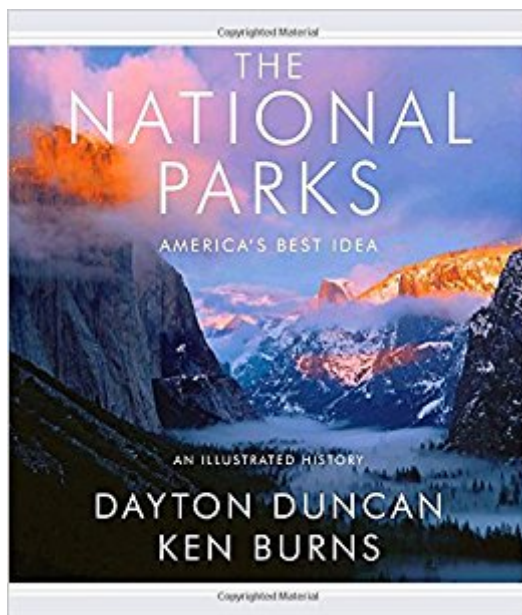


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The National Parks: America's Best Idea



Synopsis

The companion volume to the twelve-hour PBS series from the acclaimed filmmaker behind *The Civil War*, *Baseball*, and *The War*, *America's national parks* spring from an idea as radical as the Declaration of Independence: that the nation's most magnificent and sacred places should be preserved, not for royalty or the rich, but for everyone. In this evocative and lavishly illustrated narrative, Ken Burns and Dayton Duncan delve into the history of the park idea, from the first sighting by white men in 1851 of the valley that would become Yosemite and the creation of the world's first national park at Yellowstone in 1872, through the most recent additions to a system that now encompasses nearly four hundred sites and 84 million acres. The authors recount the adventures, mythmaking, and intense political battles behind the evolution of the park system, and the enduring ideals that fostered its growth. They capture the importance and splendors of the individual parks: from Haleakala in Hawaii to Acadia in Maine, from Denali in Alaska to the Everglades in Florida, from Glacier in Montana to Big Bend in Texas. And they introduce us to a diverse cast of compelling characters—both unsung heroes and famous figures such as John Muir, Theodore Roosevelt, and Ansel Adams—who have been transformed by these special places and committed themselves to saving them from destruction so that the rest of us could be transformed as well. *The National Parks* is a glorious celebration of an essential expression of American democracy.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Exclusive: Joseph J. Ellis Reviews *The National Parks* Educated at the College of William and Mary and Yale University, Joseph J. Ellis is a Ford Foundation Professor of History at Mount Holyoke College. His *Founding Brothers* won the Pulitzer Prize in 2001, and *American Sphinx* earned the 1997 National Book Award. His latest work, *American Creation*, was published in 2007. Read Ellis's exclusive guest review of *The National Parks: America's Best Idea*: If Ken Burns's upcoming documentary film on America's National Parks is as good as the book laying open before me, he has another huge winner. Of course the book, entitled *The National Parks: America's Best Idea*, is intended as a companion to the film, but as I see it--literally--the book permits the eye and mind to linger over the truly breathtaking pictures in a more meditative way that film does not allow. The result is almost elegiac, producing the same kind of goose bumps that Burns created in his early work on the Brooklyn Bridge and the Civil War. Burns has been chronicling the American experience for over thirty years, and I think it's fair to say that no one has influenced more living Americans to think about our history as a people and a nation. His dominant themes have been space and race, his persistent question deceptively simple: who are we? I think *The National Parks* is his masterpiece on the space theme. And the message that kept whispering to me in these pages was that whoever we are has been decisively shaped by the sheer physicality of the continent we inhabit. It never occurred to me before, but Americans invented the idea institutionalized in our National Parks. Namely, as Burns puts it in the introduction, "for the first time in human history, land--great sections of our natural landscape--was set aside, not for kings or noblemen or the very rich, but for everyone, for all time." As Wallace Stegner once observed, and the book's subtitle echoes, this may have been "America's best idea." Burns links the idea to Jefferson's magic words in the Declaration of Independence (i.e. "We hold these truths..."), our quasi-sacred text on human freedom, which takes on an almost spiritual resonance amidst the vistas of Yosemite or Yellowstone. Dayton Duncan, Burns's longtime colleague, has provided most of the text, which is designed to cast a spell that matches the wonder of the stunning illustrations. The book looks luxurious and feels expensive, but this visit to the National Parks is a great deal.--Joseph J. Ellis (Photo © Jim Gipe) [Look Inside The National Parks](#) [Click on thumbnails for larger images](#)

Starred Review. Duncan and Burns, who last teamed on *Horatio's Drive: America's First Road Trip*, rejoin in this visually stunning guide to the unforgettable landscapes and fascinating history of America's national parks. A companion to the documentary miniseries, this book provides not only

an armchair tour of the parks but lessons in American history and biography, as Duncan and Burns attempt to answer the question, "Who are we?" through the foundation and legacy of American conservation. From Yellowstone, the first national park, to Acadia to the Everglades, readers will learn the origins of many of the parks, monuments, and historic areas across the U.S., illustrated with more than a century's worth of photographs. A recurring theme throughout history has been the value and purpose of conservation and beauty, versus utility and tourism, and the story of the parks brings it into brilliant focus; readers will meet characters like John Muir, Horace Albright, Stephen Mather, Adolph Murie, and others who helped create the existing park system (with no shortage of attention paid to Theodore Roosevelt). Likely to inspire adventure-seekers of all generations, this broad, deep, evocative survey is just the kind of volume readers have come to expect from filmmaker and cultural historian Burns.

This book is full of breathtaking images, making it the perfect coffee table book for anyone who enjoys exploring our beautiful country and its national parks.

great

Great!

I am glad I bought this book. And thankful that certain wise American leaders in our past had the wisdom and will to establish National Parks for generations to come. This book, I think, is more a picture book than one to read for the history it contains. But in all respects it is very solid, very informative. Glad I bought it.

We were given this book as a gift and are now getting it to give to a family member as a gift. Very interesting. We used our copy to help us plan future camping trips to Nat'l Parks.

This presentation is more than 5 stars !!! Me and others do hope the TV presentation will be shown again. The book...I had to have it ! This edition will be in our family forever !

Gave it as a Christmas gift to a cousin who is traveling this year to western national parks. He has almost completed the book & loves it!

Great books with wonderful visuals along with well written passages. Bought it as a gift for my boyfriend and he loved it!

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