Pilgrimage

In the summer of 1951, Ralph and Jean Gray and their three children, Judith (age eleven), Mary Ellen (nine), and William (five) took a family vacation along the Lincoln National Memorial Highway. In his article for *National Geographic*, Ralph Gray called their trip a “pilgrimage” to Lincoln shrines. By tracing Lincoln’s migration route from his Kentucky birthplace through Indiana and Illinois, they hoped to teach their children about a man who for their family had “long been a hero and model.” So they loaded their car with suitcases, camping equipment, cameras, and film. What did not fit went into a wooden box, fondly called “the attic,” strapped to the top of the car. It was no easy trip. Like the ancient journeys of pilgrims to sacred sites who faced formidable challenges to reach their goal, the Grays faced modern obstacles on their road trip: “On its 425 mile length we bounded over rough trails that couldn’t have been much improved since the Lincolns passed; we raised atomic-size dust clouds on gravel roads; we sloshed through fords and along flooded lanes.” In the decades after World War II, families like the Grays were pilgrims to historic sites and national landmarks, consuming the American landscape while tutoring their children in the history of their nation. Heritage travel boomed in the decades following World War II as Americans visited the authentic sites of historic events, presidents, and patriots.

Since its beginnings, tourism in America has been bound up in ideas of national identity, from the sacred spaces of the landscape like Niagara Falls to the grandeur of Yosemite Valley. In the early twentieth century, travel promoters (both private and state) tapped into
feelings of national identity to sell tourism in the “See America First” movement. What sets the postwar period apart is the increased scale of heritage travel. The linkage of education, democratic values, and travel reassured Americans of their superiority as they dealt with the insecurity of cold war politics. War veterans toured the United States as an affirmation of their own values and as a means of passing them on to their children. Travel to historic sites nurtured a commitment to the nation for which they had fought.

Visitors were searching for an affirmative national history better labeled as heritage, a selective remembering of what is “attractive or flattering” and ignoring all the rest. Historian Michael Kammen argues that the end of World War II “brought a pronounced sense of discontinuity between past and present,” and Americans sought a “sense of continuity” by visiting historic sites and museums. About 49 million persons visited historic sites in the United States in 1954, and they could choose from about 1,000 historic restorations. Annual attendance surged 20 to 30 percent at historic sites and national parks until 1976, when it began to decline.

We can label these travels pilgrimages because the destination is a special place, a place that has become set apart or “sacred.” By going to those places, whether Washington, D.C., or a religious shrine, tourists strengthened their sense of national or religious identity. Central to pilgrimage tourism is the quest for authenticity, to see the actual site of a historic event, the same monument visited by all Americans, or the very spot a miracle took place. In that way, tourists can better imagine themselves as part of a larger community or can travel backward in time, to imagine that they too were a part of history. They sought no ordinary history but instead pursued a grand narrative of national greatness, or for African Americans, equality in a time when Washington, D.C., tourist homes turned them away. Parents who wanted their children to consider their citizenship, whether full or partial, took their children on pilgrimages to the sacred places of America. In the process, they strengthened their own sense of national ideals and reinforced their commitment to a nation with equal justice for all.

Maps and guides facilitated civic pilgrimage by guiding travelers to national landmarks and historic sites in a landscape prepackaged for the traveling consumer. Map publishers, states, and automobile touring associations designed their products to appeal to the family on vacation, both by depicting families on maps and by mapping routes and listing sites that would most appeal to parents traveling with children. Maps and guides in hand, families set off on cross-country tours of historic sites or
took their children to Washington, D.C., where children experienced a pilgrimage that did not always seem sacred.

**Mapping America**

Stories like Ralph Gray’s travelogue in *National Geographic Magazine* inspired countless family vacations to American destinations. The magazine, which published many articles about travel destinations, was immensely popular and instrumental in shaping American views of the world. The National Geographic Society was at the forefront of educating Americans; the society had over a million members in 1940, and in 1950 it printed 1.9 million copies of each map it created. Americans subscribed to the magazine to satisfy their hunger for maps, for two-dimensional depictions of the world that imposed order through patterns and symbols and lines. Traveler-consumers needed instructions on where to go and how to get there (and back), and maps and guides provided geographic information that made the family road trip possible.⁵

While *National Geographic* made geography popular among all classes of Americans, the Rand McNally Corporation helped meet demand by publishing maps. Rand McNally was among the three large oil company map publishers, which also included General Drafting and the H. M. Gousha Company, which was begun by a group of cartographers who had left Rand McNally in 1926. Although H. M. Gousha would become the largest producer of oil company maps, Rand McNally had the most distinguished publishing history, having been in the map printing business since the middle of the nineteenth century. Its influence was extended in the 1920s when, long before the federal government created a national highway system, Rand McNally devised a standardized highway marking system and installed markers on roads throughout the country. In addition to printing oil company maps, Rand McNally printed its first national road atlas in 1924 and has produced one annually ever since.⁶

Road maps were an essential tool in directing family vacation travel, and their images and organization shaped travelers’ perceptions of the American landscape. Vacationers depended on Rand McNally products, both their commercial atlases and the maps produced for free distribution by gasoline service stations. In a time of heightened international insecurity and fear of communism, Rand McNally maps and guides shaped Americans’ notions of national identity. By facilitating travel to historic sites and cultivating an appreciation for the distinctiveness of America’s regions, Rand McNally boosted patriotic commitment to a modern,
atomic-age America. Maps helped alter travel habits from the adventure of local discovery to through travel on interstate highways systems, resulting in a transcontinental view of the nation.\textsuperscript{7}

Atlases organized the national space into states and regions in formulations that changed over time. Rand McNally’s 1949 \textit{Cosmopolitan Atlas}, which transformed cartographic views of the world (such as a map of the world from the perspective of the North Pole) to emphasize global interdependence, sold out within a month. Maps and atlases presented a consumable America, what James Akerman calls a “national motorized space.”\textsuperscript{8} Road maps (whether bound into atlases or flat maps) were an essential tool in directing family vacation travel, and their images and organization shaped travelers’ perceptions of the American landscape.

Free oil company road maps quickly became a staple of oil company marketing in the twentieth century. The road map’s popularity can in part be attributed to the fact that it was free to consumers, but it was also attractive, useful, and contained the latest information on roads. Historians of the road map agree that by the 1930s, oil company road maps “had been brought to near-perfect harmony with the needs of the motoring public.” Oil company maps were designed to promote travel to increase consumption of oil company products. In addition to handing out maps, oil companies formed internal travel bureaus to assist their customers. For example, Conoco provided Touraide guides to its customers, assembling custom guides (as many as 4,000 per day) from preprinted pages of maps. Conoco advertised its Touraides in national magazines like \textit{Life}, with claims that “Now . . . there’s a travel bureau in every Conoco station.”\textsuperscript{9}

The sites and routes on the map were continually changing, with extensive revisions in 1946, 1957, and in the late 1960s. Although technological improvements in mapping and printing obviously accounted for some changes, because maps were based on the U.S. Geological Survey maps, new surveys were instrumental in suggesting changes in the map’s content. Map companies also relied on states for information about changes in roads or what sites to feature on their maps.\textsuperscript{10}

The announcement of federal aid to the interstate highway system in 1956 further transformed the road map, which began to feature abstracted images of cloverleaf exits and entrances, or vistas of freeways cutting straight through the countryside. Ironically, the interstate highway system also made maps less necessary because travel between destinations was as simple as finding the freeway entrance and exit ramps. For example, maps of Wyoming erased local sites, like the site of the first Holy Mass offered by Father DeSmet, or the site of the Burnt Wagon Train near Glendo.
Such erasures made the state look more empty. Fewer secondary roads were mapped, so they effectively disappeared for travelers. The 1977 map showed only eleven points of interest and focused almost exclusively on Yellowstone, featured in an inset map with the Grand Tetons. Mapped travel routes became less adventurous and focused more on planned destinations than serendipitous discovery of roadside features.¹¹

Service station map distribution reached its peak of 250 million in 1972, but as a result of intense competition from the Arab oil embargo, by 1980 gas stations found they no longer needed maps to attract motorists.¹² The end of free oil company maps made travelers more dependent on two other sources: the American Automobile Association (AAA) and state governments. The AAA, an umbrella organization of state and regional auto clubs, supplied maps and guides to its members in return for an annual membership fee. The AAA distributed 40 million maps a year in 1952, and by the mid-1970s was handing out 180 million maps yearly. The maps supplied by the AAA were not as commercialized as the oil company maps and had little promotional content. However, the AAA provided its members with detailed guidebooks in addition to maps, with listings of AAA-approved business establishments that catered to tourists. The ultimate AAA invention was the TripTik, a customized map showing a travel route lifted out of the surrounding landscape, with information about where to eat and where to stay.¹³

State governments handed out free road maps in hopes of attracting tourist revenue to their coffers. Each state created a brand or recognizable identity that distinguished it from other states. State maps generally promoted the historic and scenic attractions within the brand framework. And because state travel offices supplied publicity materials to other tourism promotion organizations, such as the AAA, the state brand characterized the image of the state on tourism materials not produced by the state. Tourists, responding to widespread advertising in newspapers and magazines, wrote to states for information while making travel plans, and they often picked up maps free at welcome centers at the borders.¹⁴

Maps and atlases were designed to appeal to family vacationers. Before the war, the illustration of the idealized traveler was a single figure or a couple, always white, and often of some means. The nuclear family made its appearance on maps after the war, usually a son and daughter with parents in a car, sometimes with the family dog. For example, the 1964 Cities Service Washington DC map cover illustrated a smartly dressed family in a late-model convertible car. Dad was at the wheel, chatting with Mom, who wore a dress and sunglasses. In the backseat, Daughter played with
a red stuffed toy, while Son observed the attendant pumping gas. Their slogan, “For People Going Places” had the double meaning of travel and upward social mobility.\textsuperscript{15} Map covers thus capitalized on the era’s ethic of the family to harness the buying power of consumers.

Images of families accompanying the map reflected the rigid gender roles of the era. Men were featured at the wheel, buying gas, or as service station attendants. Women were most often seen taking children to the restroom. A 1952 road map showed a picture of Dad talking with the service station attendant while his son touched the car’s headlight. Mom was behind the car in a summer dress, carrying the baby daughter. The oil company reassured its customers that family travel would not threaten the security of the domestic unit: “The road may be strange. The scenery may be strange. But when you drive up to the familiar Torch and Oval Sign of Standard, there’s a cheerful welcome waiting from your friend on the highway—the local Standard Oil Dealer.” Not until the 1950s were women pictured at the wheel on maps. And then they did not have to get their hands dirty, because attendants would fill the tank and check the oil.\textsuperscript{16}

Oil companies knew that to please women customers, restrooms needed to be clean. The phrase \textit{sanitary restrooms} became a mantra featured on nearly all road maps. A 1949 Gulf Oil map promised: “Sanitary Restrooms—this sign means added comfort and convenience.” The use of the word \textit{sanitary} may have served as code to women travelers who used menstrual products such as sanitary napkins. The map was illustrated by a picture of a woman in hat and skirt ushering her son and daughter from the car to the restroom. Gulf Oil assured its customers that “weekly and daily cleaning and maintenance schedules are followed, and hourly inspections made to further assure you and other members of your family of finding restrooms in the cleanest possible condition at all times.” A Texaco map pictured a mother telling her daughter, “Look for the green and white sign that means clean Registered Rest Rooms.” Images of women in maps always emphasized the feminine, with the women wearing dresses. In the Texaco map, the mother wore a red dress, matching heels, and a wide-brimmed hat. Her blonde daughter wore a pink dress with a bow, had a ribbon in her hair, and held a doll. With clean restrooms, women could uphold their standards of cleanliness and femininity even while on the road.\textsuperscript{17}

Travel guides combined maps and texts to offer prepackaged travel itineraries that assured travelers of a safe and secure journey. The 1953 Rand McNally \textit{Vacation Guide} listed seven “Transcontinental Tours” that

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Service stations attracted families by advertising "Clean Restrooms" for their customers. Standard Oil, Road Map of Washington (H. M. Gousha, 1962). (Courtesy Utah State Historical Society.)
“take you over the best and most scenic highways and can be picked up or left at any point along the route.” The Atlas provided a Transcontinental Tour Map and Transcontinental Mileage chart, along with more detailed routes of tours from Boston to Seattle, or New York to Los Angeles. The tours were broken down into units “so that it may be completed, with a moderate amount of sightseeing, in one day by the average driver.” In 1955 Rand McNally renamed the cross-country tours “Beelines” because they were “the fastest, best, and often the most scenic routes to the Vacation Areas.” The Beeline moniker stuck until the mid-1960s, when the guide no longer mapped transcontinental tours for its readers and instead marked “Go” routes “if you are in a hurry.”

A particular form of travel guide, the vacation guide, was organized so that travelers could target a certain geographic area for their trip. In 1953 the *Rand McNally Vacation Guide* introduced each section with an article that “gives you the flavor and character of the region as a whole.” The regional approach allowed guides to highlight the history and culture of each area. For example, New England was where “colonial history comes alive for the traveler.” Whether it was the Southwest or the Midwest, “Every region has a special appeal for the vacationer. It may be in the unusual and appetizing food—the exotic French cooking of New Orleans, the thick, rich steaks of the Montana cattle country, the sea food of New England, or the real farm meals of the rural sections.” As late as 1970, commercial atlases organized the nation by region, complete with descriptions of regional character. The idea of region was important to road travelers; air travel and a more homogenized American culture would later erase regional distinctions in maps and guides.

Atlases depicted popular understandings of American regions by relying on symbols of local culture. The 1960 *State Farm Road Atlas* featured a stylized map of the United States with pictograms located in various regions connoting local culture. An oil derrick in Texas, a lobster in Maine, and a cow in Wisconsin conveyed information about the state for travelers. The South’s Atlantic coast was dotted with symbols of its growing importance as a vacation destination: palm trees and a waving bikini-clad woman. Iconography alluding to slavery dotted the South: black women in bandanas picking cotton, men dancing with a banjo. Other states drew on the iconography of the American Indian, with a tepee in Montana and an Indian in a headdress in Oklahoma. Such depictions of states and regions in shorthand that used lighthearted symbols to portray racial subjugation and conquest showed insensitivity to the struggle for racial equality then brewing in the South.
The State Farm Road Atlas (1960) depicted the regions of America with stylized symbols. (Courtesy Harold B. Lee Library.)
Map cover art was also racialized, with other races "forming part of the landscape to be consumed, but never as consumers." The preoccupation with the white nuclear family excluded other races and family types. However, African Americans were not completely excluded in informational content of maps. Maps of the South reflected its segregated nature, as in the 1955 map to Atlanta that boasted "over 300 churches for the white population...in addition to 150 churches for Negroes" and seven "colleges for Negroes" that made Atlanta "the world's leading center for Negro education." Not until the 1984 Rand McNally Vacation Guide was black history featured; "those interested in Atlanta's unique black history" could visit the birthplace and home of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.  

Maps and guides assisted travelers in negotiating cities as America became more urbanized. Cities became more common as tourist destinations, and the number of cities listed in the atlas increased, from 48 in 1949 to 147 in 1957. Flat maps featured more detailed urban guides, such as a 1956 map of Los Angeles that advised visitors to see the Civic Center, Exposition Park, the Griffith Park Observatory, the Spanish missions, the Motion Picture Industry, Olvera Street, and the Southwest Museum. An orange square on the map marked the location of the new Disneyland in Anaheim as a point of interest. Atlases featured cities in inset maps and in text that featured the many choices for sightseeing with children. "Visitors to New York City top the highest towers in helicopters, encircle Manhattan in excursion boats, and go aboard ocean liners docked at West Side piers. They take their children to see the Statue of Liberty, the United Nations, Times Square, the great museums, and the Central Park Zoo. They ascend the Empire State Building, still the tallest building in America."  

Oil companies promoted travel with advertising that tapped into feelings of patriotism. In the summer of 1959 Texaco provided a removable insert in Life magazine that readers could take along as a guide on their summer trips. Texaco's guide featured the "story of the flag and how to tour historic America." Its pages "picture and describe many of the historic points of interest and national shrines in America." As a bonus, it included "a beautifully illustrated story of the origins and changing designs of our American flag through the years." It suggested, "This year why not plan your motor trips to include stops at famous historic sites along your route? There are hundreds of these cherished spots that tell the story of our country's beginnings, and its growth into a great nation. Your trips will be more exciting and educational for the youngsters, too." This pitch to family travelers emphasized the educational value of travel.
for children, and considered the historic spots to be shrines worthy of a family pilgrimage. Lest readers forget, the advertisement repeated the commercial motto: "And wherever you go, tour with Texaco!" 

Commemorations of important historic events prompted map publishers to issue special editions to meet the needs of travelers. Rand McNally issued a Civil War centennial map in 1962, with a Civil War centennial schedule of events, such as battle reenactments, and several ceremonies, among them the Medal of Honor and Emancipation Proclamation commemorative ceremony at the Lincoln Memorial. The map featured three tours, including the northern theater of war, significant forts, the Confederate capital, and the western war theater from Mississippi to New Orleans. The cover featured photographs of two Confederate generals, Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson, emphasizing events from the perspective of the South.

Map makers heavily promoted heritage travel around the time of the nation’s bicentennial celebration. Rand McNally’s 1975 Atlas featured a pullout reproduction of a 1776 map of the theater of war, suitable for framing. It contained a special index to Bicentennial points of interest and a section on the “personalities” of the Revolution, with thumbnail biographies of female patriots like Betsy Ross. Notably it included a diverse cast of characters, like African American poet Phillis Wheatley and Mohawk chief Joseph Brant. Inside the back cover was a map of the town of Boston in 1775. The back cover twisted the national slogan to “Discover Historic America.” States also issued special Bicentennial maps. The Massachusetts map bragged that “The Bicentennial Begins Here.” Printed in the patriotic colors of red, white, and blue, it featured photos of historic sites such as the Paul Revere Monument and Old Ironsides.

Even McDonald’s, the fast food restaurant chain, got into the act during the Bicentennial. It produced a “Heritage Roads” map, a “guide to America’s heritage, a summary of exciting places to go, what to see and do, so you and your family can enjoy these places of interest as you travel.” The map conveniently marked locations of McDonald’s restaurants, so when “mealtime rolls around, or you feel like a break, check it for the nearest McDonald’s in your area.” By promoting national landmarks and historic sites, McDonald’s not only encouraged patriotism but also boosted consumption of hamburgers and fries.

States likewise promoted their own historic landmarks by appealing to families traveling with children during the Bicentennial. Travel to New England’s Revolutionary War-era landmarks provided an opportunity for families to inculcate patriotic values and nurture a sense of national
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tory to promote heritage tourism. A 1970 Massachusetts map proclaimed that “Massachusetts men gave Americans a heritage of freedom, and to-
day’s travelers visit the sandy shore and the rustic inland valleys to dig for the origins of their democracy. Families, teaching their school-aged children American history from the storied buildings and streets of Mass-
sachusetts, are familiar sights on the state’s highways.” States like Florida boasted, “It’s a grand family vacation project—brushing up on America’s earliest history.”27
Pennsylvania state maps featured Philadelphia as an important site for families making patriotic pilgrimages. In 1947 the Pennsylvania state map claimed: “In this historic shrine were formulated and signed the two documents which are the foundation of the Nation and upon which the whole world depends—the Declaration of Independence and the Consti-
tution of the United States.” The photograph showed a family, a man and woman with linked arms and their little girl, gazing up at the cupola of Independence Hall. Children could stand in line to touch the cracked Liberty Bell, or walk past Betsy Ross’s house, or see where Benjamin Franklin once lived. The same family was pictured visiting a monument to Washington’s crossing on the banks of the Delaware River.28
The search for a unified usable national past immediately after the war was challenged by the racial and social divisions in the 1960s. The aston-
ishing success of Alex Haley’s Roots and the associated television minis-
teries in 1977 was just one signal of a rekindled desire by many Americans to find their own roots by retracing the steps of their ancestors. The appearance of sites of black and immigrant history in maps and guides suggests that the idea of American heritage became multistranded. Atlases and guides in the 1970s depicted the national landscape as a mosaic created from an American immigrant heritage and highlighted the continuing presence of native peoples. The 1970 Texaco travel atlas announced that “Historic treasures, at long last, are cherished and restored. In the country and in small towns, as in the big cities, conservationists and history lovers now demand more than a statue in a park or a tablet on the sidewalk to record that X marks the spot.” The historic consciousness led for some to a celebration of ethnicity and diversity that Rand McNally promoted by listing local festivals and reenactments. Noting that travelers could attend Norske Days in Wisconsin, rodeos in Wyoming, or Sioux powwows in Minnesota, the author remarked: “Whatever nationality your forefathers may have been, your fellow descendants will be recalling them at some
frolic somewhere in this mosaic that is the Middle West.”

The America presented in maps and guides in the 1950s was a regionalized nation, with distinctive subcultures and identities conveyed to travelers with symbols that sustained whiteness by depicting race as an artifact of history. By the 1970s, regional distinctions and signs of local culture faded from maps, replaced by the idea of America as an ethnic and racial mosaic. Maps and guides both reflected and shaped cultural change in ways unrecognized by the family travelers who used them to make the family vacation a pilgrimage.

**Civic Pilgrimage**

By traveling to the Lincoln sites or Civil War battlefields, American families could partake of the national legacy, praise its heroes, and internalize its democratic values. Through family vacationing, parents were inculcating patriotic values in their children, encouraging in them a loyalty to the nation for which many of their fathers fought in World War II. Civic pilgrimage combined education and emotion into one package. Tourism and religious pilgrimage share a concern with sacred space, a desire for authenticity, and a concern with the aesthetic elements of the destination.

Literature promoting the capital and tourists’ accounts of their visits emphasized the notion of civic landmarks as sacred space.

American families undertook lengthy cross-country trips to see historic sites. If the journey of the Ralph and Judith Gray family outlined in *National Geographic* in 1952 is typical, American families who visited historic sites experienced the same sense of sacred pilgrimage. The Grays began their Lincoln tour at Sinking Spring Farm in Rockport, Indiana, where the National Park Service built a memorial building surrounding “what is said to be the traditional birthplace cabin.” The park historian informed Ralph that attendance to the site had tripled since 1946, and he noted from car license plates that visitors came not only from adjacent states, but also from as far away as Wisconsin, Colorado, and Massachusetts. “Children had raced up and down the long inviting slope of steps outside the memorial but once inside, their shenanigans ceased without a word from their parents. A reverent mood gripped each visitor.”

The reverent mood persisted as the family visited the memorial to Lincoln’s mother, Nancy Hanks Lincoln, a hearthstone, and her grave. Ralph cited the homage to Lincoln’s mother on the hearthstone as “the altar of his home, a place of joy in times of prosperity, as a refuge in adversity; a spot made sacred by the lives of those spent around it.” The Gray family walked the trail of Historic Stones to her grave site: “It heightened
our sense of history at this hallowed spot when Judith looked down at the rocky path and by good fortune picked up a perfectly shaped Indian arrowhead." The sacred and civic meshed as they walked back to the cabin site from the burial spot and "the great flag at the top of a massive shaft rippled and snapped in the stiff breeze." 32

The trip through southern Indiana took them back in time. Part of the appeal for children was imagining scenes from Lincoln's childhood and visiting Knob Creek, where a friend saved Lincoln from drowning. The surroundings were still rustic, with log cabins and tobacco fields; Judith noted, "You get a real 'Lincoln feeling' on this road." The family pitched a tent in Lincoln State Park, "headquarters for four days while we visited the shrines in the hills of southern Indiana." Ralph described the crude three-sided cabins in which early settlers lived and remarked, "By camping, we felt we were re-creating in small degree the rugged conditions the Lincolns lived under during their first winter in Indiana." The park was adjacent to the memorial, affording them a chance to dip in the lake created by damming Little Pigeon Creek, "in which hundreds of visitors swim every summer week end." A photograph depicted Judith fixing breakfast for the family. The trip was not without excitement; After a rainy night, Ralph discovered a stray dog had bedded down on his daughter's pillow, "a cold nose buried in her hair." Another day, both daughters awoke with "bloated faces and eyes swollen shut," a reaction to coming into contact with poison oak. They spent two days in Vincennes while their daughters were being treated. 33

The Gray family took muddy back roads to New Salem, Illinois, a reconstructed village where Lincoln began his public career. The family walked the streets, and the children rode in a Conestoga wagon pulled by oxen and climbed a rail fence, just as in Lincoln's time. On the Fourth of July, costumed actors represented people from Lincoln's day, like his first love, Ann Rutledge, and Chief Black Hawk in a play, Forever This Land, in the state park. "Among the carefully reconstructed cabins, the made-up and costumed actors lent the final touch of reality." Judith commented: "The Lincoln feeling is strong here...you can almost imagine him walking around." Even Ralph got into the act by comically imitating Lincoln's favored reading pose, lying on the grass with his feet propped up on a tree. The Grays concluded their Lincoln tour at the restored family home in Springfield and toured "the massive tomb north of town...a constant reminder to native and visitor alike of greatness that once lived nearby and now, dead of an assassin's bullet, is come home to rest." The last paragraph concludes on a solemn note: "Having followed the mortal
trace of Abraham Lincoln from the cradle to the grave, my family and I
turned sorrowfully to leave Springfield.  

Perhaps few families made a pilgrimage as elaborate as the Gray's, but
certainly other families were touring the Lincoln sites. The Grays made
a vacation of history with camping, roaming the wooded sites, and just
being silly by riding on oxen or pretending to be Lincoln reading under a
tree. By traveling in space, they also felt they were traveling backward in
time, which enabled them to imagine themselves in the world of Abra-
ham Lincoln. Despite the mishaps of stray dogs and poison oak, by trav-
eling in the footsteps of the great American president, they paid homage
to him and to the nation he united by force of war. Notably, absent from
the travelogue is a consideration of race—ironic in light of Lincoln's free-
ing of the slaves, but understandable in a nation still segregated by race.

While some families spent their vacations visiting historic sites across
the country, others took their children long distances to Washington, D.C.
Those cross-country trips to the nation's capital lingered in the mem-
ories of children in the backseat of the car. In 1950 young Ann Whiting
made a three-week cross-country trip in the family car from rural Utah
to Washington, D.C., with her parents, a brother, and a sister. Her father,
Ray Whiting, was a farmer and raised livestock, so the family left in the
spring after the lambs were sold. The children missed school, but her
teacher assigned her to write something about the journey. Ann remem-
bers sitting in the backseat with her sister, Gayle, playing card games and
doing embroidery. Her mother kept a cardboard lunch box behind her
seat stocked with bread, mayonnaise, tuna fish, and bologna for feeding
the family along the road. When the family arrived at a motel, her father
told the children to duck down behind the seat to the floor so they would
not be charged more for the room. They took the blue highways across
because the (red) interstate highways had not yet been built. She remem-
bers being excited to cross the Mississippi River in St. Louis, after days of
anticipation. There they visited the zoo, including the snake house, even
though her mother was afraid of snakes. They visited Washington again
in 1953 and took family snapshots at Mount Vernon, the Lincoln Memo-
rial, and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

Travel east to see relatives and the historic sites was such a high prior-
ity that they lived in the basement foundation of their house until 1954,
when they took out a mortgage to complete the aboveground living space.
Ann remembers, "We never felt poor in any way" because "my Dad always
had a new car." The family stopped at other destinations on their cross-
country trips. On the 1950 trip they traveled via Memphis, where they visited
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The Whiting children of Utah visiting the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, 1953.
(Courtesy Ann W. Orton.)
the zoo and the Pink Palace. In 1957 they took the train to Chicago, where they caught a bus to Flint, Michigan, picked up a new Buick, and drove to Niagara Falls and New York City, where they visited Ann's aunts. Ann still has the souvenirs from those trips: a painted aluminum coaster from Nebraska, the Corn Husker state, and a guide to the observatory of the Empire State Building. Half a century later, she still has a Kodachrome pocket guidebook to Washington, D.C., on which she wrote her name in cursive. Each page contained a “Picto-Chrome” photo in “natural color,” faced by a page with a short description of the site's significance.

Washington, D.C., was the premier site of civic pilgrimage. Allied victory in World War II enhanced a sense of the importance of Washington, D.C., as not just a national capital, but as the capital of the world, its most politically powerful city. Taking the family to the nation's capital was thus not merely an educational excursion, but also a civic pilgrimage for both parents and children. Thus the nation's capital was the premier destination for families who wanted to teach their children about America's heritage. Printed maps and guides compared travel to the capital to the religious experience of pilgrimage: “For every American citizen the trip is not merely a dutiful pilgrimage but a tremendously inspiring, informative, and enjoyable experience.”

Heady with victory, an ad in spring 1948 for the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad boasted “our magnificent National Capital has become the hub of the world—where headlines made today are the history of tomorrow.” The illustration pictured parents with their son ascending the steps of the Capitol and suggested that a trip to Washington would cultivate a feeling of patriotism in children. “Give yourself and the youngsters a holiday—and a new appreciation of our country. Come to Washington, the keystone of world security—and the key to a marvelous time!” Visitors should see the Declaration of Independence and recently built monuments like the Jefferson Memorial or “the amazing Pentagon Building.”

A postwar map and guide to Washington, D.C., recognized the power of the city to imprint a consciousness of American ideals:

This city, a symbol of the greatness of our republic, stirs the very fibers of his heart as he reflects that it stands for “one nation, indivisible, with Liberty and Justice for All.” No matter how lowly or humble he may be, when he experiences the majesty of the Capitol, or the strong simplicity of the White House, he will realize that Washington is, in part his, and he will feel as did George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln with millions of other Americans, the strength and
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as the very fibers tion, indivisible, ly or humble he ol, or the strong /ashington is, in thomas Jefferson, the strength and ending permanence of those ideals of democracy forming the founda- tion of this city and this nation. He and generations of Americans to come will gain inspiration from this city to make those ideals a part of their lives and our nation's living history.\textsuperscript{39}

The theme of sacred sites in a city home to Americans was common. A widely distributed guide in 1964 claimed: "Every American, from childhood on, is imaginatively and emotionally attracted to see his nation's capital. He knows he will feel at home, even before he gets there—for this wondrous, shining city belongs to all Americans." In Washington, tourists could see "the national shrines, the stately public buildings, the foreign embassies and the historic tree-lined avenues that appear so much in the news. And here is the glamour of a city where our country's history has been made and is in the making."\textsuperscript{40} The appeal to democratic ideals was characteristic of postwar tourist guides and maps; such homage to national landmarks was seen as a way to preserve those ideals in an uncertain world. Elaborate and explicit tourist maps and guides allowed travelers, especially children, to imagine themselves as living history in the times of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln.

The national park system promoted heritage travel by restoring national landmarks like Independence Hall and battlefields like Gettysburg. Its Mission 66 initiative sparked a decade-long effort to refurbish visitor's facilities at the national parks and monuments to meet the demands of tourists, who numbered 56.5 million visitors in 1955. Creating civic awareness was an explicit rationale for the financing of the improvements, which were seen as a way of helping Americans rekindle the idealism of the patriots of their past. Five million visits were made each year to the national monuments in Washington, D.C. In 1960 the top draw on the Mall was the Lincoln Memorial, which attracted 2.5 million visitors, followed by the Washington Monument, which attracted 1.4 million visitors. Over 800,000 people visited the White House in 1960, and in 1961, 1.3 million visited. The Jefferson Memorial saw nearly 1 million visitors in 1962, part of a total of 6.3 million visitors to Washington, D.C., in 1960. In 1963 visits to national memorials totaled over 7 million persons.\textsuperscript{41}

Special events like meetings, rallies, and marches swelled the crowds in the capital. Three million persons attended special events in the capital in 1957, a total that rose to 4.5 million in 1960. The number of events rose from 233 in 1957 to 366 in 1961. The 1963 civil rights march on Wash- ington on August 28, 1963, reoriented the Lincoln Memorial as a place of protest. Park reports indicate that 150,000 persons were assembled at
the memorial, and that over 3 million persons visited it that year—a new record. Encouraged by the success of the mass demonstration, various groups sought permits for meetings and religious events in the parks. In 1965, over 4 million visited the Lincoln Memorial and nearly 2 million visited the Washington Monument. Nearly 8 million persons visited the national park sites in the capital, an increase of 2 percent over the previous year. To cope with the crush of visitors, for the first time, the National Park Service erected informational kiosks and staffed them with employees to answer visitors’ questions.  

The list of sites on maps and guides changed over time to reflect changes in the Washington landscape and in visitor consciousness. Free oil company road maps indicated not only the location of buildings, but also what they looked like in tiny sketches so the visitor could easily identify them. The 1945 Rand McNally Road Atlas featured the capital with a one-page map showing the location and hours of major departments of government, memorials, gardens, museums, art galleries, libraries, and the zoo. A decade later, the 1955 Esso road map (which featured a family in front of the Jefferson Memorial posing for pictures) included an index of U.S. government offices and agencies, hospitals and institutions, schools and colleges, along with the usual tourist destinations of monuments and museums. In 1963 the Esso company map displayed the U.S. Marine Corps War Memorial (Iwo Jima) on its cover, adding it to the list of sites tourists were obligated to visit.  

Popular magazines published articles guiding readers with families to Washington. Marjorie Holmes wrote “This Is Your Year for Washington” in Better Homes and Gardens in May 1955. She urged readers: “While the children are still young, enjoy with them the thrill of discovering the city that truly ‘belongs’ to every American.” She confided, “We live in Washington, and love it. Perhaps that’s why we urge every American family to make at least one pilgrimage to the capital. Here, and in neighboring areas, are graphic concepts of history and government that can never be matched in school.”  

Holmes carefully laid out an itinerary for a week-long tour of the city, Mount Vernon, Williamsburg, Virginia, and Annapolis, Maryland. Among major destinations in the capital, Holmes included the White House, the Capitol, and the Supreme Court Building. The Washington Monument was a good place to start, and “a ride to the top is the first thing that small fry generally clamor for.” While visitors rose to the top of the obelisk in the elevator, a “recording tells of the man who became the Father of our Country.” And children should not miss the Smithsonian
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Institution: “Put on your walking shoes and prepare to spend the day with
the first airships and the Spirit of St. Louis, with the former first ladies
in their inaugural ball gowns, with life-size dinosaurs, Teddy Roosevelt’s
wild-animal collection, fabulous gems.”

In her capsule descriptions of the sites, Holmes used language to con-
vey their sacred qualities. At the National Archives “in lighted cabinets lie
the hallowed documents that brought this nation into being,” their words
of freedom “preserved for eternity.” She referred to the Lincoln Memorial
as a “temple,” where, in the words of architect Daniel Chester French,
“the memory of Abraham Lincoln is enshrined forever.” She claimed:
“One of the most profoundly moving memorials ever designed is that to
the immortal Lincoln.” Visitors to the Jefferson monument could read
his “immortal words . . . carved on its immaculate marble walls.” The
most sacred site was Arlington National Cemetery, where “sentries keep
ceaseless vigil at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. And each hour, quiet
crowds gather to watch the simple, impressive ceremony of the changing
of the guard.”

Holmes’s theme of sacred space was interwoven with her argument
that Washington belonged to the American people. At the White House,
where “every citizen is a welcome guest to the main-floor rooms,” one
might see a tricycle or scooter left by the president’s visiting grandchild-
dren, just like at home. “One of the nicest things about visiting the White
House is the feeling that it is your house, too, somehow. No pressure
is put upon you to hurry; you can linger as long as you like.” The
Supreme Court, an “immense classic temple where knickered page boys
scurry about and the solemn wheels of justice turn,” offered visitors the
opportunity to participate in government. Once seated in the chambers,
your most thrilling moments come when you are seated in the spacious
courtroom.” Visitors watched as the “ruby velvet curtains” parted and the
judges entered, “nine famous personalities familiar from newsprint and
television.” Holmes emphasized the tourist as citizen: “In presenting their
decisions, they address the audience persuasively, less reading than rea-
soning—with you!”

There was no better place to see government at work than in the Cap-
tol, “where the laws are made.” She asked tourists to imagine themselves
in the footsteps of famous American statesmen: “As you climb the broad
plaza steps on the east front, you’ll be walking where every president from
Monroe to Eisenhower . . . has been inaugurated.” Her description of
the Capitol building suggests its cathedral-like qualities: “Within the or-
nate bronze doors is a circular rotunda, man-dwarfing, breath-taking, as
it soars up and up to a dazzling, resplendent dome.” Children could learn history from what they saw: “This façade, the entire building, is rich with paintings, frescoes, murals, and statuary, much of which the children will recognize from their schoolbooks: The Baptism of Pocahontas, the Surrender of Cornwallis.” Guides explained the history and lore of the artwork in the rotunda, telling stories that were lessons in national ideals. To show the acoustic properties of the dome, guides would customarily stand across Statuary Hall from their groups and speak in a whisper. A pass was required to enter the spectator galleries as a result of increased security after shootings in 1954 by Puerto Rican nationalists. “You’ve come a long way to see this arm of America in action; when you do so, be free to witness the hectic but fascinating goings-on to the full.”

The list of sites for the 1950s visitor was long and included sites not familiar to today’s visitor, such as “the American Red Cross, with its celebrated Tiffany window, museum, and impressive Civil Defense exhibit”; Constitution Hall, headquarters of the Daughters of the American Revolution; and the Pan American Union building, “with its exotic Aztec gardens and magnificent hall of the Americas.” Perhaps more appealing to children was a visit to the Federal Bureau of Investigation. “There, every half-hour, bright young G-men demonstrate every conceivable type of crime detection. You’ll hear enthralling tales of the capture of ‘most wanted’ crooks, saboteurs, and spies, be led past laboratories where actual evidence is being analyzed; the whole show winds up with a ‘bang’ in the shooting gallery.” Cold war politics was a feature of her recommended driving tour of embassy row: “Most people are curious to spot that of Soviet Russia, at 1125 Sixteenth.” Holmes’s detailed tour guide concluded that “this is the year for Washington. Renew the kinship every American has with these scenes. It will package the past into a permanent treasure, yet relate it to the present in which all have such a vital stake. Especially those citizens of tomorrow—our youngsters!” Maps and promotional literature aimed at the vacationing family headed for Washington, D.C., played on the theme of civic pilgrimage. They did so by depicting sites as sacred and as places where every citizen, even “youngsters,” could participate in democratic government.

The experiences of ordinary American families visiting the capital reflect the idealism of the tourism literature—with a personal slant. Nate and Bobbie Corwin of suburban Philadelphia took their three children to Washington, D.C., in the summer of 1963. A World War II army veteran, Nate was a skilled carpenter in a home remodeling business, and Bobbie was known as a good cook. Bobbie’s mother, a Russian immigrant and
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expert seamstress, sewed the summer dresses worn by Bobbie and her
daughter, Andrea. Nate and his sons, Alan and Gary, were comfortable
but not casual in lightweight slacks and short-sleeved shirts, and Alan
wore a tie. Bobbie carried a purse, Andrea carried her own camera, and
Alan shouldered the leather case for the family camera.

The Corwin family photographs tell the story of their pilgrimage to
the White House, approaching it first from the south across the lawn of
the ellipse, and then pausing at the marker from which all highway mile-
ages are measured, fittingly on the grounds of the president’s home. Bob-
bie snapped a photo of the children and Nate against the iron fence, and
Andrea stood on the bottom rail to be taller than her dad. The red tulips
and fountain behind make a picturesque backdrop to the family framing
the White House, home of the first family. Perhaps tired of the sun, they
went to the Capitol, where Alan, the oldest, solemnly posed in statuary
hall while Andrea and Gary, distracted, mugged for the camera. Nate’s
shot caught his wife’s upward gaze at the inside of the Capitol’s dome
with its fresco of clouds and mythic figures.

Outside on the portico, Nate posed his family to frame his view of the
National Mall with the Washington Monument in the distance. Later, at
the Lincoln Memorial, they stood still for Nate, the photographer, who
centered them exactly between the two columns framing the statue of
seated Abraham Lincoln. Andrea looked down at her camera, maybe to
take a picture of her dad; Bobbie has her hand on her youngest son’s
shoulder. Alan, the oldest son, is grown up enough to stand on his own,
apart from his mother and his younger sister and brother.

The family visit to Washington, D.C., was documented by the father
as photographer, except for the rare shot taken by Bobbie to include him
in the memories they were creating of the trip. The Corwins, children of
immigrants, were a thoroughly American family that had achieved the
success of the American dream of home ownership in a prosperous middle-
class suburb. Their pilgrimage was a way of cementing that American
identity, of passing it on to their children by visiting the nation’s capital.
All the historian has are photos, the memories created of the trip. The
pictures tell the story of their pilgrimage.⁴⁷

The account of an adolescent girl also helps us see the city through
young eyes and suggests that traveling without one’s family made for a far
different experience. June Calendar, a farmer’s daughter from Versailles,
Indiana, painted a detailed picture in her report of her senior class trip
in May 1956 to the capital. She and her classmates traveled by train with
two male teachers as chaperones. They stayed four to a room at the Hotel
Harrington and traveled by bus to sites in Washington. The temperatures were record-breaking, in the 90-degree range, and "I was becoming very hot in those wool slacks and that orlon sweater." Their first stop was the Washington Monument, where they waited "a half hour or more in the hot sun, swatting off knats—of which there seemed to be several million." They took an elevator to the top while listening to a recorded orientation. It was worth the wait: "The view from the top was spectacular. All of Washington seemed to lie at our feet and it was very, very beautiful." She was impressed by the changing of the guard at Arlington:

I was amazed at the precise way the soldier on guard paced in front of the tomb and then would stand at attention for about a minute then pace to the other side. Then a bunch of sailors came and put on a ritual and then the Navy Band, or a part thereof, played the Star Spangled Banner, I managed to get Goosebumps, I was so impressed. Then after a little more parading a bugler played Taps which was very haunting. The whole crowd was quiet while the whole ceremony was going on except for the constant click of cameras.⁴⁸

The reverence of the crowd, the military ritual, and the music inspired June’s emotional response to the tomb. Her patriotic feelings were
reinforced in her visit to the newly built Marine Corps war memorial: “I felt that I could reach out and feel the texture of the soles of their shoes and the cloth of their uniforms and I was struggling with the marines as they raised the flag.” The memorial made her feel as if she was there with the soldiers, part of the military victory at Iwo Jima made famous by photographer Joe Rosenthal.49

The remainder of her tour of Washington did not provoke as deep a response. She and her friends saw the first ladies’ ball gowns and documents in the National Archives, where she admired the handwriting of Thomas Jefferson. The Capitol’s broad staircases, murals, and dome were “really lovely,” but she “wasn’t greatly impressed by the Capitol—except to think that I would like someday to get used to walking around it—on business.” The trip inspired her to imagine a political career for herself in the Capitol. As they walked to the train station for the ride home,
she confessed, “I was disappointed beyond words that I didn’t get to go inside the Lincoln memorial but only went past it.” She had spent her evening on a boat ride down the Potomac with friends, putting her social needs ahead of a tourist itinerary. The beauty of the capital awoke in her a desire to live there some day. “It is by far the most beautiful city I could ever dream of living in and is certainly a fitting city to be our nation’s capitol.”

These accounts suggest that although logistical concerns about what to eat, what to wear, and Washington’s summer heat may have muted their reactions, ordinary people did experience a civic pilgrimage to the sacred sites. The size and scale of the Capitol building, the triumph of the Marine Corps memorial to Iwo Jima, and the solemn site of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier provoked an emotional response in visitors. As travelers remembered their visits, they recalled the moments of grace where they were moved to contemplate the greatness of their nation. Families took photos and children bought souvenirs to remember their pilgrimage to the White House, the Capitol, and the Lincoln Memorial. The photographs integrated their family into the national landscape of monuments and memorials. Traveling together as a family in a ritual of civic pilgrimage, parents and children reinforced their sense of what it meant to be American.

Heritage travel boomed in the decades after World War II as American families visited the nation’s capital or constructed their own cross-country pilgrimage to historic sites. Travel writers portrayed Washington, D.C., or Lincoln’s Salem as sacred sites that would impress a sense of citizenship upon the traveler. If family travelers experienced civic pilgrimage in fainter form, perhaps it was because the supposedly sublime experience of travel was in reality more mundane. Cardboard boxes of food, pesky insects, long lines, and rough roads had a way of muting emotional response to the sacred shrines. Whether because parents sought a sense of national community or because they wanted to imprint a national identity in their children through travel, making the journey is evidence of their strong belief in the value of the travel ritual. Family tourists depended on the consumable geography of road maps and guides designed to appeal to the family vacationer with happy portraits of the nuclear family of parents and two children—always white. Guides and maps suggested a freedom of the road for all Americans, but in reality, they shunted Americans toward prepackaged sites.
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For African Americans, the civic pilgrimage was a bitter lesson in the
limits of citizenship. Washington was a southern city with segregated ho-
tels and rooming houses, evidence of racial prejudice in stark contrast to
the ideals inscribed on the capital's monuments. How African Ameri-
cans resisted Jim Crow on the road is also part of the story of American
pilgrimage, of claiming citizenship in the national geography.