

CAPITAL OF THE NEW AMERICA The foundation of the federal capital of the United States, to be built on a confluence of the Anacostia and the Potomac between the existing settlements of Georgetown, Hamburg and Carrollsburg, was ratified in July of 1790 with the Residence Act, the result of brilliant diplomatic negotiations conducted by Jefferson, then State Secretary, between the states of the North and the South. On the one hand, he loved the beauty of nature, which led him to design houses opened up as far as possible toward the outside, with windows down to the floor and octagonal projections generating "semicircles of air and light."²² On the other hand, he thought of land as the load-bearing axis of democracy, based on the key concept of the fair division of the territories between all Americans. He dreamed of a nation of farms worked by people living in harmony with nature and their fellow men.²³ These agrarian ideals were obviously utopian, given the reality of the northern states, with their large urban concentrations mainly involved in industry and commerce, whereas the great plantations of the South were worked by masses of slaves completely deprived of the rights described as self-evident truths in the Declaration of Independence. Moreover, although Jefferson deplored slavery, he was a landowner whose own economic well-being was based on the exploitation of slaves.²⁴ These were the ambiguities of the nascent nation, which still had to perfect its foundations, but trusted in progress and confidently left its problems to be solved by the future generations.²⁵ To meet the new challenges of the future, the young Americans had to be trained, however, and that is why Jefferson believed that the universal diffusion of knowledge was the only "sure foundation. These two buildings were not to be joined by a plaza or boulevard, as was usually the case in large European cities at the time, but by a public walk along the Tyber, a small tributary of the Potomac. Thanks to Jefferson, the landscape is a powerful presence in the urban space, and nature becomes an integral part of the architectural design.²¹ Jefferson's predilection for natural landscapes was based on both aesthetic and moral values. 6, 8)...