



Washington from the Ground Up

James H. S. McGregor

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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.

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