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Washington, D.C.

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WASHINGTON, D.C.

BY MARK CALEB SMITH



Washington, D.C., like any great city, can be experienced in a few days. You may not unearth every treasure, but you'll discover plenty of jewels if you plan carefully. And you'll also see the faith of our nation's founders in small and large ways throughout.

The National Mall is a required destination. The massive green space connects the United States Capitol to the Washington Monument, and just beyond that, you will see the Reflecting Pool and the Lincoln Memorial. Smithsonian Museums (American History, Natural History, Air and Space, Museum of the American Indian, and the Museum of African American History and Culture) surround the Mall. You will also find the United States Botanic Garden, the National Gallery of Art, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and the Museum of the Bible in the same area. You can spend an hour or a day in each of these spaces, depending on your family's patience and interest.

The Lincoln Memorial is most powerful after dusk. Lincoln's towering presence must be experienced. Take a few moments to read the walls, where you will see the 16th president's most famous words. Note on the north wall his second inaugural address, in which he clearly and repeatedly mentions the providence and plans of God, stating, "The Almighty has His own purposes" and "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether," quoting Psalm 19:9.

If you take the 87, or "four score and seven," steps from Lincoln's chamber to the Reflecting Pool, you will notice the Korean War Memorial on your right and the Vietnam Veterans

Memorial on your left. Straight ahead, in the distance, is the World War II Memorial. The fluid, yet perfectly still, portrayals of Korean War veterans haunt the night. The names of the dead from Vietnam overwhelm even casual observers. At the World War II Memorial, note the 4,048 gold stars, one for every 100 American military deaths. These sacred grounds only barely communicate the sacrifices of those who died so that we might live in a land of peace and freedom.

History reveals our past to explain our present and show us a glimpse of the future.

Every family should schedule tours of the U.S. Capitol, the White House, and the Supreme Court Building. The Capitol Rotunda is magnificent. Pay close attention to the artwork, especially the Baptism of Pocahontas and the Embarkation of the Pilgrims. Look up to see the Apotheosis of Washington. The White House is smaller than you think, but fascinating, especially for those who enjoy early American furniture and learning more about our presidents and their families. The Supreme Court's exterior is just as impressive as its interior. The east side of the building shows some of civilization's great lawgivers, including Moses.

History reveals our past to explain our present and show us a glimpse of the future. It also reminds us of the people of faith who have shaped the nation. Every American should visit Washington, D.C., the city where our history lives.

Mark Caleb Smith is Professor of Political Science and Director of the Center for Political Studies. He earned his Ph.D. in political science from the University of Georgia.