 27)

Top: The Arts and Industries Building has a special role among Smithsonian buildings; it was the original home of the National Museum. It opened in 1881 in time for the inaugural ball of President James A. Garfield.

Bottom: The Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History opened the doors to this massive complex in 1910. Since this time, it has developed into a treasure trove containing everything from the Hope Diamond, to a half million dinosaur fossils, to a 24-foot-long giant squid. (Worck 77)

Curved roof feature in the National Museum of the American Indian.



The limestone walls of the Lincoln Memorial's inner chamber, surrounding Daniel Chester French's famous statue of the president, are inscribed with the Gettysburg Address and Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address. (Worek 27)

IN THIS TEMPLE
AS IN THE HEARTS OF THE PEOPLE
FOR WHOM HE SAVED THE UNION
THE MEMORY OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN
IS ENSHRINED FOREVER



Washington's Monuments & Memorials

Washington, DC is a city of monuments and memorials. They honor the generals, politicians, poets and statesmen who helped shape our great nation. Although the most famous monuments and memorials are on the National Mall, you will find statues and plaques on many street corners around the city. Since Washington, DC's monuments are spread out, it is hard to visit all of them on foot. The best way to see all the monuments is to take a sightseeing tour. Many of the monuments are open late at night and their illumination makes nighttime a memorable time to visit them. (Cooper)

The winged figure of Democracy in front of the United States Capitol.

Franklin Roosevelt, who greatly respected Thomas Jefferson, spearheaded an effort to build him a memorial. (Worek 29)



Fifty United States flags surround the Washington Monument, one for every state in the Union.

Inspired by Egyptian obelisks, the Washington Monument was begun in 1848 but wasn't completed until 1884. Construction on the monument was interrupted by the Civil War as well as funding problems. (Nowitz 78)



The Air Force Memorial is a national place of pride, reverence and remembrance located just outside the Nation's Capital, in Arlington, Virginia. It is dedicated to the Men and Women of the United States Air Force and its Heritage Organizations. The Memorial was given to the nation during its formal dedication on October 14, 2006.



The U.S. Marine Corps Memorial, commonly known as the Iwo Jima Memorial, is a massive bronze statue outside Arlington National Cemetery. Its design was inspired by Joe Rosenthal's famous photo, Raising of the Flag on Iwo Jima, and is dedicated to all personnel in the Marine Corps who have died in defense of their country. (Worek 37)

One of the most poignant sights in Washington DC is the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial, erected in 1982. Two black granite walls, inscribed with the names of the men and women who died in the Vietnam War, stretch into a V, one side pointing at the Washington Monument, the other at the Lincoln Memorial. (Worek 88)

Top: The Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial, dedicated in 1997 by President Bill Clinton, is found along the famous Cherry tree Walk on the western edge of the Tidal Basin. (Worek 22)

Bottom: The Ulysses S. Grant Memorial stands in front of the Capitol and includes the largest equestrian statue in the United States.

The National World War Two Memorial in Washington was dedicated in 2004 before a crowd of 15,000 people. Fifty-six 17-foot-tall granite pillars representing the states and territories flank a central plaza and Rainbow Pool. (Worek 91)





Washington Monument and the Kennedy Center at Night.

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