

Architectural icon: the u

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Introduction The U. S.

capitol building is one of America's greatest and most recognizable historic buildings. Located in Washington DC, opposite the National Mall from the Washington Monument, the US Capitol Hill building is a prominent landmark that showcases a 19th century neoclassical architecture. Besides it being a symbolic structure with historical significance, the US Capitol Hill is the work place for elected members of Congress. The aim of this paper is to describe this iconic building and show how it functions. The paper will also give suggestions on how the building can be improved through interior redesign, reconstruction, reorientation, landscaping or through reconstruction.

Capitol Hill The name of the iconic building to be studied is The Capitol Hill. According to the AOC, the history of the US Capitol Hill started in the 1793 and since then the building has undergone several changes including rebuilding, burns, extensions, and has been restored several times. President George Washington selected the present District of Columbia to plan for a new city in Washington. A French engineer by the name Pierre Charles L'Enfant was hired to plan for the city of Washington and he selected the present location as it was at an elevated east end on the Brow of Jenkins' Hill. The Frenchman however refused to give his design of the Capitol Hill and later a Scottish trained physician by the name Dr. William Thornton presented a plan for the building that was accepted on April 5, 1793 by commissioners.

Washington gave a formal approval on July, 1793 and President George Washington laid the cornerstone of the building in September, 1793. Even

though the building was not completed in time, Congress, the Library Congress, the Supreme Court, and the courts of the District of Columbia occupied the building by 1800. There have been more than 11 architects who have made contributions to the Capitol including Thomas Walter who designed the current dome (History of the U. S.

Capitol Building, n. p.). According to Rachel Cooper, Capitol Hill has 540 rooms that are divided among 5 levels: the ground floor is allocated to congressional offices, the second floor houses the senate in the north wing and the house of representatives in the south wing. The third floor is allocated to visitors who can watch live proceedings of Congress when in session. The fourth floor and basement serve as additional offices and machinery rooms.

In the center of the building is the dome where the rotunda is located. This is a circular space serving as a gallery of sculptures and paintings of American historical figures and events. The Floor Plan Thomas Jefferson, the US president had wanted a structure that resembled a Roman Temple hence the circular structures. Neoclassical style architecture is one that encompasses the Greek Revival (popular in the 18th and 19th centuries) and the Federal architecture. As a result the US Capitol's designs were derived from ancient Rome and Greek and they evoke the ideals that steered the country's founding fathers as they framed the republic. How the building was constructed The building has been constructed for a long time now, because of numerous renovations.

The building was constructed by free whites and enslaved blacks who were rented from local slaveholders and later by neo classical Italian sculptors who migrated to America (Parker, p. 12). Dimensions of the Building According to the AOC, the Capitol Hill's length from north to south is 751 feet 4 inches while its furthestmost width measures 350 feet. However, its height above the baseline is 288 feet from the east front to the top of the statue of freedom (History of the U. S.

Capitol Building, n. p.). Materials Used The original building was completed in 1826 and was initially made of bricks that were clad in sandstone. Later in mid 19th century, the north and south wings were added with other connecting corridors. These were mainly made up of brick clad in marble.

The dome of the Capitol is made up of cast iron that totals to about 8, 909, 200 pounds (History of the U. S. Capitol Building, n. p.).

Challenges encountered in building the Capitol Hill Several challenges were faced during the course of construction of the Capitol. First, construction was very labor intensive and time consuming. This is because sandstone that was used for building was being ferried from faraway quarries in Virginia. It was hard to induce workers to leave their homes to come to the wilderness that was Capitol Hill. Funding was also inadequate and as a result in 1796 the commissioners were forced to focus on building the northern wing to be used by congress. A magnificent ruin occurred in August 24, 1814 when British troops set fire on the Capitol building which fortunately was stopped by a sudden rainstorm (History of the U.

S. Capitol Building, n. p.). Significance of the Building The Capitol Hill is significant as it produces nationally significant imageries that are pursuant to their varied goals (Parke, p.

45). The building stands as the focal point of a centerpiece of the national mall and the Capitol Hill and as the government's legislative branch (The US Capitol Building, n. p.). Renovations Although an old building, I will not suggest that the Capitol Hill should be knocked down any time in the foreseeable future.

This is because apart from being a historical architectural mastery of our forefathers, the building houses one arm of the government as well as housing the US Supreme Court, and the library congress among other important offices. According to Grooms & Lednum (p. 7), Capitol Hill is a building and neighborhood that has taken more than 200 years in the making with powerful historical figures like Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Jefferson. The building has especially been shaped by the middle class Americans including artisans, civil servants, merchants, and craftsmen. Therefore destroying the building is like destroying the American rich culture. Through various renovations and redesigns, the building can easily compete with some of the new buildings in terms of architectural beauty.

Nowhere in the whole of DC is L'Enfant's original street plan is better preserved than in Capitol Hill. The structure does reflect more than two centuries of architectural styles: Federal, Second Empire, Queen Anne, Romanesque, and the Second Empire (Grooms & Lednum, p. 15). Today people are allowed to tour the magnificent site that is Capitol Hill, admire the

lovely old structure and delight at the same time the pleasures of urban living while enjoying the heritage of the great capitol (p. 18).

Conclusion Being one of America's greatest and most recognizable historic buildings, the Capitol Hill is located in Washington DC, opposite the National Mall from the Washington Monument. It is a prominent landmark that showcases a 19th century neoclassical architecture as well as beaux arts architecture which is a theatrical and with a great deal of ornaments. I strongly oppose any ideas of demolishing the building in order to put another 'Capitol Hill.' I propose that the building should stay there for many generations to come to enjoy not only its architectural beauty but also the history that the building is. The US Capitol's designs were derived from ancient Rome and Greek and they evoke the ideals that steered the country's founding fathers as they framed the republic.

This is history that we should always strive to keep.