

THE NATIONAL MALL Stage For Our Democracy

When You Set Foot On The National Mall, The Founding Fathers Speak To You.



When you set foot on the National Mall, the Founding Fathers speak to you. From their marble monuments, and across the centuries, they tell of the ideals that gave birth to our government “of the people, by the people, for the people...”

Whether you are here to celebrate, petition, relax in the beautiful setting, or to reflect, you are part of a long tradition of our democracy in action.

The First Century Mall

In 1791, President George Washington chose Pierre L’Enfant—soldier, architect and engineer—to plan the new capital. The Mall was to be the symbolic heart of the city and the newly founded nation. L’Enfant called the Mall “public walks” and a “place of general resort” lined by theaters, academies, foreign chanceries, and “all such sort of places as may be attractive to the learned and afford diversion...”

By the mid-nineteenth century, you could have explored the new Smithsonian “Castle,” marveled at animals in the zoo, and meandered through paths of romantic gardens on the Mall. During the Civil War, you could have chatted with soldiers encamped there. Later, you might have even boarded a train for Richmond or Baltimore.

But there were serious problems. Where L’Enfant saw a grand public space with promenades along refreshing pools, the Mall had instead become fragmented by chaotic, congested development. Industrial smoke was belching in the shadow of the Capitol. Unhealthy, malarial marshes stretched beyond the Washington Monument.

Meanwhile, the capital city was growing dramatically, as was the



nation. Sites were needed for new memorials, public buildings, and parkland.

The Second Century Mall

In 1901 Congress established the McMillan Commission to renew L’Enfant’s vision.

The McMillan Plan proposed a great formal public park in the spirit of Versailles and the Tuileries in Paris. It more than doubled the size of the Mall to the west and south on landfill dredged from the Potomac by the Army Corps of Engineers, giving us the Tidal Basin and sites for the Lincoln and Jefferson Memorials, as well as an expanded plan for the future of the Mall.

The McMillan Plan guided development for over seventy years. The clutter east of the Washington Monument gave way to the open green promenade lined with Smithsonian museums and the National Gallery of Art. With the removal of World War I and II “temporary” buildings along the

Lincoln Memorial’s Reflecting Pool in the early 1970s, the majestic Mall finally emerged as America’s premier civic public space.

But the National Mall developed as more than a public open space. It became a great stage for expression of our democratic ideals.

In 1894, for the first time, ordinary citizens organized a “march on Washington” to petition their elected leaders directly. “Coxey’s Army” of unemployed workers converged on the Capitol seeking relief from a severe economic depression. In 1913, the Suffragists’ demand for women’s rights proved that Washington demonstrations could be dramatic, dignified, and effective. Nineteen years later, “Bonus March” veterans called on Congress to honor its promise of a bonus for their service in World War I.

The Mall also became the nation’s world-renowned site for declaring and demonstrating that all Americans are entitled to equal rights. In 1939

- 1 - Suffragists Parade on Pennsylvania Avenue, 1913
- 2 - Children with sailboats at the Reflecting Pool, 1920s
- 3 - Bonus veterans at the U.S. Capitol, Bonus March, 1932
- 4 - Marian Anderson on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, Easter Sunday, 1939
- 5 - Reflecting Pool with Navy temporary buildings, 1945
- 6 - Martin Luther King Jr. on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, 1963
- 7 - Inauguration of Ronald Reagan on the west front of the U.S. Capitol, January 20, 1981



African-American opera singer Marian Anderson, denied access to Constitution Hall because of her race, sang “My Country, ’Tis Of Thee” on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. A quarter century later, on those same steps, Martin Luther King Jr. proclaimed. “I have a dream...,” invoking the words of the Founders enshrined nearby.

The Mall had become democracy’s stage. Millions of Americans come each year to protest, petition, honor, as well as to celebrate and enjoy our nation’s heritage. The world has seen: glorious July 4th fireworks, the Farmers’ Protest, the AIDS Quilt, anti-war demonstrations, a grand Bicentennial celebration, the Million Man March, Annual Folklife and Kite Festivals, Presidential Inaugurations, Memorial Day concerts, and more.

Toward the end of the 20th century, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial triggered a new era of memorial building: the Korean War Veterans Memorial, the FDR Memorial, and the new World War II Memorial.

These memorials put more pressure on the Mall’s symbolic, but shrinking, open space. In 2003, Congress imposed a moratorium on future memorials and visitors centers, declaring the Mall “a substantially completed work of civic art.” But Congress had already authorized additional memorials and structures: the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial

THE MALL TODAY

Security concerns have changed the Mall. Access is limited and beautiful vistas are interrupted by security barriers and construction fences. Visitors to public buildings are required to undergo security screening. More construction lies ahead, as permanent security barriers are put in place around museums and memorials.



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and the Black Revolutionary War Patriots Memorial. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Visitor Center and the proposed Museum of African-American History and Culture may follow. Where will they go?

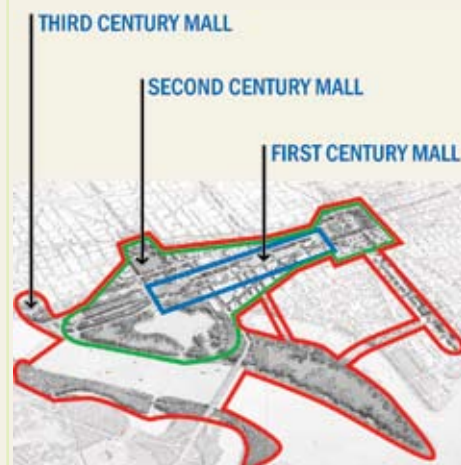
The moratorium is a promise that will be very difficult to keep. There can be no moratorium on history. Future generations will want their place “on the Mall.”

What, then, is the future of the National Mall?

The **National Coalition to Save Our Mall**, a collaboration of citizens dedicated to safeguarding the integrity and meaning of the Mall, believes that history holds the answer:

The time has come for the Mall to expand again, as it did with the McMillan Plan a century ago, to provide space for the full expression of our evolving democracy. The next major memorial or museum could launch this new expansion...a grand THIRD CENTURY MALL.

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THE NATIONAL MALL
 Stage For Our Democracy



This map/historical guide to the National Mall is a public service of the **National Coalition to Save Our Mall**, a non-profit 501(c)(3) citizens organization working to safeguard and enhance the National Mall as a symbol of American founding ideals and stage for our evolving Democracy. Your tax-deductible contribution helps Save Our Mall.

National Coalition to Save Our Mall
 www.nationalmall.net
 www.savethemall.org
 P.O. Box 4709
 Rockville, MD 20849
 Toll Free 1-800-618-3166

For further information about museums and monuments: Smithsonian 202-633-1000
 National Park Service 202-426-6841