

## The Architecture of the Capitol: an outline

### I. Historical Context

- From the start, the basic plan envisioned was similar to the Williamsburg Capitol in that it was bicameral, but larger and more monumental: two wings joined by a domed rotunda
- Also from the start, the U.S. Capitol was envisioned in a way which made it a new type of religious symbol: a “temple” of liberty.
- This goal, however, of creating an iconic symbol for a new idea led to the “bricolage” which Dell Upton describes: multiple sources, multiple architects, and eventually, multiple meanings.

### II. L’Enfant’s Plan:

- based on Versailles and Williamsburg
- two systems superimposed:
  - 1) grid of streets which creates neighborhoods
  - 2) diagonal boulevards connecting monuments or ceremonial public spaces: these were the major avenues names for the 13 states
- center: T-shaped park anchored at opposite ends by the Capitol and the President’s house, connected by the mall

### III. The competition

- a public competition was used to select the design
- first round selected George Turner and Stephen Hallet
- Washington and Jefferson preferred a late entry, William Thornton’s design (based on the popular Georgian style)
- eventually, a design which combined Thornton’s ideas, Hallet’s, and L’Enfant’s (who did not enter the competition) was created as the final design and credited to Thornton
- Benjamin Latrobe later made some modifications to it when he was appointed the supervising architect (a position which was held by numerous people during the time it took to complete the building)

### IV. Continued Development

- One reason for the protracted process was the fact that the British destroyed most of it during the War of 1812
- As the rebuilding progressed, it became apparent that the nation was growing at a pace which made the size of the Capitol inadequate and expansions had to be planned
- Thomas Ustick Walter was responsible for most of the work done in the 1850s-60s, a process which was delayed this time because of the Civil War
- His additions included adding wings to the building, and raising the dome, since the shallow dome did not look very monumental as the building became larger