



# **Ansel Adams and the American Landscape: A Biography**

*Jonathan Spaulding*

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Working with a cumbersome 8 x 10 field camera, Ansel Adams (1902-1984) created some of the most dramatic and influential photographs ever made of the American West. His majestic landscapes and evocative still lifes conveyed a vision of an idealized America that helped inspire the wilderness conservation movement. Yet despite these accomplishments, Adams has been the least studied of our most important photographers. Now Jonathan Spaulding provides the first full biography of the artist and a critical analysis of his life's work.

Refuting the myth of a solitary and carefree wilderness explorer, Spaulding portrays a man grappling with the question of how art and nature intersect in the modern world. He addresses the contradictions the photographer faced as both artist and activist: his struggle to balance art and commercialism; his desire to create art, yet enjoy bourgeois comforts; his simultaneous support for economic development, tourism, and wilderness preservation.

Spaulding places Adams's work in the context of modernism and the other major developments in twentieth-century art and ideas. He examines his debt to the pioneering art photographers Alfred Stieglitz and Edward Steichen, and his response to later artists. He traces Adams's growth as an environmental activist and discusses his use of photography to further the cause of conservation.

Questions regarding the meaning and place of wilderness in modern culture remain with us today. By analyzing these issues through Adams's life and work, this book is a telling portrait of one of the century's greatest photographers and a reflection of our changing attitudes about the natural world.

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