

# Heritage for the WORLD

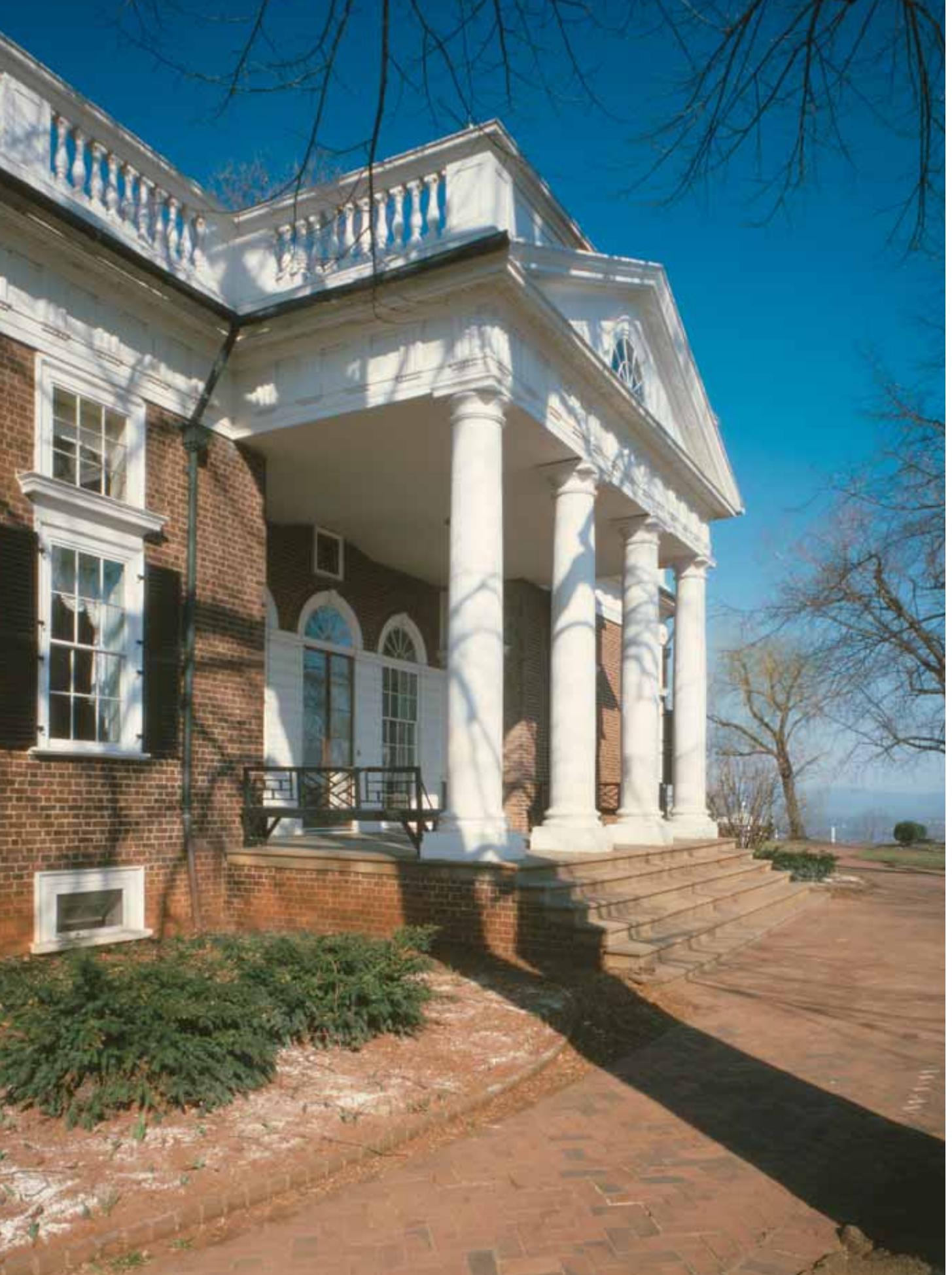
EXHIBITING THE EMBLEMS OF AMERICA BY JOE FLANAGAN

They are spectacular places, most of them instantly recognizable the world over. They are natural landmarks, human creations of exceptional beauty, places of inspiration, and memorials to enduring ideals. Their resonance is distinctly American: Yellowstone, the Everglades, the Statue of Liberty. Captured in photographs at the U.S. Department of the Interior Museum in Washington, DC, they are lit like precious art in an atmosphere of gravity and reverence, their significance so profound they have been enshrined as world heritage sites, places that transcend boundaries. That recognition, created under the auspices of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, just celebrated its 30th anniversary, the occasion for the exhibit, whose images are among those shown here with photographs from the National Park Service Historic American Buildings Survey. It is a distinction that has been bestowed on 878 places in 145 countries; 20 are in the United States, 17 are national parks.

**Right:** Among America's most recognizable symbols, the Statue of Liberty, shown during its 1980s restoration, one of the most successful partnership projects in the history of the National Park Service. The NPS Historic American Buildings Survey and Historic American Engineering Record have both played pivotal roles in documenting the site for posterity, with evocative large format photographs featured in a *Life* magazine special issue and state-of-the-art 3-D laser scans done with Texas Tech University.



JET LOWE/NPS/HAER



**NOT FAR FROM THE CRUDE TIDEWATER SETTLEMENT THAT SAW THE FIRST** stirrings of a nation, Thomas Jefferson's Monticello perches atop a hill in the Virginia Piedmont. Like many U.S. world heritage sites, it is an American icon, reflecting the founding father's restless intellect as he designed, altered, and refined it over the years. Together with the University of Virginia's historic core, which Jefferson also designed, Monticello embodied his influential ideals, its neoclassical architecture one of the tools he used to establish a utopian vision for civilization in the New World. The young republic, and the affinity for the classical so evident at Monticello, found its inspiration in the democratic ideals of ancient Greece. Today, it is a symbol that speaks to people everywhere.

The world heritage list was conceived in the 1960s in part to promote the American ideal of conservation. The international treaty that established the global landmarks, called the World Heritage Convention, was adopted by UNESCO in 1972. But the seeds of the movement can be traced to a seminal event in 1959, with the construction of Egypt's Aswan High Dam. The project was to flood the valley of the Abu Simbel temples, ancient relics of Egyptian civilization. UNESCO launched an international effort—at the request of Egypt and Sudan—to save them. Archeologists and preservation specialists from all over the world conducted emergency investigations and, with financial support from the international community, the temples were dismantled, moved to higher ground, and reconstructed.

In the late '50s, much of the world was in the throes of a postwar boom. In America, urban renewal was starting to lay waste to large swaths of historic cities. Preservation as we know it today was taking its first faltering steps, in the face of great odds. The rescue of Abu Simbel sowed the idea of human heritage as a legacy for the planet.

**SYMBOLIZING THE GRANDEUR OF THE AMERICAN WILDERNESS, YOSEMITE** occupies a privileged place among the crown jewels of American parks, drawing visitors from all over the world. Thousands of years ago, glaciers carved much of the landscape, exposing the underlying granite that accounts for much of its stunning beauty. The Yosemite Valley, a former lake bed once filled with glacial melt, is today an open expanse with flowering meadows and quintessential western vistas. Giant sequoia groves, lakes, and waterfalls are part of a 1,169-square-mile preserve, 95 percent of it designated wilderness. The valley was both a geographical and a cultural boundary between the Native Americans of California and the Great Basin, its history evidenced by

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over a thousand archeological sites documented by the National Park Service. Yosemite's world heritage designation points out that it is home to almost all of the environments found in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. For its biodiversity, its unparalleled beauty, and its native state, Yosemite is considered an heirloom for the world.

The same is true for the Grand Canyon, which interpreter Chuck Waller says gets a large number of tourists from the Far East, where world heritage status has more cache. "Even if they've seen movies or postcards, the Grand Canyon is more—in a whole variety of ways—than what they expected." That is evident when he overhears their comments, he says. "It humbles people, because of the vastness."

**Left: The portico of Monticello, Thomas Jefferson's laboratory of architecture and ideas. The founding father's home, set in the bucolic Virginia countryside, continues to inspire people around the globe. Above: The essence of American wilderness, Yosemite is a wonder to people around the globe.**

LEFT JACK BOUCHER/NPS/HABS, ABOVE STAN JORSTAD

**AMONG AMERICAN CULTURAL SITES, THERE ARE FEW THAT CARRY THE** metaphoric weight of Philadelphia's Independence Hall. The structure's relative modesty, in the Georgian style then in vogue, speaks of a young nation's lack of pretense. The style suits the hall's original intent as the capitol of the sleepy province of Pennsylvania. But today the world sees it as the epicenter of modern democracy, the setting for the drama of the American Revolution, synonymous with the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, and the U.S. Constitution. While its spire and symmetry suggest provincial efficiency, what happened inside ignited an eternal flame in the minds of people everywhere.

When the first world heritage sites were declared in the late 1970s, Independence Hall joined the pyramids of Giza, the palace and gardens at Versailles, and the Olduvai Gorge as sites that exceed the bounds of place and time. The World Heritage Committee, an independent body managed by UNESCO, selects the sites. Its 21 representatives—from the nations that have ratified the convention, advised by bodies such as the International Council on Monuments and Sites—define what constitutes the outstanding universal value of place.

The concept gained momentum in the wake of the Abu Simbel campaign. The idea of a "World Heritage Trust," discussed at a 1965 White House conference, continued to evolve through a series of meetings until a treaty—the World Heritage Convention—was forged. The United States was the first country to ratify it. By then, the idea had been shaped by the American experience with the national parks. The concept fused nature and culture, one often inte-

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heritage site in 1995, preserves the remnants of an inland sea that existed over 250 million years ago. The mountains were once part of a reef along the water's edge; today, fossils of snails, sponges, and other ocean life are abundant. The caverns, far below the Chihuahuan desert, are among the world's biggest and longest, with over a hundred in the park alone, their soft limestone eroded over millennia by water and naturally occurring sulfuric acid. This subterranean wonderland is an ecosystem unto itself, long the subject of research for its cornucopia of microorganisms, some with medical applications. The caverns are cultural, too, with a profusion of archeological sites and cave paintings

pointing to a human presence going back 12,000 years.

Sites like Carlsbad achieve international recognition only after submitting to "a very rigorous process" says Stephen Morris, chief of the National Park Service Office of International Affairs. Cultural candidates must be masterworks of human creativity or intelligence, places associated with the exchange of values and ideas, unique evidence of cultures that are endangered or have disappeared, important examples of architectural or technological development, or sites directly linked to historic events or ideas. Natural landmarks must express stages of the earth's history, be out-

gral to the other, as expressed in a UNESCO document: "For a long time, nature and culture were perceived as opposing elements in that man was supposed to conquer a hostile nature, while culture symbolizes spiritual values . . . The cultural identity of different peoples has been forged in the environment in which they live and frequently, the most beautiful man-made works owe part of their beauty to natural surroundings."

New Mexico's Guadalupe Mountains illustrate the idea. It is the last place one would think of a large body of water, but evidence of it is everywhere. Carlsbad Caverns National Park, inscribed as a world

**Above:** There are few places on earth like Carlsbad Caverns National Park, whose subterranean world was formed out of an ancient salt water reef. **Right:** Unassuming on the outside, a country was born within; Independence Hall is a universal symbol of democracy. This 1959 image, one of the first in color taken for the Historic American Buildings Survey, was photographed by illustrious lensman Jack Boucher at the start of his National Park Service career, which just came to a close with his retirement.

RIGHT JACK BOUCHER/NPS/HABS, ABOVE STAN JORSTAD







standing examples of ecological and biological processes, contain remarkable phenomena, or provide important habitat and diversity.

The recent candidate list illustrates a desire to broaden the reflection of the American experience, including places associated with the Civil Rights movement, the Wright Brothers' quest for flight, the ancient mound-building cultures, and buildings designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. This is in part to address what ICOMOS President Gustavo Araoz calls "an imbalance." He says that natural sites outnumber cultural by about three to one. "Natural sites," he says, "are felt by specialists to be somewhat finite. They have very specific categories—geological, biological, and so forth." The tendency is to check off a category once it is represented, like the perpetual lava of Hawaii Volcanoes National Park.

Cultural sites, such as San Juan National Historic Site, are not so easy to define. Sprawling across the rocky shore of Puerto Rico's north coast, the imposing medieval-looking edifice—a Spanish fortress that is over 400 years old—seems to have grown out of the turquoise waters like a reef. Seen from the air, its intent is obvious and sobering, a direct link with the complicated geopolitics of the 16th century. Both artifact and witness, the fort represents the European balance of power, the evolution of Caribbean culture, and the development of military technology. "Cultural sites are limitless," says Araoz. "We don't want to say there are x number of categories for them."

American involvement in the World Heritage Convention is officially handled by the Department of the Interior in cooperation with the State Department. The National Park Service provides technical and staff support. The U.S. committee of ICOMOS plays an advisory role upon request. The committee, made up of historic preservation organizations and individual specialists, promotes awareness and greater American participation in the convention. A federal interagency panel—with representatives from the National Park Service, the State Department, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Smithsonian, and others—also weighs in on issues.

The list's 30th anniversary marks a revitalization of U.S. participation, with a host of national parks nominated for inscription. The United States withdrew from UNESCO in the 1980s, but continued making nominations and sending delegates to meetings. In 2003, the United States renewed its commitment. Two years later, it was elected to the World Heritage Committee, which Morris describes as "very coveted." The recent election of Araoz as president of ICOMOS—the first American to hold the post—gives an additional boost to U.S. involvement. There is great excitement over the list of tentative sites, and 30th anniversary initiatives are bringing a new dynamism. Araoz points out the yet untapped potential of American cultural sites.

**Left: Detail of San Juan National Historic Site, an elaborate fort on the Puerto Rico coast that evokes the 16th-century Spanish empire. Below: Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, aglow with the geologic signature that earned its world heritage status.**

Among the stories he says could be shared are the history of the auto industry, space exploration, mining, and communications. "What has been suggested is to undertake a study of potential sites in every state—like the theme studies done by the U.S. National Historic Landmarks Program—to develop a thematic approach that will broadly represent our cultural heritage."



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There is great potential in what Araoz calls the “extraordinary” model of the national heritage area, where across entire swaths of America—from Louisiana’s Cane River to Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley—oral traditions, performing arts, and traditional knowledge and craftsmanship are celebrated and preserved along with the built legacy and the cultural landscape. “This is something we could take to an international level,” he says.

With the growth of global tourism, world heritage sites have soared in popularity, presenting a great opportunity. This sometimes has a price for both fragile sites and their communities. Many places simply do not have the infrastructure to accommodate tourists. The economic ramifications can be socially and environmentally disruptive.

The World Heritage Alliance, established by the United Nations Foundation and Expedia, “is trying to bring the tourist industry on board with the concept of world heritage and what it means,” says Morris. “But it is also trying to make some of the benefits of tourism available to communities so they’ll have a vested interest in preserv-

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National Park are part of a pilot program with the World Heritage Alliance in which the parks conduct focus groups and carry out training and outreach with the tourism industry. These efforts promote both the importance and the fragility of the sites, helping to spread the message to the ever-growing traveling public.

The architects of the World Heritage Convention may not have known how prescient their vision would be 30 years into the future. While technology has made the world smaller, its differences appear starker and more irreconcilable than ever, and crisis—political, economic, environmental—seems a natural feature of the international landscape.

The idea of a common history—the heritage of humanity itself—is unifying, ultimately healing, and as enduring as the places we honor.

For more information, visit the World Heritage web site at <http://whc.unesco.org/>. For more on the National Park Service and its work with world heritage, go to [www.nps.gov/oia/topics/worldheritage/worldheritage.htm](http://www.nps.gov/oia/topics/worldheritage/worldheritage.htm). The exhibit “World Heritage Sites in the USA: A Thirtieth Anniversary Celebration” is on display at the U.S. Department of the Interior Museum until February 6. For more information, contact Hunter Hollins at (202) 208-4659, email [hunter\\_hollins@nps.gov](mailto:hunter_hollins@nps.gov). A host of U.S. world heritage sites are featured in the National Park Service Teaching with Historic Places series of lesson plans, online at [www.nps.gov/history/nr/travel](http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/travel).

**Above: Among the royalty of American places, Yellowstone National Park has captured the imagination of the world. Right: The cliff dwellings of Mesa Verde National Park in southwestern Colorado, one of the most compelling artifacts of early America.**



ing the sites.” The Mesa Verde cliff dwellings, in southwest Colorado’s remote tablelands, embody both the problem and the promise. The sight of them, carved into the wall of a vast canyon at the end of a winding road over endless flatland, simply amazes. It amazed the two cowboys who happened on it in 1888, tracking lost cattle through the snow, and it renders visitors the world over speechless in any language. With its visual drama and 700 years of Native American life, Mesa Verde was the first American cultural site inscribed on the world heritage list. It also remains one of the most fragile.

“Geotourism”—responsible travel that protects sense of place while providing financial incentive for preservation—is the goal of a partnership among the National Park Service Office of International Affairs, the National Geographic Society, the U.N. Foundation, and Expedia. Through its promotional brochure, “12 Things to Know About Your World Heritage,” National Geographic promotes hiring local guides, patronizing local establishments, and respecting the environment. Expedia donates profits from trips booked through its website to the Friends of World Heritage Fund. Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, San Juan National Historic Site, and Everglades

