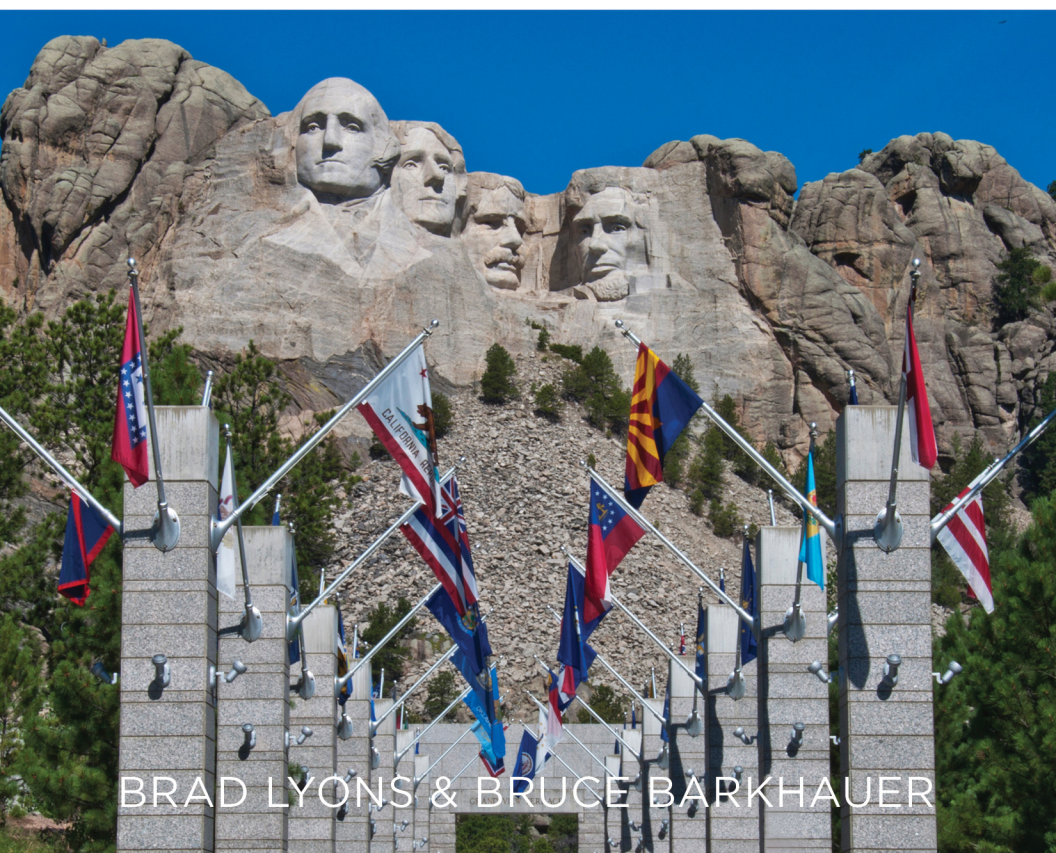




AMERICA'S SACRED SITES

50 FAITHFUL REFLECTIONS
ON OUR NATIONAL MONUMENTS
AND HISTORIC LANDMARKS



BRAD LYONS & BRUCE BARKHAUER

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**chalice
press**

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INTRODUCTION

We have all encountered a place where history happened—a place where something or someone started, was born, ended, or died. An event occurred here that changed the course of history. Perhaps it was something enormous, or perhaps it was more simply an observation that was exactly what that person needed *right then* to continue working on a challenge or an idea. Even if that event was long ago, if we're lucky when we visit that place something in us stirs, too, and makes us feel different—maybe a nervous excitement, a subdued dread, or a mind-freeing aha!—and we can feel that God is still working in that very place, years later.

In the United States, many of those important places have been set aside, protected by the National Park Service or its state and local counterparts specifically so that we can experience those moments when we let our guard down, have a heightened awareness, and hear God nudging us in a new direction.

Welcome to *America's Sacred Sites*. We invite you to dig into a National Park Service site from each of the fifty states. We hope you'll travel vicariously through this book and then take it along on your next adventure.

This is the second book through which we invite you to consider and reflect upon the connection between NPS sites and our faith. The first book, *America's Holy Ground*, focused on spaces identified as National Parks, often on the natural beauty and wonder of these places that this country has wisely preserved. National Parks are, by their nature, about nature. Only a few have a human-made centerpiece. Along the way, we offered insight into the history and cultures that embodied these remarkable locations, but it was the splendor and majesty of the spaces themselves that captured our imaginations and revealed something of the mystery of our Creator in our chosen themes for each space.

America's Sacred Sites is similar, but different. As we continue exploring the vast and varied array of places related to the National Park Service, our focus shifts to the significance of events at a particular location, rather than simply its God-given beauty. The scale changes from thousands of square miles containing rivers and mountains and bears and birds to places the size of a family home. The importance of the place, however, is not size, but the significance of what happened on or near that space.

The sacred and sometimes the profane are revealed not only in the earth's beauty but also in the events that shape a country and its people. Here, memory plays a role in calling us to recall, with celebration or mourning, the marks we have inscribed upon the time line of our nation's story. The events sometimes define us at our best and at our worst. The locations can inspire our idealism and testify to our grandest aspirations, or remind us who we have struggled to be, to remain, or to become.

To illustrate our intention, consider the stories in the biblical witness where a place is marked as special or sacred. In Genesis 12, when Abram enters Canaan, God having told him in a dream that he and his descendants will one day inhabit this land, Abram sets up a pile of stones—an altar—at the oak of Moreh. The place is to be remembered

Harpers Ferry, West Virginia



because something out of the ordinary happened there. In this case, it was the first concrete step of Abram living into the vision of what would become the biblical nation of Israel. Marking the place allows the history to live on beyond the individual or generation that experienced the event.

While different cultures might remember an event associated with a place or object, they may not share a common view of

what that memory means. Palestinians, for example, view Abraham's first footfall on the land of Canaan very differently than modern-day Israelis. Native Americans have come to view Christopher Columbus and the "discovery" of the New World very differently than do people of white, Anglo-European descent. These two perspectives, vastly different in almost every way, share the same moment in history and a spot on the map.

Sometimes the place and the event are so interwoven that they are synonymous. Golgotha seemingly cannot be separated from the crucifixion of Christ, just



North American porcupine (*erethizon dorsatum*), Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Park, 2016. North Dakota

Mosquito Lagoon at Canaveral National Seashore, Florida





Tripod Practice, Mount Rushmore in South Dakota

as the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, and the galvanization of the civil rights movement in the United States are inseparable.

Many of the places in this book can be interpreted in multiple ways. We are bound to have missed a few.

What piqued our interest was to reflect upon a place, a date, an event, or an object that engages not only our sense of being an American, but also of being a person of faith. How was God, how were God's people perceived as present—or perhaps absent—in what happened in this particular place and moment? Do certain events cause us to reflect more deeply upon our faith and how it calls us to be citizens in two worlds? How does following the God of the Abrahamic traditions invite us to think critically about our own history? How does such a call invite us to discover our better natures and our hope for realizing a fuller expression of our values and ideals—ideals with foundations in justice, equality, and the pursuit of individual happiness in communal relationships?

Not all of the places, events, objects, or dates mentioned in *America's Sacred Sites* demand a complex evaluation of our shared history. There are still places of wonder, such as Devils Tower National Monument and Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site. There are celebrations of achievement remembered in places like the Wright Brothers National Memorial, or Canaveral and its National Seashore. There are symbols that we share, like the Liberty Bell, the Statue of Liberty, and Mount Rushmore.

There are places that inspire us. New England's National Park Service units focus on artists. Nicodemus National Historic Site introduces us to African Americans who went west in hopes of finding a better

life after Emancipation. And the country's most-visited national park site, Golden Gate National Recreational Area, reminds us that we need to unwind every now and then.

But a faithful and faith-filled look at ourselves also requires that we visit sites that recall our country's hardest times, such as Harpers Ferry, the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail, and the Oklahoma City National Memorial. All of these places, symbols, and events, for both the courage and the violence exhibited there, make us who we are as Americans in the early twenty-first century.

What is most remarkable to us is that there is a place in every state of our union that has some significance in shaping us and our history. Consequently, there is a place near you right now where a visit can get you started on discovering more of America's holy ground. We wish you blessings and safe as well as amazing journeys as we remember that our memories of the past, well-tended, not only define who we are now, but can shape us into something even greater in our shared future.

Devils Tower, Wyoming





The Marin Headlands, Golden Gate Bridge, and San Francisco

GOLDEN GATE NATIONAL RECREATIONAL AREA

CALIFORNIA • 1972 • FUN

*There's a season for everything
and a time for every matter under the heavens . . .
a time for crying and a time for laughing,
a time for mourning and a time for dancing.*

—ECCLESIASTES 3:1,4 (CEB)

Where do you go to have fun? For millions of people each year, the answer is a national park site. But it may not be the particular national park that first springs to mind. It's not Great Smoky Mountains, the most visited of the sixty-one national parks, or the monuments in the nation's capital, but Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

More than fifteen million people visit Golden Gate each year. The metropolis around San Francisco Bay is the country's fifth largest metropolitan area with almost ten million residents, and it is a popular tourist city at home and abroad. With locations stretched over nearly sixty miles along the Pacific coast, the park can be a destination after a busy workday or part of an epic road trip.

Looking for a natural getaway from the fast-paced city? Muir Woods is the legendary home of old-growth coast redwoods, towering over trails that wind through a carpet of ferns and other plants that are part of a mammoth natural recycling factory. Reaching over 250 feet high, the redwoods here are around seven hundred years old, still young for a tree known to live more than two millennia. Or head for the beaches and feel the sand around your feet. From the Marin Headlands, take in the world-famous view of the city before you set out for Gerbode Valley's grasslands, wildflowers, and chaparral. If you want to stay in the city, Land's End provides sweeping views of both Golden Gates—the bay's

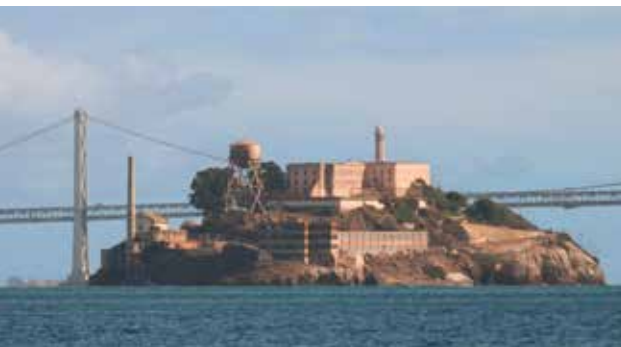


Beneath the redwoods in Muir Woods

and the inevitable jokes about locking up random tourists, but it's also a lesson in the civil rights movement. Tours recall the nineteen-month-long occupation of Alcatraz by Native American rights activists.

For budding scientists, the Marine Mammal Center and Bay Area Discovery Museum provide a new perspective on our surroundings and are kid friendly. Explore the airfield's successful restoration effort that resulted in many fish and bird species making their homes in the area, along with more than one hundred species of native plants.

And it's impossible to ignore the enormous red bridge at the



Alcatraz Island and the Bay Bridge

entry and the bridge that spans it.

How about history? Learn about the early Spanish settlers and see how the American military protected this vital port, from early territorial forts to a deactivated Cold War-era Nike anti-bomber missile. Fly a kite or work on your tan at Crissy Airfield, a key training site in the early days of aerial defense. A mile offshore sits one of the park's best-known landmarks—Alcatraz Island, the famous prison that imprisoned the most troublesome inmates in federal custody. A prison tour can be a fun diversion, including its tourist-trap aspects

center of the park, with its elegant lines and mind-boggling engineering. While it's not part of the park, the Golden Gate Bridge is still a magnificent, majestic masterpiece. It's hard to look away

from the landmark, and a trip to San Francisco doesn't feel complete until you've passed under its twin towers.

If any park can boast to have something for everyone, Golden Gate may be it. It claims thirty-seven different sites that sound like a complete vacation package.

However, we don't need to have the country's most popular park in our backyard to break up the routine of everyday life. It doesn't require a trip to San Francisco or a national park or even a local park. Catching a movie or a concert, cooking a favorite recipe or a new one, taking the long way home from work, chatting with a friend, playing with the dog—we have so many ways to take a break, get our minds off our troubles, and catch our breath. We humans are meant to have fun—alone or with others, friends and strangers alike. And we benefit from the new perspective to think about our faith, about the way we interact with each other, about the way we live our lives, and about what we believe.

What habits of yours could you change to have more fun? Who are the people in your life with whom you enjoy spending time, and why? What is on your list of things you still want to try or experience?

Wildflowers at Mori Point



KNIFE RIVER INDIAN VILLAGES NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

NORTH DAKOTA • 1974 • HOSPITALITY

Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.

—HEBREWS 13:2 (NIV)

Before airplanes arching across the azure skies could traverse the country in a few hours, before a grid of highways enabled us to cross the country in a few days, rivers were the quickest way to move to a new place. Native American settlements along the rivers were the first rest areas, places for travelers to find shelter, food, and human contact.

For hundreds of years, the Hidatsa lived at the confluence of the 2,300-mile-long Missouri River and its tributary, the Knife River, near the center of what we now call North Dakota. While many nomadic Native American tribes lived in *tipis*, the Hidatsa and their neighbors were farmers and traders, with no need to relocate regularly. They built permanent homes in settlements that exceeded a thousand residents. Today, the sites of three neighboring villages—Awatixa Xi'e, Awatixa, and Hidatsa Village—are preserved at Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site.

The original homes no longer exist, but a reconstruction helps visitors imagine what used to occupy the circular indentations in the ground where countless footsteps compacted the soil. Construction of the domes was overseen by a woman who knew the required engineering and the sacred vision for building what was both a home and a holy place. The domed homes were ten to fifteen feet tall and thirty to sixty feet in diameter, covered in grass held in place by a ring of timber. A square doorway led to a small corral that could hold a few horses. Around the circle's perimeter were beds for about twenty people, a sweat lodge, and

A reconstructed Hidatsa earth lodge





Recreating a family's life inside an earth lodge

a shrine where only the men who owned holy relics could intrude. Food was cached along the wall and in the floor. In the center of the lodge was a fireplace surrounded by reed mats. A place of honor, the *atuka*, was reserved for the

oldest man in the house but also for special visitors. Over the fireplace reached four pillars in which Hidatsa believed the spirit of the house lived; offerings of hide or cloth were often wrapped around the pillars.

For traders, location has always been key, and the Hidatsa had an optimal location. Their trade network spanned from Minnesota to the Pacific Coast and all the way to the Gulf Coast. Their primary commodities were furs, guns, and metals, but corn and other crops also passed through their marketplace.

The Hidatsas had their share of famous guests. The most well-known visitors were the members of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. During their stop at Awatixa in the winter of 1804–1805, they met the Shoshone teenager, Sacagawea, pregnant by her captor/husband and far from her homeland in the mountains. History records her as the woman who saved the expedition with the serendipitous encounter with her brother, guided the expedition through the Rockies, and traveled all the way to the Pacific Ocean. Other visitors included the artists George Catlin and Karl Bodmer, whose paintings of the Plains Indians' culture gave America their first tangible view of their neighbors.

The hospitality shown by the Hidatsa, though, nearly wiped them out. An 1837 smallpox epidemic, exacerbated by the trade business, killed half the villages' population. Accompanied by the neighboring Mandan and Arikara, the Hidatsas



Canoeing the Missouri River near Knife River

relocated north, further upstream. The lodges, meant to last about a decade, collapsed, leaving the ripples in the ground visitors see today.

The National Park Service has worked to restore the prairie to how it looked when the Hidatsa lived here, planting cottonwoods, green ash, American elm, box elders, and other native trees near the rivers, and mostly treeless grassy prairie above the valley. While restoring Knife River to its former glory is extremely unlikely, the park honors its former inhabitants while helping us wonder what we have lost in the American conquest of North America.

How much hospitality to show a stranger is a charged issue these days. We are comfortable helping some strangers but not others, and at times we're not exactly sure what compels us to make those choices. But over and over, our faith calls us to welcome the stranger regardless of how different the stranger may be.

When has somebody shown you unexpected or undeserved hospitality? When have you shown hospitality toward somebody else? How do you decide who deserves hospitality and who does not?

Prairie wildflowers





The Great Hall on Ellis Island

STATUE OF LIBERTY NATIONAL MONUMENT

NEW YORK • 1933 • ALIEN

*The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you;
you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt:
I am the Lord your God.*

—LEVITICUS 19:34 (NRSV)

If America has a front door, it must be New York harbor. Following the Immigration Act of 1882, it became the largest legal entry point into the United States. Prior to that, America had no restrictions on persons coming to find their freedom or fortune. The Immigration Act itself placed a “head tax” on persons seeking entry and required that they not be “a convict, lunatic, idiot, or person likely to become a public charge.” From 1892 to 1954, over twelve million immigrants passed through Ellis Island as they arrived in the United States.

Since 1886, “Liberty Enlightening the World” has stood as a silent sentinel welcoming to New York all who sought to make America their home. A gift from France celebrating both a long friendship between the countries and the abolition of slavery at the end of America’s Civil War, the “lady with the lamp”—better known as the Statue of Liberty—has become a *global* symbol of freedom and democracy.

Most people recognize her by her torch and crown, others by the book, cradled tightly with her left arm, inscribed with the date of the United States’ Declaration of Independence. For many, distinguishing this from all other landmarks is Emma Lazarus’s poem fixed to the pedestal with words in bronze that welcome the world’s “tired, poor, and huddled masses yearning to breathe free.”

It is a considerably smaller number of people, however, who recognize what Édouard de Laboulaye, French political thinker and



New arrivals at Ellis island

longer hold her in one place. Laboulaye's Liberty marches forth with the light of freedom into a waiting world that gives the right of self-determination for *every* human person.

Her creation was intended to be a constant beacon to freedom and a light against the dark enslavement of others, whether through ownership or political tyranny. In this regard, some say Liberty has failed. While the official yoke of slavery was broken with the Union's victory in the Civil War, the full weight of that promise has yet to be realized by persons of African descent some 150 years later.

The openly Jim Crow South and the more covert but equaling crippling red-lined districts of the North kept the full experience of liberty from these Americans through the middle of the twentieth

Immigrants made their petition to come into America and her promise in the hearing room.



abolitionist who first envisioned her, likely had in mind with her design. The copper colossus's special feature, mostly hidden beneath her flowing robe, is a *broken* chain. Lady Liberty does not stand still, but rather walks in full stride because the shackles fastened to her ankles can no

longer hold her in one place. Laboulaye's Liberty marches forth with the light of freedom into a waiting world that gives the right of self-determination for *every* human person.

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century. Now, in the early twenty-first century, we have come

to realize that systemic oppression of *all* minority groups is built into the very structures we have created to govern and administer our lives as a nation. In recent years, there has been increased movement toward building walls rather than creating doors for people

to become a part of a great experiment that the Statue of Liberty represents—especially among the disadvantaged and the nonwhite global population. This is not new; we have placed such barriers before on groups seen as “less than desirable,” forgetting that every one of us who isn’t Native American has come from someplace else.

To our own detriment we overlook that some of the greatest scientists, scholars, philosophers, artists, athletes, and inventors came to this country as immigrants with little more than the clothes on their backs. They enriched our lives by deepening the color palette from which we paint the story of our nation, adding to, rather than subtracting from, the resources we use to create our future.

At times, the lady in New York harbor represents more of a romantic ideal than an ever-present and deeply lived value. Yet she calls us still to be more than we are and to reach for what we, in our best moments, most want—to welcome others as we ourselves have been welcomed, to work for the freedom of others as hard as we work to preserve our own.

When have you experienced being a stranger? What does it mean to be welcomed? How do you balance your citizenship in a nation and your citizenship in the Realm of God?



Lady Liberty at nightfall

The feet of Liberty, chains broken, walking into freedom

