

The History of Urban Planning in America

Schaffer, Daniel, ed. *Two Centuries of American Planning*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988. Pp. 329. Illustrations, maps, and index. \$48.50 (U.S.) cloth, \$14.95 (U.S.) paper

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Fisher, Irving D. *Frederick Law Olmsted and the City Planning Movement in the United States*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1986. Pp. 205. Illustrations, maps, index

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Their task of providing a comprehensive introduction to the following articles was not an easy one. The book spans a wide range of theoretical approaches, different methods and topics, and various conclusions about the practical implications of feminist research. Articles deal with analysis of the impact of economic restructuring on gender roles and on the way the city is spatially organized as well as with the design and implementation of urban structures responding to the needs of women. The methods are varied, ranging from a feminist reading of published statistical data to examination of letters produced by women active in urban reform. Action research also receives some attention.

Among these articles, an essay by Suzanne Mackenzie and another by Damaris Rose and Paul Villeneuve are highly significant parts of the book. They investigate how city structure changes with restructuring in the labour market and in gender roles. The first essay considers two such periods, both marked by an "urban crisis" and a "woman crisis," namely the late 1800s and the mid 1900s. The second article deals specifically with the contemporary period in inner-city Montreal neighbourhoods. The other articles are more policy-oriented. William Michelson's essay is a contribution to the understanding of the impact of major economic changes on the lives of women in the urban community and how these women have experienced these changes. The author is concerned about elements of urban structure that act either to facilitate or to hinder the lives of working women. This concern is prominent in Gerda Wekerle's article on the origins and evolution of women's housing cooperatives in Canada and is the background of Fran Klodawsky and Aron Spector's discussion of single-parent family housing as an issue in Canadian cities. Denise Piche's article deals with the related, although different, question of bringing women into the planning process. It is based on the early stages of a project using action research. The focus is on women's experiences during their leisure

times and on creating spaces for women in the city as well as in the planning process.

The last article of the collection consists of another essay by the editors. They raise a number of important questions related to "gender-specific approaches to theory and method." The main problems faced by feminist research are outlined and an agenda for further inquiry is offered. The commitment to develop methods sensitive to women and to ensure that findings reach those engaged in policy and practice is presented as an essential element in feminist research. In many respects, however, the content of their article does not differ much from previous publications on similar matters. Despite references to *Women and Environments*, it lacks the Canadian perspective that makes the rest of *Life Spaces: Gender, Household, Employment* a significant contribution to feminist studies.

Finally, the book furnishes an annotated bibliography. According to the editors and their collaborator Susan Montonen, it brings together the principal contributions in print about gender relations and the Canadian environment dating from the early 1970s. As is true of most edited bibliographies, it is far from exhaustive. It provides nevertheless an excellent starting point for researchers concerned with the gender relations within community environments in Canada.

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As Daniel Schaffer observes in his introduction to the collection of essays comprising *Two Centuries of American Planning*, the American planning profession, especially urban planners, is under attack from many quarters at present and is torn by internal divisions. In one of the essays making up Schaffer's volume, Howell Baum explores the roots of the current "conceptual crisis" in the planning profession, finding them in attacks both from above by policymakers, such as former president Ronald Reagan, who are wedded to the market mechanism, and from below by minority groups who see redevelopment destroying their neighbourhoods. Planners need, Baum concludes, to rethink their ideas and actions. Perhaps as part of their reformulation, some planners and scholars are turning to history, looking anew at the development of urban planning in the United States. The past few years have witnessed an outpouring of books and articles on the history of American urban planning and the establishment of new academic groups to further its study — the Planning History Group within the Organization of American Historians and the Society for American City and Regional Planning History for example. The three works under review suggest some of the approaches currently being taken to this historical examination of urban planning.

Two Centuries of American Planning presents an overview of how, in the space of just four generations, the United States "moved from a rural to an urban to a suburban and now a post-suburban nation." The title of this collection is a bit misleading, for the essays examine urban planning almost to the exclusion of any consideration of other types of planning efforts. Within this limitation, however, the volume offers a valuable introduction into how Americans have tried to shape their urban environment from the early 19th century to the present day. Many of the essays underline a fundamental conflict in the goals of urban planning in America: on one hand a concern for stimulating economic growth through private development, while on the other a desire to reform society in the interests of equity.

Planning began, the volume shows, well before the 20th century. Edward Spann examines the adoption of the gridiron street plan by New York City in 1811, seeing in this action a shift away from earlier urban planning that was "imbued with socio-political and aesthetic concerns" in such colonial centres as Philadelphia, Annapolis, and Savannah to "simpler and more utilitarian plans intended to facilitate the rapid urban development which occurred during the nineteenth century." Essays by Henry Binford and Michael Ebner show how suburbs with characteristics distinct from their mother cities and from each other grew up around Boston and north of Chicago. The development of transportation facilities combined with new ideas about the city to create suburbs as middle-class residential enclaves. Private, not public, planning efforts were of most importance. "Small entrepreneurs, hustlers," were, Binford shows, instrumental in the growth of Cambridge and Somerville as suburbs of Boston. As time progressed, however, suburban leaders came to think of their communities as distinctive places. Ebner documents how a North Shore suburban *ethos* had taken root in the eight suburban

towns that had developed north of Chicago by the 1880s and the 1890s. Focusing upon the private and public work of Andrew Green in New York City, David Hammack claims that "a form of comprehensive planning was in process long before the age of the formal comprehensive plan."

Several of the essays investigate Frederick Law Olmsted's impact upon urban planning in America, treating his work as a transition from older to more modern conceptions of planning. Dana White surveys Olmsted's career, concluding that modern planners can still learn much from his pioneering efforts. In a more positive assessment than those of some scholars, Dana concludes that Olmsted's "creations appear to be natural, pristine, eternal" and "seem expressions of a no-nonsense, back-to-basics Yankee commonsense." In a particularly sophisticated and well-argued piece, William Wilson illustrates how Olmsted's ideas combined with new elements to create a park movement in Seattle in the early 1900s, and how this development paved the way for partially successful comprehensive city planning. David Johnson looks at the development of regional planning in New York in the 1920s and 1930s, finding its roots in Olmsted's 19th century efforts. Johnson traces the uneven growth of the idea of regional planning, culminating in the 1929 Regional Plan of New York.

Four essays examine the evolution of cities and city planning since the 1920s. In one of the few studies to go beyond urban planning, John Hancock provides a critical survey of the diverse planning efforts of the 1930s, concluding (correctly) that "New Deal policies for urban America were unambitious and piecemeal." John Bauman looks at the development of public housing policies after World War II by exploring developments in Philadelphia. He shows that in the immediate postwar years planners initiated a successful "shelter-oriented redevelopment programme" in which "low- and moderate-income housing was woven into the neighbourhood

fabric." From the mid 1950s on, however, planners lost sight of the neighbourhood and shifted their attention to downtown redevelopment, and public housing degenerated into "a deprived perilous world of social malaise and instability." Finally, essays by Robert Fishman and David Goldfield examine how technological and social changes are creating new types of cities in the 1980s, especially self-sufficient peripheral communities beyond central cities and their traditional suburbs.

Two Centuries of American Planning is a solid survey of the development of city planning in the United States, a volume particularly well suited for use in upper-division college and university courses on urban history or urban planning. Appropriate and clearly reproduced maps and illustrations enhance the value of the work, and full endnotes for each essay guide the reader to additional primary and secondary sources. None the less, the study possesses shortcomings. The volume overemphasizes the importance of planning, especially urban planning, in American history. Many cities grew up with only minimal attempts, private or public, at planning, and with even fewer successes. This unintentional bias may derive from the focus of many of the study's essays on just a few large cities, especially New York. What was happening in smaller cities? Then, too, even within its exploration of the evolution of urban planning, this volume neglects important developments. Aside from Wilson's essay, there is little about the city beautiful-city functional movement, which many historians regard as an important turning-point in the city planning movement. Even more surprisingly, given the recent interest in it by scholars such as Marc Weiss, the volume hardly touches upon the development of zoning. Despite these few drawbacks, *Two Centuries of American Planning* is a valuable collection, well designed as an introduction to the history of urban planning in the United States.

More problematic is Richard E. Fogelsong's *Planning the Capitalist City: The Colonial Era to the 1920s*. A revised dissertation in political science written at the University of Chicago, this study aims at presenting "a theoretically informed history, one that goes beyond the marshaling of facts around narrow historical questions or theorizing without historical reference." Deeply influenced by the works of Nicos Poulantas, Claus Offe, Manuel Castells, and David Harvey, Fogelsong takes a Marxist approach to the history of urban planning, seeing in it the unfolding of two contradictions: one "between the social character of land and its private ownership and control" and the other "between the need to socialize the control of urban space ... and the danger of truly socializing, that is, democratizing, the control of urban land."

Fogelsong begins by examining the colonial period, for him something of a golden age in which town planning was an essential feature of urban development. While useful in reminding us that town planning was important in New England and that even larger centres such as Philadelphia and Savannah bore the imprint of planners, his account goes too far in drawing a sharp distinction between the nature of city planning in colonial and later times. Fogelsong views the colonial period, incorrectly, as a pre-capitalistic age in which it was invariably "taken for granted that government or such other collective institutions as existed should seek to provide for the public good" and in which "there was yet no accepted distinction between public and private that prevented local authorities from organizing the development of the town on the basis of their conception of the public interest." To the contrary, capitalism was central to the economies of the colonies, and urban and rural land speculation was part of colonial business.

Moving into the 19th century, Fogelsong examines efforts at housing reform and park development as precursors to urban

planning. Here he is on safer ground. Housing reform, especially in New York, which he investigates in detail, was an important attempt to come to grips with urban problems. One need not be Marxist in approach to agree with him that the housing reform movement was elitist in leadership and sought, at least in part, to impose "middle-class standards of morality" upon "the ill-housed immigrant poor." This is, in fact, the standard interpretation put forward by the historian Roy Lubove two decades ago. Similarly, the park movement which spread across America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries contributed in important ways, as numerous historians have shown, to the development of the city beautiful movement. And, like the housing campaign, the park movement was, as Fogelsong points out, elitist in origins and represented, again at least in part, the efforts of business groups to impose their values upon others. Focusing upon Olmsted's creation of New York City's Central Park, Fogelsong probably goes too far, however, in claiming that "early park planners helped educate the city's business class about the need for state-organized forms of collective consumption as antidotes to the anarchic effects of the market system."

From these beginnings, Fogelsong moves to the core of his study, an examination of early 20th century urban planning, beginning with the city beautiful movement. After dealing with the "White City" in Chicago, he looks at the results of city beautiful movements in Washington, Cleveland, San Francisco, and elsewhere. The city beautiful movement was, according to him, "an attempt to create social and moral cohesiveness in a heterogeneous urban society in which face-to-face methods of social control had proven to be unworkable." Although led by businessmen and professional planners, the city beautiful movement largely failed, none the less, because it was not attentive enough to the economic needs of businessmen. Beautification did not provide for more economical land use and was, thus,

"insufficiently responsive to the property contradiction"; nor did it adequately address the "capitalist-democracy contradiction," for the voluntary, private associations of businessmen and planners in charge of the beautification efforts lacked the power to require compliance to their recommendations.

Around 1909 the city beautiful was superseded by the city practical movement, which Fogelsong reviews in the final substantive chapter of his work. He sees three inter-related developments as comprising this alteration in urban planning: a shift away from beautification to a concern for transportation needs and other economic matters in the drafting of comprehensive city plans, the creation of government commissions to implement the plans, and recourse to zoning to shape the urban environment. He observes that the city practical was more nearly successful than the city beautiful in achieving its goals because it came closer to reconciling the contradictions inherent in urban development and planning. In particular, he claims, the city practical movement achieved "a modicum of collective control of urban development in the interest of capital without subjecting that control to the claims and considerations of non-capitalist groups." Yet not even the city practical movement was totally successful. It could not be, according to Fogelsong, for some businessmen continued to see planning as a threat to their control over private property. In the city practical movement was born, he concludes, "a dynamic of support and opposition between planners and businessmen that continues to be acted out, in realm after realm today."

Fogelsong provides a useful survey of the early urban planning movement in America, showing how several common themes run through efforts to grapple with the explosive growth of American cities. Particularly valuable is his comparative point-of-view, for he makes a real effort to connect developments in the United States to similar

developments in Great Britain and Europe, especially in his accounts of the housing and park movements. One need not share his Marxist outlook to agree that much of the planning movement was elitist in leadership and that it sought to impose the values of middle-class businessmen and professionals upon other segments of society. The planning movement was, Fogelson correctly demonstrates, far from democratic.

None the less, his sweeping survey obscures much of the complexity of the urban planning movement, and particularly why it was only partly successful. Businessmen were far from monolithic in their approach to planning. There was much more conflict between groups of businessmen than Fogelson suggests, and these divisions made it impossible in city after city for businessmen to present a united front in support of planning, thus dooming the planning movement to defeat. As Fogelson himself notes at the conclusion of his study, "Undoubtedly, more such conflict would have been included had the focus (of my book) been on planning in particular cities." Recent studies of planning in specific cities do, indeed, reveal a pattern of intense conflict among business groups. Public disputes over where to locate civic centres, new harbour facilities, and redesigned transportation systems split businessmen into warring camps in such cities as Seattle, Portland, and San Francisco, and defeated attempts at comprehensive planning in those centres. Nor were ethnic and labour groups always as compliant as Fogelson suggests. In some cities on some occasions they were able to thwart or modify the desires of planners and businessmen. In short, the political situation with regard to urban planning was more pluralistic than he illustrates.

If Fogelson's study suffers from a lack of specificity, Irving Fisher's *Frederick Law Olmsted and the City Planning Movement in the United States* offers a narrow intellectual biography of one of the founders of urban

planning. Despite its title, this study reveals little about the movement for urban planning. The celebration in 1972 of the 150th anniversary of Olmsted's birth sparked renewed interest in his work, and Fisher's study, first written in 1976 but published a decade later, is one of the results of that interest. Fisher begins by highlighting the formative influences upon Olmsted's ideas. A love of nature inherited from his family, German Romantic idealism, and an admiration for the didactic and moral aspects of John Ruskin's writings combined to instill in Olmsted social and aesthetic ideals that would shape his later actions. Fisher then devotes separate chapters of his study to analyses of different aspects of Olmsted's thoughts.

Three aspects were, Fisher argues, of greatest significance. Perhaps most important, according to Fisher, was the "organic principle" that "became an integral part of Olmsted's aesthetic theory." In laying out Central Park, for example, he viewed the different parts as necessarily interconnected and as a result he constructed the roads, bridges, and walks in ways that would not detract from the overall aesthetic impact of the park. Fisher also examines the aesthetic principles underlying Olmsted's work, especially his belief, taken from the Romantics, that the unconscious faculties of the mind could be stirred into conscious action by the arranged landscape beauty of city parks. Olmsted sought, Fisher writes, "to free the imagination of the observer through aesthetic experience." Far from being elitist, Fisher concludes, Olmsted tried to appeal to everyone through his park work. Finally, Fisher investigates Olmsted's conceptions of beauty — his love of the picturesque, the serene, and the openness in nature.

From his examination of the concepts underlying Olmsted's work, Fisher moves to the most valuable part of his study, an analysis of how Olmsted viewed cities and the roles of parks in them. Fisher shows clearly that Olmsted had a positive

conception of the city. The growth of cities, Olmsted believed, represented the progressive development of civilization, and cities were to be valued for the cultural, social, and economic opportunities they brought people. Yet urban growth, Olmsted recognized, also had a negative side: it separated man from nature and led to an overspecialization in work, creating an artificial environment for many. Enter the large city park. Parks could, Olmsted thought, act as antidotes to the artificiality of urban life. Fisher concludes that, through his park work, Olmsted was seeking "social reform by achieving individual psychological change through aesthetic impulse. He was attempting to change society by indirection."

Fisher's slender volume is a welcome addition to the growing literature on Frederick Law Olmsted, probing in detail the sources of his ideas. And, as in the work edited by Schaffer, well-reproduced maps and diagrams grace this study. Yet it too has weaknesses. Most fundamentally, Fisher claims too much for Olmsted. While very important in the development of city planning, his work was not, contrary to Fisher's suggestions, the only source of planning ideas and actions. As other studies, including the two reviewed above in this essay, have shown, urban planning was a complex movement originating in numerous sources. The planning movement was more than simply "a manifestation of a social reform that had its inception in the 1850s and in the efforts of Frederick Law Olmsted." Then, too, while admirable in exploring the evolution of Olmsted's ideas, Fisher fails to relate adequately those ideas to what Olmsted and other early planners were doing. The studies of other scholars, particularly Laura Wood Roper and John Emerson Todd, present more well-balanced accounts of Olmsted's work and its later impact.

All of these studies further our understanding of the history of urban planning in America, but they also point to the need for additional research on this topic. The essays in *Two*

Centuries of American Planning explore many of the episodes in city development and urban planning in the United States, but, precisely because they are separate essays, do not present a comprehensive look at the development of the planning movement. *Planning the Capitalist City* attempts to present an overview of the connections between the development of planning thought and the realities of how planning was carried out. Too often, however, it fails to see the complexity of the situation and becomes mired in its ideological approach to planning. *Frederick Law Olmsted and the City Planning Movement in the United States* is an intellectual biography that does not demonstrate well enough how ideas were carried over into actions; it also overemphasizes one person's impact on the city planning movement. What is needed are works showing more clearly the connections between ideas and actions, ones that explore in some detail the cooperation and conflict between different groups and individuals active in the planning movement. Until such works appear, urban planners will be unable to benefit fully from the study of planning history. For instance, an examination of the complex relationships between planners, business groups, and labour groups in the progressive period might well offer insights useful for those seeking to redefine the relationships between planners, government, and minority groups in the present day.

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Scobie, James R. *Secondary Cities of Argentina: the Social History of Corrientes, Salta, and Mendoza, 1850-1910*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988. Pp. XVI, 276. Maps, black and white photographs, illustrations, notes and index.

Szuchman, Mark D. *Order, Family and Community in Buenos Aires 1810-60*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988. Pp. XIII, 307. Figures and tables, illustrations, methodological appendix, notes, bibliography and index.

Before his untimely death, Jim Scobie had, by the volume and quality of his publications, become the best-known and most-respected interpreter of Argentina to the English-speaking world. The scholarly community, therefore, should welcome with excitement this posthumous work, so ably completed and edited by his friend and colleague Samuel L. Bailey. In a sense *Secondary Cities of Argentina* is a continuation of a sequence. In 1964 Scobie published *Argentina: a City and a Nation*; a decade later *Buenos Aires: "Plaza to Suburb"*. Then his focus turned from the metropolis to sleepy Corrientes, colonial Salta, and burgeoning Mendoza.

Crucial to an understanding of this book is his belief that these secondary cities, and others like them, "linked rural economies and inhabitants with the outside world while insulating the traditional rural environment from the changing character of large urban centres. In this intermediate position economic relationships and social structure changed slowly . . . continuity within the secondary centres thus reinforced conservatism, accentuated the gap between major cities and the rest of the country, and contributed to the resistance to change that characterizes much of Latin America today."

Within this framework, the three cities are then described, compared, and contrasted. And what a dramatic contrast they provide.

The chapter on Corrientes, the first city, is subtitled "A Study in Stagnation." Here the central theme is that for reasons internal and, primarily, external Corrientes grew only modestly and was never able to capitalize on advantages it sometimes appeared to possess.

In contrast, Salta ("The Sleeping Beauty"), despite severe problems of health and hygiene and a rigid social structure, was eventually able to develop its pre-existing economy and to add some modest local industrial development.

Mendoza presents a more complex and dynamic picture. Despite the devastation of the 1861 earthquake, the city revived quickly, and by the end of the 19th century had entered a period of rapid demographic and economic growth. Alone of the cities studied, Mendoza attracted a large number of southern European immigrants who transformed the Pampas. Yet even Mendoza failed, in the period under review, to develop a new social structure or to transform the Cuyo region, of which it had become the economic centre.

Technically, *Secondary Cities of Argentina* is well produced. Its maps, diagrams, graphs, and tables are clear and meaningful, and it is well illustrated. Even more important, the notes and sources, despite Dr Bailey's modesty in the matter, are organized, informative, and succinct.

This book is readable, interesting, and informative to the widest readership, and it stands as a worthy monument to Scobie's memory.

Mark Szuchman's *Order, Family and Community in Buenos Aires 1810-60* makes an interesting comparison to Scobie's book. Both deal with aspects of urban history in 19th-century Argentina and are works of mature scholarship, but there the resemblance ends. Scobie's work is essentially urban history conceived as