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parts of Europe. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the respective crowns founded cities by buying up land from peasants, using vastly different strategies.

The volume concludes with two contributions on Ireland on the eve of industrialization. Brian J. Graham (Northern Ireland) discusses the social, economic, political, and aesthetic motivations behind urban improvement efforts. Susan Hood (Northern Ireland) describes the planning of Strokestown, a small town in the Irish Midlands.

As is to be expected of conferences of this type, the contributions are uneven, both in quality and scope. Some of the essays represent summaries of secondary literature, others are reports of research in progress. The broad range of the contributions is both a strength and weakness of the volume. The geographic diversity is refreshing and valuable: many of the areas represented in this volume are not usually included in the literature. In the pre-modern age which had different contours than today, these areas can potentially shed important light on the European urban experience as a whole. At the same time, however, the geographic focus seems arbitrary. Are these lands to be understood as a periphery? North (and East) versus South? The experiences of Poland and Hungary might have been more appropriately discussed along with the Czech lands (which are not represented) within the context of the Great Eastern Expansion (bringing in the German lands as well). The wide periodic range is also problematic, serving as much to pull apart as it does to bind together the major thread: the issue of urban landownership. Furthermore, although all the papers address landownership, some do so only tangentially. The book would have benefitted by the addition of a concluding chapter, which could have taken some material from the introduction, making it more lucid in return. To a certain extent, some of these problems have as much to do with the state of research than with the volume itself. Rather than take away from this volume, they underscore the importance of continuing comparative, multi-disciplinary discussions of this kind; and this volume suggests plenty of directions for future dialogue and research. On the whole, this is a highly informative work that should be of interest to everyone involved in the research of the pre-modern European city.

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Spann, Edward K. *Designing Modern America: The Regional Planning Association of America and Its Members*. (Urban Life and Landscape Series). Columbus OH: Ohio State University Press, 1996. Pp. xvi, 247. Bibliography, index. US$45.00 (cloth)

The Regional Plan Association of America (RPAA) looms large in American planning history not because of what the organization did collectively (not much), but rather because of what the members contributed as individuals (a great deal). The organizational designation suggests a substantial body with regular publications, local chapters, annual meetings, etc. In fact nothing could be further from the truth. The RPAA was an informal and loose knit group of acquaintances in overlapping friendship circles who would get together periodically to advocate for various of the ideas that they held in common.

But as individuals, the RPAA consisted of many of the finest minds in American planning, architecture and social activism in the early decades of this century. Benton Mackaye was instrumental in the creation of the Applicachian Trail. Henry Wright, Clarence Stein and Alexander Bing breathed life into the evolving American version of the English garden city through their creation of Sunnyside Gardens in Queens, New York and Radburn in Fairlawn, New Jersey. Edith Elmer Wood was an important figure in the creation of public housing. Perhaps the most prominent contribution of all came via the towering figure of Lewis Mumford, who through the power of his intellect and his writing talent continues to instruct generations of planning students and urbanists about important issues in city building. Among the other RPAA leading lights were Catherine Bauer, Stuart Chase, Robert Kohn, and Charles Whitaker; all significant names in American planning history.

Edward Spann's book about these remarkable people and their times is a thoroughly researched history of this extraordinary organization. It provides far more detail about the intersections between their collective deliberations and individual works than has heretofore been known. It is an important contribution to American planning history because it permits us to more fully understand the personal and political dynamics behind some of the important innovations and writings with which RPAA members were connected both collectively and individually.

The RPAA's "brief shining moment" was the two decades from the end of World War I to the end of the 1930s. From the vantage point of planning history these years are important as the moment in which the dimensions of the American landscape were transformed to accommodate the voracious spatial appetite of the automobile.

Ideologically these planners, architects, and social activists were critical of the unregulated market. They tended to view the problems of America as driven by over speculation. Their solution was tight control of regional land use. The auto-driven sprawl which plagues us now was then in its infancy. Few could perceive the social, economic, and environmental disaster awaiting future generations. It is a tribute to their collective intelligence and prescience that they could. Their solution was to use public planning mechanisms to reign in speculation and order regional growth. As our generation of planners attempts to help society dig out from under this costly sprawl with ideas about "new urbanism," "transit oriented development," and "pedestrian pockets," we can only wonder at what might have been if the RPAA's call had been heeded in its time.

The RPAA vision was built around a notion of the region as a natural entity. Because it was natural, it and not the market was the proper spatial focus for land use, urban design and civic con-

siderations. In their schema the natural region was only uncovered through a regional survey. Regional planning was a process intended to accentuate the strengths and minimize the problems of these naturally existing spatial entities.

Looking back from an era in which such an activist and anti-market conception of public action is simply ruled out of "realistic" conversation, the expansiveness of their thought seems positively Quixotic. Yet given the common sense rationality of so much of what they advocated in light of what came to pass, the book forces one to consider why we permit ourselves to continue to succumb to "realism" when "idealism" might in fact be more efficient.

Spann's treatment of this group is fair and balanced. His conclusion that the full scope of what they taught and believed still awaits a better airing by policy makers is correct. Their ideas will continue to attract adherents not only because the problems, that they were among the first to identify, persist, but with the advent of globalization, have worsened. Thus their idea for establishing a rational spatial basis for a socially equitable civic life will continue to attract adherents. In that regard, this book becomes required reading for those seeking to understand the depth and complexity of the physical and written legacy which these talented people have bequeathed us.

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Hise, Greg. *Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth-Century Metropolis*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997. Pp. xiii, 294. Maps, black and white illustrations, bibliography and index. US $35.95 (cloth).

Los Angeles has been called everything imaginable, most of it bad. Perhaps the most acid description was discovered by Carl Abbott who quoted, though not approvingly, a critic who said that "Los Angeles was "topless, bottomless, shapeless, formless, and endless, ... random, frenzied, rootless, and unplanned" and "a violently aggressive organism."[1] One hopes that this critic will never read Greg Hise's very good book on metropolitan planning in the city that everyone loves to hate. Not only will the critic read a very stimulating story of planning in the Los Angeles and other areas, he will be in for an agonizing reappraisal. It has been an open secret in the profession of urban history that Los Angeles County created one of the first countywide planning commissions in the nation; that the city and county adopted a uniform street plan in the 1920s; that the city elected the first African American to the California state legislature; that the area created an enlightened scheme for metropolitan government in the Lakewood Plan; and that people from its suburb of Pasadena provided leadership for everything from the reinvention of Throop Institute into the California Institute of Technology to the creation of the Mount Wilson and Palomar observatories. These, together with developments in the Bay Area, made California the world leader in astronomy. The area is, and has been, anything but the retrograde, bible-thumping, poodle-worshipping nut case that its critics have charged. Rather, the area was, and is, a captivating human cauldron, fusing a new culture.

Kevin Starr and Carl Abbott have made this story clear, and Hise's history of city planning adds many important dimensions. Hise argues that the Los Angeles area was a leader in the adoption of sound, reformist, Progressive city planning principles. The American city planning tradition evolved from a number of sources, and as it did, both public planners and private developers quickly incorporated this tradition of "community building" into their repertoire. The tradition drew on the work of Ebenezer Howard; Lewis Mumford, Henry Wright, Clarence Stein and the regionalists of the 1920s; housing reformers; the New Deal new towns; the rural housing and "physical planning and social reform" work of the Resettlement Administration in California; the developments of businessmen and builders; and Southern California's and the Bay Area's experiences with wartime housing.

From the 1920s, when developer Walter Leimert created Leimert Park, Southern California has been at the forefront of the American planning tradition, along with other areas like the Country Club District of Kansas City. In the thirties, the Farm Security Administration experimented with mass-produced housing, novel materials like metal, innovative groupings, and enlightened models from Radburn, New Jersey.

From there, the FSA ideas drifted back into town, along with the war workers from the agricultural camps, and took root in Bay Area wartime housing. In Southern California, other experiments were conducted by both the aircraft industry and private builders. Like the FSA, they also had adopted mass production principles years before Leavitt and Sons. Far from being "planless"and "formless," these suburbs were located within driving distance of the factories that were churning out warplanes, as was Westchester, located within sight of the plants at Los Angeles Municipal Airport. All this was not a flight from the center city, but rather an attempt to integrate shopping, services, home, and work for suburban factory hands.

These threads of "community building," harking back to the 1920s, came together in the postwar developments of Henry Kaiser. One was planned decentralization, enough to have warmed the cockles of Lewis Mumford's heart. These suburbs offered not single use, but rather occupational and economic diversity; access to employment; comprehensive financial and city planning; and linkage of center city and periphery. Too, they were systematically formed around major arterials. The city was not being disowned, but rather tied together; the past was not rejected, but rather affirmed and built upon. Kaiser and his partner Fritz Burns believed that a home gave a working class family a stake in American society. To achieve his goal of providing both white- and blue-collar housing, Kaiser also tried to industrialize the process of home building and to promote vertical business integration.