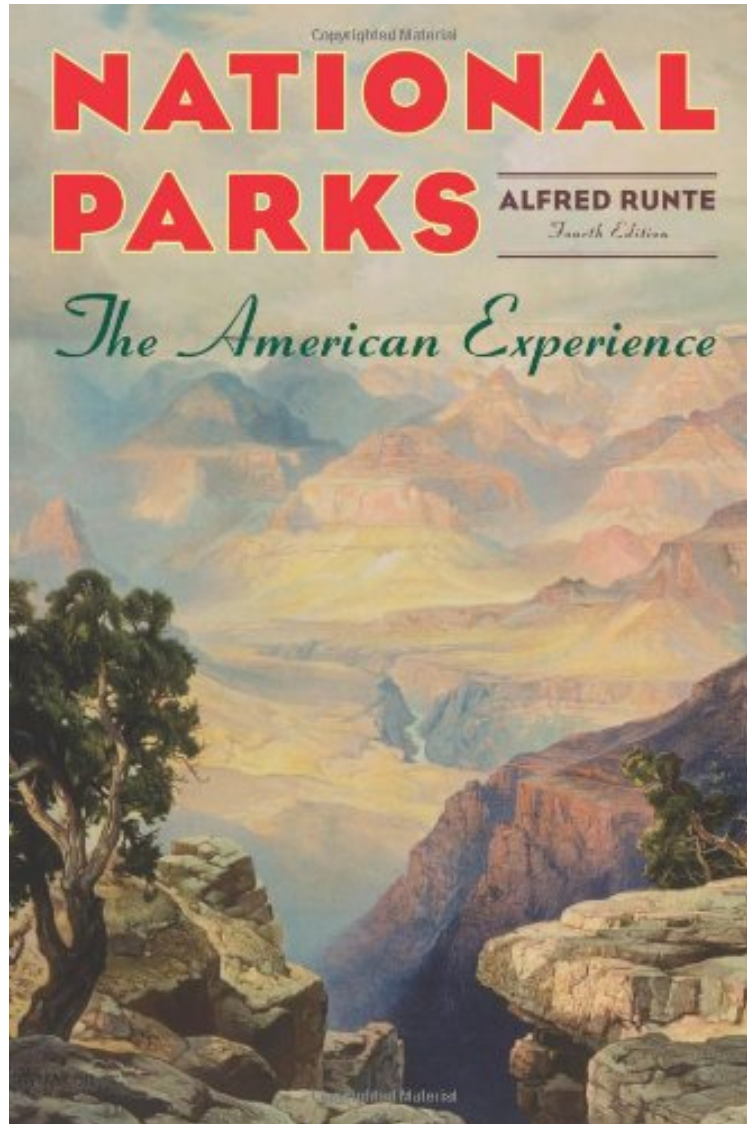


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## National Parks: The American Experience, 4th Edition

*Alfred Runte*

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**Alfred Runte : National Parks: The American Experience, 4th Edition** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised National Parks: The American Experience, 4th Edition:

6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. A very good but not definitive history of the national parksBy Arthur DigbeeThis book provides a good history of the national parks. The first chapters on the history of the national park idea and the national park system are particularly interesting and well-written. Runte emphasizes "cultural nationalism" as an explanation for the park idea, the notion that American cultural identity could rest on our relationship with wilderness and scenery, and thus best be established in opposition to Europe, where culture is tied to

human history. Runte makes those claims well, but the first edition attracted the most attention for its "worthless lands" thesis, and this edition begins with a response to his critics. This is a very measured response, emphasizing clarification more than argumentation, but Runte stands his ground on the issues. His main claim is that a necessary condition for creation of a park before the 1930s was that the land be worthless or un-economic for primary products such as agriculture, grazing, mining or timber; many of the parks were recognized as valuable for tourism, which is why they were made parks. Properly circumscribed, the thesis gets the first decades right, though it starts to break down at about the time the Everglades NP was established. By the time of the New Deal and Civilian Conservation Corps, the worthless lands thesis is clearly no longer correct. Like other histories of the national parks that I've read, this book emphasizes the trophy parks - those with monumental scenery such as Yellowstone and Yosemite. Runte nods in the direction of the national recreation areas (like Lake Mead) and urban parks (like Golden Gate) more than most other authors, but he really only mentions them in passing. Many other parks, even beautiful ones, get ignored if they are not famous (Voyageurs, Big Bend, and Theodore Roosevelt, to name three). And what's up with Steamtown USA or Homestead National Monument of American, for crying out loud? Like everyone else he ignores whole categories of national parks, some of which are visited more than the trophy parks - the historic sites in Washington, Philadelphia, New York and Boston; the battlefield parks; and the Blue Ridge Parkway, among others. Each of those units get 5-15 million visitors a year, while Yosemite and Yellowstone get about 4 million. Even so, I haven't yet found the history of the park system that gives these non-monumental parks justice. Leaving these other parks out matters a \*lot\* for Runte's thesis. Golden Gate NRA sits on prime real estate in America's most crowded city, and is hardly "worthless" land. The historic sites on the eastern seaboard lie in the most valuable parts of Boston, New York and Philadelphia - not to mention the National Mall and other sites in Washington DC.

Fredericksburg/Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, Manassas, Murfreesboro, Chickamauga/Chattanooga and other battlefields are subject to strong development pressures and surrounded by suburban growth. Cuyahoga, Santa Monica Mountains, Cape Cod, and other parks would make attractive up-scale suburbs and second homes if they were not protected. Clearly the "cultural" and "recreational" parks differ from the scenic and monumental parks, and they differ in precisely the ways most damaging to Runte's worthless lands thesis. Though Runte has given us a classic history of the parks as we have traditionally thought of them, we need a new approach to the history of the national park system as a whole. The literature has emphasized scenery, wildlife, geology and science but not culture and history. Though Runte begins with American cultural nationalism, he does not fit the cultural and historical parks into his vision of the system as a whole.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars  
By Laura Bethany Thomas  
We had a great idea in America to preserve some areas for all of us.  
0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Four Stars  
By John Calhoun  
I like it but wish more of the black and white pictures were better reproduced.

Completely revised for its fourth edition, *National Parks: The American Experience* tells the highly engaging story of how Americans invented and expanded the concept of national parks. A prominent adviser to the Ken Burns Emmy Award-winning documentary, "The National Parks: America's Best Idea," Alfred Runte is renowned as the nation's leading historian on the meaning and management of these treasured lands. Lavishly illustrated with period photographs, including eight pages of color paintings, *National Parks: The American Experience* has never been more beautiful or profound. This remains a stirring look into the lands that define America, from Yosemite and Yellowstone to wilderness Alaska. This is how we got our parks, and yes, how we have occasionally failed them, and when doing so how we have failed ourselves. "Civilization is the problem parks solve," Runte writes. At times, the national parks may seem as imperfect as they are exceptional; the point is that they are all we will ever have. Knowing that earlier America, and planning for the new America, still demands our humility to advance the best of both.

Like John Muir, Al Runte has felt the siren call of our saved and sacred places, and, like John Muir, he has found a way to share their glories with power and poetry. This is a sensitive, well-written history of our land and the complicated people who call it home. (Ken Burns) Alfred Runte brilliantly demonstrates why he is considered one of America's preeminent environmental historians. Not only does *National Parks* sing with inspiration, but it is the most trustworthy synthesis scholars have on the American preservation movement. Everybody should read this marvelous study. Highly recommended! (Douglas Brinkley) Congratulations to Al Runte on the fourth edition of *National Parks: The American Experience*. Al understands and captures not only the history of our national parks but also their importance to the United States and the world. From Al's childhood experiences in national parks to all the research he has done on their history and value, his fourth edition captures why our national parks are America's best idea. (Fran P. Mainella) Having had a role in the beginnings of this important book, it is an honor to celebrate its fourth edition. Al Runte reminds us how dramatically the valuation of national parks has changed in little more than a century. Read it and you will learn why national parks can be considered a distinctively American idea, indeed a contribution of our nation to world civilization. (Professor Emeritus Roderick Frazier Nash) Alfred Runte gives a comprehensive discussion of America's parks. *National Parks* is a choice and solidly recommended addition to natural history collections. (Midwest Book) About the Author An internationally recognized expert on America's national parks, Alfred Runte is based in

Seattle, Washington. He was recently an adviser to the Ken Burns PBS documentary *The National Parks: America's Best Idea* and appeared in all six episodes of the Emmy Award-winning series. Runte has also been a guest on *Nightline*, *The Today Show*, *48 Hours*, the *History* and *Travel* channels, and speaks frequently in public forums on the need to protect our parks. His other books include *Allies of the Earth: Railroads and the Soul of Preservation*, *Yosemite: The Embattled Wilderness*, and *Trains of Discovery: Railroads and the Legacy of Our National Parks*, now in its fifth edition. In April 2011, Runte was elected to membership in the College of Arts and Sciences Hall of Fame at Illinois State University (his master's degree institution) "in recognition of exemplary achievement" as a teacher and public scholar. He also holds a B.A. from the State University of New York at Binghamton and a Ph.D. from the University of California, Santa Barbara.