

Introduction by Walter Cronkite

We Americans are a strange lot. When we travel abroad we seem to be overcome with embarrassment that our own country is so young. We put aside the pride we otherwise express in the success of this country of ours, which in less than two hundred years has become the shining example of democracy that most of the world's people would like to emulate.

Instead, we stand before the Acropolis in Athens, the Coliseum in Rome, London's stately Houses of Parliament, St. Petersburg's grand palaces and we think of the monuments to our history as babes in swaddling clothes.

Thus we desperately need the help of a photographer whose artistry has discovered the beauty of our history.

Jake Rajs has found and glorified the profusion of landmarks that remind us of the American experience. Some are marked with monuments; others rest in their natural state. Individually they are not ignored. They are visited by crowds of visitors who visit them in awe and wonder and respectful silence or boisterous holiday hilarity. They can read from the bronze plaques and chiseled marble of the momentous events that occurred on the very spot. This is to our common heritage what to our family history is the search of graveyard stones for an ancestor's last resting-place. As the fading memorial carved in those stones bind us to our family, the monuments and battlefields tie us forever to our land.

Many of our citizens are privileged to see some of it. Few are privileged to see it all. None has so captured its magnificent totality as has Jake Rajs.

The mountains, the plateaus, the escarpments, the wide prairies, the plunging waterfalls, the rock-ribbed coasts and the glorious beaches, the presence of living things—the galloping buffaloes, the marvel of our cities, the quaintness of our villages. This is the panorama of America.

It is not the individual monuments but the grandness of their totality that Jake Rajs captures in this stunning book. He sees beauty in the steeples that mark the villages that once were colonial America, and in our cities the steeples glorifying commerce that we call skyscrapers.

Here is the scope of our history, those sites where our laws were made, our philosophies honed, our battles won. The visitor can tread the very stone our ancestors walked or gawk at the bed where the hero slept and the desk where he wrote.

It is the land itself that is our special historical inheritance. The very vastness of it is our glory and when we have the opportunity to enjoy it we gasp with its wonder. And then

we get out our instant cameras and try to preserve the magic moment we have just enjoyed.

Despite the vows inspired by those grand scenes, few of us dedicate the time to pursue the rainbow's trail to this continent's distant horizons. It is Jake's resolve and talent that turns an artist's search for the beauty of nature into the almost religious fervor of a pilgrimage.

Jake has woven a stunning tapestry of the many threads of America. The tableau depicts our trials and tribulations and our success in overcoming them to become the shining example of human achievement that is these United States.