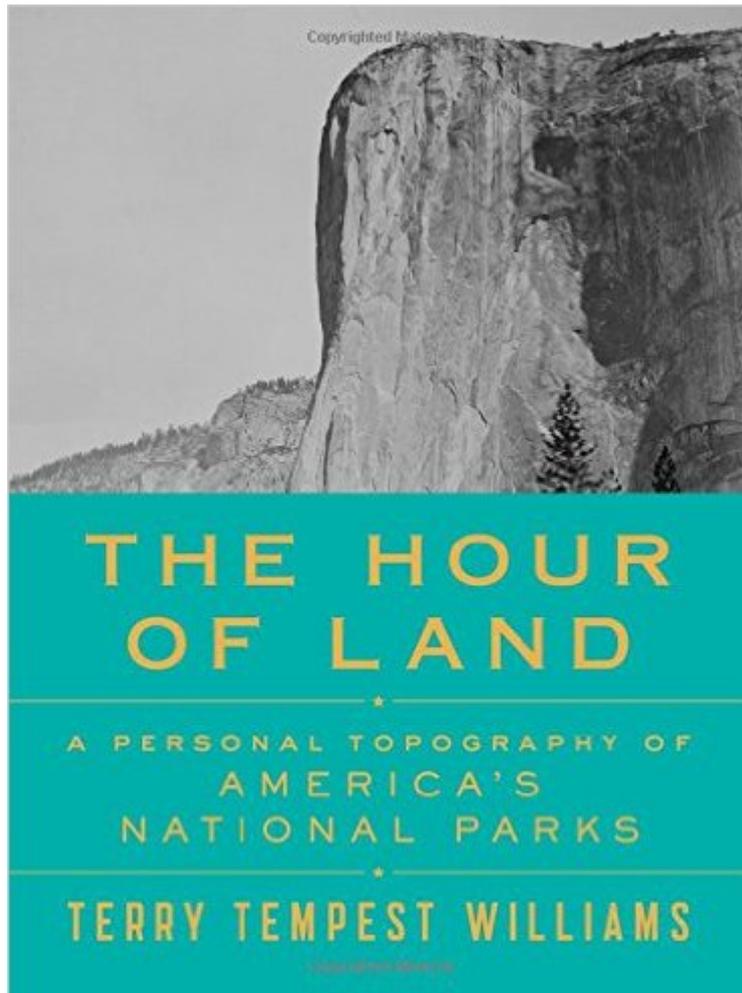


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# The Hour Of Land: A Personal Topography Of America's National Parks



## Synopsis

America's national parks are breathing spaces in a world in which such spaces are steadily disappearing, which is why more than 300 million people visit the parks each year. Now Terry Tempest Williams, the author of the environmental classic *Refuge* and the beloved memoir *When Women Were Birds*, returns with *The Hour of Land*, a literary celebration of our national parks, an exploration of what they mean to us and what we mean to them. From the Grand Tetons in Wyoming to Acadia in Maine to Big Bend in Texas and more, Williams creates a series of lyrical portraits that illuminate the unique grandeur of each place while delving into what it means to shape a landscape with its own evolutionary history into something of our own making. Part memoir, part natural history, and part social critique, *The Hour of Land* is a meditation and a manifesto on why wild lands matter to the soul of America.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

More of a memoir than a travel guide, *The Hour of Land*, I'm willing to bet, is unlike any of the many books that are currently being published to coincide with National Parks Centennial. Terry Tempest Williams has written about 12 National Parks and Monuments in layers: surface descriptions through the eyes of someone who has spent much of her life watching, wandering, and wondering; and then all that is beneath the surface including the political maneuvering and legislation that created them; the dark energy that threatens them. But also their magic and mystery and their role as a source of imagination and possibility. We realize that the deeper we look into

these places “which may be as close as what we, in America, have to call “Sacred Lands” the better we know ourselves. The post-modern black and white photos (Sebastio Salgado, Sally Mann, Robert Adams, Emmet Gowin among them) tell their own story and their selection and positioning within the book become clues to a magic riddle for which each reader is sure to find his or her own unique solution. This thrilling book, may be her best yet.

This is a powerful book that at times is nearly lyrical and at times a little self-indulgent. It is a highly personal collection of essays, themed around 12 of the national parks. That may sound trite, but each park is treated differently, sort of a base for exploration of things related to that particular place, including history, conflicts, threats to the place, and stories about people involved in some way with the place or with issues the place has brought to her mind. Overall is the sense of the importance of parks as focal points for discovering a sense of unity--if I understand her correctly. My description here isn't very good, but take my word for it, the intermix of stories about people interspersed with her own (which includes a lot of her large and strong Mormon family, her remarkably sturdy and long marriage, her activism and travels--hikes, visits and more--with friends such as Doug Peacock and Rick Bass) is an inventive and fascinating mix. She's long been a successful writer, and this book is made readable through her skill. There are rants, sadness and a great deal of anger, not always so easy to read about, but in this book, compelling. For example in the chapter on Alcatraz Island, she writes about an art exhibition by the remarkable Chinese artist Ai Weiwei, themed on freedom and incarceration; the essay mixes her reaction to and participation in the exhibit. It turns into a meditation on freedom to dissent and repression, including the American Indian occupation of the place in the 1970s. Another quite remarkable essay is the one on the Gettysburg battlefield, telling the stories of a number of people including guides and re-enactors, and the point that the Civil War is alive and well is well made. A couple of chapters describe the involvement of rich men in creating parks, more complex and interesting than one might think: the Rockefellers in Acadia National Park, for example. The essay on Theodore Roosevelt park in North Dakota describes in grim detail some of the sociology of the oil boom in the Bakken area, and fracking which, partly because of the peculiarities of our energy regulations, present a deadly threat to the park. The essays I note here are a juxtaposition of generosity and greed. The essay on Gulf Islands National Seashore is the most strongly partisan, looking largely at the BP oil disaster, and making BP seem something manipulative and evil, with glimpses of untold truths and cover ups. The essay on Glacier National Park is about literally surviving a fire that quite easily could have killed her and the family and others she was with. There are 12 parks in all, including Big Bend,

Cesar Chavez (small, dedicated 2012), Grand Teton, Effigy Mounds, Gates of the Arctic, Canyonlands and Glacier, and the others as noted. I don't think the title is a very good one and "personal topography" isn't very descriptive. The essays vary considerably in both form and length. Each essay/chapter features a black and white photograph, which create moodiness and mostly add to the book.

Magnificent. This book goes deep, and is sprawling and poetic and rich and nuanced. So happy for its arrival. It feels like the book that I didn't know I'd been waiting for about our national parks and ideas of wilderness. Cannot recommend it highly enough. Thank you, Terry Tempest Williams.

This book is OK, but it's not my favorite of Terry Tempest Williams. That honor goes to *Refuge*. Some of the essays in this book, especially the conversations, seem a little forced. It seems to me that the Park Service came to Ms. Tempest and invited her to visit some parks and write about them for the Service's Centennial. Some of the essays spent more time on Ms. Williams's family history, such as the essay on Acadia in Maine, rather than the natural and human history of the park. The best essays are the ones where Ms. Williams has a passion for the landscape. The others just read like reporting.

An open inquiry into where we have been and where we are going through eyes full of our national parks and monuments. The nonjudgemental contemplations encourage the reader's curiosity in exploring a deeper sense of time and place. The photographs are breathtaking and remind us that the spectacular beauty within each park forever changes moment by moment. Heartfelt and eloquent.

Great book. Each chapter was informative and poetic. Descriptions of environment including flowers animals trees earth so clear like being there. Political issues often included. Have been to many of our parks now interested in visiting those I have not that she covers. Very important book for everyone to read. Beautiful.

Terry Tempest Williams is an environmentalist, author, and poet who tours a number of National Parks and shares her deep spiritual experiences there, her love of nature, her outrage at the destruction of our treasures, and even the history we need to understand. Her writing often is poetic and stirring. Occasionally this format loses the reader, but is never dull. One comes away with a

deeper appreciation of these American treasures.

As always, Terry deeply understands the landscape and language. Great narrative about great, but evolving American idea - national parks.

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