



Pilgrimage to the National Parks: Religion and Nature in the United States (Routledge Studies in Religion, Travel, and Tourism)

Lynn Ross-Bryant

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National Parks – ‘America’s Best Idea’ – were from the first seen as sacred sites embodying the God-given specialness of American people and American land, and from the first they were also marked as tourist attractions. The inherent tensions between these two realities ensured the parks would be stages where the country’s conflicting values would be performed and contested. As pilgrimage sites embody the values and beliefs of those who are drawn to them, so Americans could travel to these sacred places to honor, experience, and be restored by the powers that had created the American land and the American enterprise.

This book explores the importance of the discourse of nature in American culture, arguing that the attributes and symbolic power that had first been associated with the ‘new world’ and then the ‘frontier’ were embodied in the National Parks. Author Ross-Bryant focuses on National Parks as pilgrimage sites around which a discourse of nature developed and argues the centrality of religion in understanding the dynamics of both the language and the ritual manifestations related to National Parks. Beyond the specific contribution to a richer analysis of the National Parks and their role in understanding nature and religion in the U.S., this volume contributes to the emerging field of ‘religion and the environment,’ larger issues in the study of religion (e.g. cultural events and the spatial element in meaning-making), and the study of non-institutional religion.

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