

| BY GUSTAVO F. ARAOZ |

WHEN WE AMERICANS TALK ABOUT the World Heritage Convention, we are quick to point out with pride that it sprang from an American idea, that we were the first nation to ratify it, that Yellowstone National Park was the first site inscribed in the list, and that during the first 18 years of the convention, an additional 20 American sites were successfully nominated. We are right to be proud of having been instrumental in creating the most popular and widely ratified convention in the history of the world. **WORLD HERITAGE SITES** are special in that they have outstanding universal value, which is a way of saying that they have the power to stir every human being. For me, this value is more than an intellectual construct. It is an overwhelming emotional perception that I get whenever I visit a world heritage site, whether it is Machu Picchu, the Parthenon, the Medina of Fes, or the Banks of the Seine in Paris. The genius that permeates each of these magical places reminds me in its own particular way that the capacity of the human spirit is infinite, regardless of the little slot that we may occupy in our millenary trajectory. **IN THE UNITED STATES**, we are fortunate to have many sites such as this. Some are already inscribed in the world heritage list, while many others are still waiting. In the ancestral Native American lands of the Southwest, Mesa Verde National Park, Chaco Culture National Historical Park, and Taos Pueblo are more than the majestic testimony of great feats of construction and profound aesthetic sensibility. They also speak eloquently of peace interrupted by epic human conflict, of profound ties to the earth, and of the irreparable sadness in the face of paradise lost. **IN THE EAST**, Independence Hall, Mount Vernon, and Jefferson's Monticello inspire us with awe for the eternal human search for a utopia where the spirit can soar. The miracle that so much talent could exist at one time in one place, and that it could then converge to create the American Republic, remains unfathomable. These places drive home the universal message that when faced with great adversity, one must act decisively and with honesty. **AS AN IMMIGRANT AND A NATURALIZED AMERICAN**, the Statue of Liberty is the U.S. world heritage site that speaks most eloquently to me, even though my personal immigration on a regularly scheduled Pan Am flight from Havana to Miami, in 1960, lacks the drama and

pathos of the halls of Ellis Island. I harbor no illusions that Miami International Airport—my personal Ellis Island—will ever be added to the world heritage list. This is because in spite of this personal connection, the authenticity and integrity of the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island pack an emotional punch far more powerful. The little island in New York harbor—the place of so much suffering and joy, desperation and hope, gratitude and regret—is emblematic of the emotional baggage that every immigrant carries for life. **THERE IS INHERENT VALUE IN** all cultural sites, but rarely do they rise to the level of the world heritage list. The United States boasts dozens of places that speak eloquently to the universal condition, and of American

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contributions that—for better and sometimes for worse—have changed the planet. They range from humble places where the spark of a simple idea changed the world, to devices that broke the bounds of Earth itself and deposited men on the Moon. **THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE WORLD HERITAGE LIST** brings a new excitement and opportunity. It is a chance to engage the international community, to invite people the world over to witness the American experience and its impact on humanity. The tentative list of U.S. sites recently nominated for inscription on the list is a small but significant step in the right direction to ensure that these outstanding places will get the global recognition they deserve.

Gustavo F. Araoz is President of the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS).