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Washington From The Ground Up



Synopsis

At the confluence of the Potomac and Anacostia rivers, President Washington chose a diamond-shaped site for the city that would bear his name, along with the burdens and blessings of democracy. Situated midway between North and South, the capital was also a gateway to the West--a contested wilderness where rough frontiersmen were already carving a divided nation. With Indians on their borders and black slaves in their midst, the country's white founders struggled to embody, in bricks and stone, the paradoxical republic they had invented. Inspired by Greek and Roman models, city planners and designers scoured the Western world--from Hadrian's Pantheon to Palladio's Vicenza to the French Royal Academy--for an architectural language to capture the elusive principles of liberty, equality, and union. *Washington from the Ground Up* tells the story of a nation whose Enlightenment ideals were tested in the fires of rebellion, removal, and resistance. It is also a tale of two cities: official Washington, whose stately neoclassical buildings expressed the government's power and global reach; and DC, whose minority communities, especially African Americans, lived in the shadows of poverty. Moving chronologically and geographically throughout the District, James McGregor reads this complex history from monuments and museums, libraries and churches, squares and neighborhoods that can still be seen today. His lucid narrative, accompanied by detailed maps and copious illustrations, doubles as a visitor's guide to this uniquely American city.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

For visitors to the White House, the Congress, the Senate, the Library of Congress, the National Mall and scores of other federal buildings, institutions and attractions, this guide brings to life the architecture of the capital, placing each piece in a historical perspective that is national in scope. The writing, crisp and direct, is enlivened with anecdotes about our rulers and their often unruly subjects who made history in these same buildings. (J. D. Brown and Margaret Backenheimer Chicago Tribune 2008-02-03) McGregor's story of our nation's capitol begins with George Washington's selection of the site in 1790 and then proceeds to chronicle the history of the federal city's construction. He discusses the competition to design the executive mansion, what he calls the burgeoning bureaucracy, and the creation of 130 acres for the president's grounds; the city's public walks and the development of its prestigious neighborhoods are also part of his purview...Also brought into the profile are the city's many libraries, churches, monuments, and museums; McGregor tells how they relate to the capitol's history. A solid, thoroughly researched book. (George Cohen Booklist 2007-09-15) James McGregor's *Washington from the Ground Up* is a fine undertaking, a concise account of the city that integrates geography, history, and design. "From the ground up," the author discusses Washington's terrain and topography as they relate to its urban development ... The chapter on Pierre L'Enfant and early Washington is especially good, and the chapter on the local and social history of Washington is outstanding. This is a book by a man who truly knows and loves Washington. (Richard Striner Weekly Standard 2008-06-16)

James H. S. McGregor is Professor and Head of the Department of Comparative Literature at the University of Georgia.

This is not your ordinary tourist guide. Granted you could use it to learn in depth much about our nation's capital. It is a history of the area. It contains information about designing the city and what the goals were in building it. It covers specific areas around Capitol Hill, the White House, and the expansion of federal buildings, green areas and the citizens of the District. There are many small colour illustrations, which give the reader a very good insight into details such as the carvings, leaves and flowers that were included in these structures. The inner workings of buildings such as the Capital are detailed, its history and the also the people who were involved in their construction and design. This is an all-encompassing book that even describes some of the private houses, the riots of the 60's, the effect of the Metro and various communities. There are maps to help you place where things are and a detailed index. This is a book for anyone fascinated by US history, architecture or city planning.

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