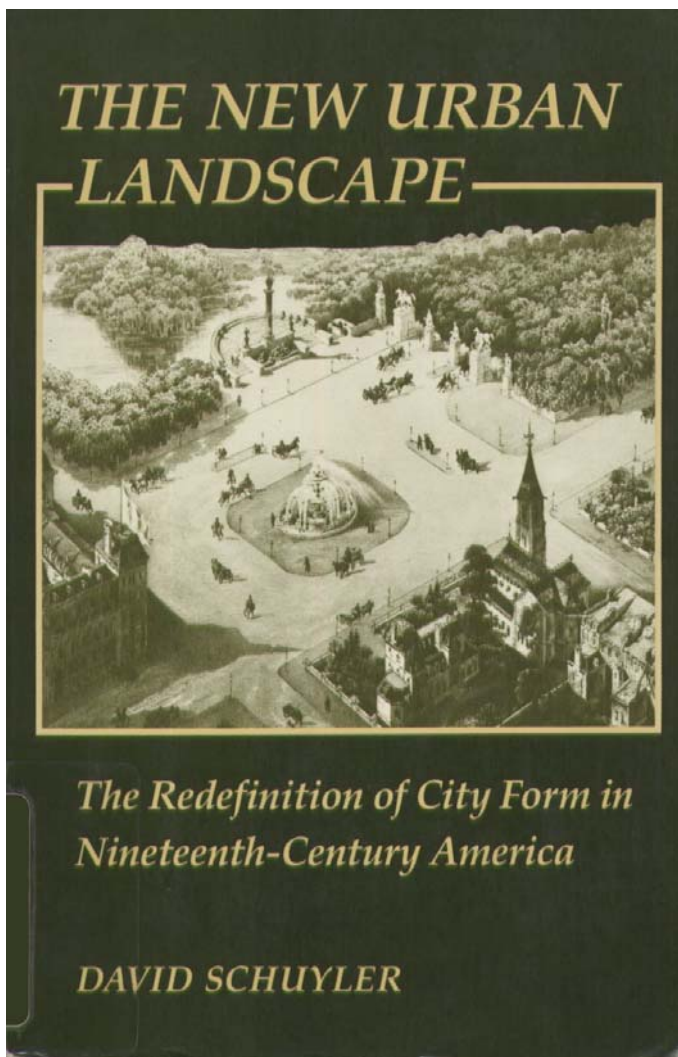


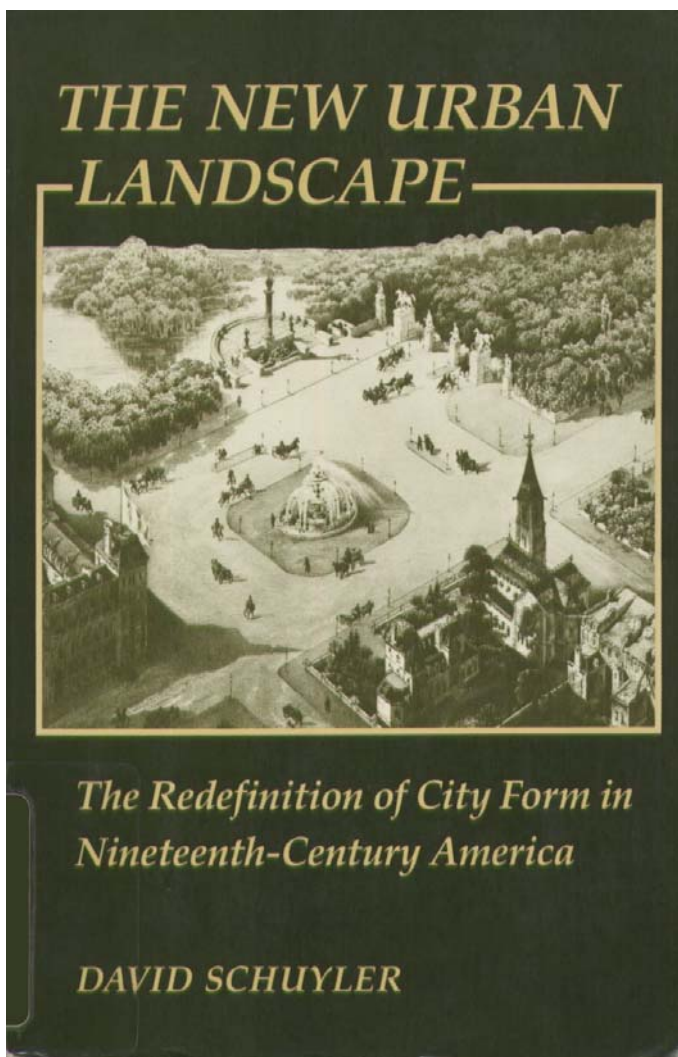
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URBDP 565: American Urban History
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The New Urban Landscape by David Schuyler



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The New Urban Landscape: Book Outline



The New Urban Landscape Outline

Introduction

- a. New perspective on urban form and culture in 19th century America
 - i. What is the appropriate physical form of cities?
 - ii. What elements should be included in expanding cities?
- b. Cities built to serve commerce; growth of public transportation causes growth – growing need to provide open spaces for health and recreational reasons
- c. “Nature” identified with a pastoral or domesticated environment – the “middle landscape” (*rus in urbe* – “the country in the city” as the desired physical expression)
- d. Regret of the gridiron coupled with inevitability of urban growth
- e. Rhetoric of sanitary reform and republicanism; moral superiority of nature and domesticity
- f. New perception of “city in the country”
 - i. Repudiates commercial city – want of more openly built environment
 - ii. New middle-class conception of the city and its possibilities
 - iii. Break with older patterns of city form: attempt to achieve differentiation of space and land use within the city
- g. Rural cemeteries of 1830’s offer an early option for urban public space/recreation
- h. Development of suburbs – seen as an escape, break with gridiron development
- i. Concern for maintaining social order – parks not only an aesthetic issue, new political/social ideology
- j. Questions: Were promoters of the new urban landscape imposing their own middle class (elitist?) values and behaviors on urbanites? Were the spaces provided of the kind that residents actually needed?
- k. The new urban landscape did not remake the city or solve the problems – but it did make a creative and enduring contribution to the practice of city building

Part I—Changing Conceptions of Urban Form

1. Chapter 1—Flawed Visions: The Lessons of Washington and New York
 - a. Decision to move seat of national government from metropolitan Philadelphia to then-rural Washington D.C. in 1800
 - i. Plan of new city to reflect agrarian/republican national aspirations
 - ii. Rejection of the concept of the new capital as a metropolis
 - iii. Reflection of a deep cultural ambivalence about cities and their place in “Nature’s Nation”
 - iv. Attempt to create a European-scale capital with classical imagery
 - b. Rejection of the city as an ideal form of civilization
 - i. Cities seen as threats to republican institutions (general distrust of landless, dependent poor)
 - ii. Independent farmer as the “true” republican
 - iii. Jefferson’s equation of agriculture with the moral health of the nation
 - c. L’Enfant’s design for Washington, D.C.
 - i. No provision for industry; requirement that houses be brick and stone
 - ii. Avoidance of traditional colonial urban development, especially density of building and commercial character
 - iii. D.C. a disaster – no sound economic foundations, no money to implement the plan, no urban form, no amenities
 - iv. “City of magnificent intentions,” “a town gone on a visit to the country”
 - v. Location of capital in D.C. determined future polycentric nature of U.S.
 - vi. Rejection of European tradition of metropolitan leadership – reflection of belief that the U.S. was, and should remain, an agrarian nation
 - vii. One-dimensional city; separation of government from leaders in other fields of endeavor
 - viii. Haphazard development; little influence on plans of later cities

- d. Gridiron plan for New York City
 - i. Plan a reassertion of commercial function as basis for urban form/culture
 - ii. Special commission established street grid for both municipal and private lands – state gave cities power to create a final, conclusive plan
 - iii. No deviation from grid; limited recreational spaces set aside
 - iv. Problems: crosstown streets too narrow, lack of alleys limited access, lots created narrow, deep buildings, plan ignored topography, no flexibility
 - v. Plan as a monument to primacy of commercial and speculative values – all about buying, selling, and improving real estate
 - e. NYC and D.C. two extreme alternative directions for the 19th century American development of urban form and culture; one too grandiose and monumentally civic; one too limited and commercial – lack of foresight to cause future problems
2. Chapter 2—Toward a Redefinition of Urban Form and Culture
- a. Creation of “dichotomy in American thought” regarding the city
 - i. Changing perception of nature - an American expression of Romanticism
 - ii. Beginnings of a “modern city culture”
 - b. By 1825, agrarian stability succumbed to the “spirit of unrest” – American characteristics of mobility and instability a growing cause of distress
 - i. Transition from subsistence to commercial agriculture
 - ii. Traditional agrarianism dissolves into nostalgia, appreciation of natural scenery instead of the “rigors of agriculture”
 - c. Nature as a source for inspiration – not a place for hard work, but for contemplation, tranquility, renewal
 - d. Critics fault the city because it is not the country – deprived residents of nature
 - i. Reasoning that absence of nature in cities was source of poor health, poor morals, and insanity
 - ii. Rural life as virtuous counterpart to the city
 - iii. Country as a place to “escape the tenements and the unhealthy and immoral influences of city life”
 - e. Few actually moved out of cities; in reality, it was the other way around
 - i. 1820-60: mass urbanization, rise of industrial city (congestion, poverty)
 - ii. City praised by some as illustrative of human accomplishment
 - f. Public expressions of new duality in attitudes toward city and country
 - i. Emerson’s writings as an expression of reconciliation between the romantic hostility toward the urban experience and the growth of cities
 - ii. Thomas Cole’s “The Course of Empire” expresses pastoral state of development as the “best” – a balance between man and nature
 - g. The new urban landscape seeks to remedy its lack of “country” characteristics by bringing large expanses of rural beauty into the city itself
 - h. Landscape architects seek to design parks that “combine the rural with the artificial in cities” – “charming bits of rural landscape”
3. Chapter 3—The Didactic Landscape: Rural Cemeteries
- a. Rural cemeteries as the first physical expression of changing urban form/culture
 - i. New attitude toward domesticated nature emerging in landscape painting, literature, and the debate over urban form
 - ii. Need for publicly constructed and maintained parks to bring country into city
 - b. Abandonment of traditional urban interment, creation of peripheral cemeteries
 - i. Changing conception of death – permanent, private graves
 - ii. Urban burial grounds overcrowded, poorly maintained
 - iii. Inner-city land too valuable to be used as cemeteries any longer
 - iv. Gases emitted from graves thought to be a public health threat
 - v. Romantic belief that impact of scenery could ease mourning
 - c. Mount Auburn Cemetery created in Boston (1831)
 - i. Rural cemetery combined with experimental garden/horticultural society

- ii. Site noted for its “beautiful and romantic scenery”
 - iii. Improved with art, curving pathways, “picturesque” style of landscaping
 - iv. Pilgrims from other towns visited; called the “Athens of New England”
 - v. Popularity such that admittance eventually had to be limited
- d. Mount Auburn’s success encouraged leaders in other cities to create rural cemeteries
 - i. 1835: Laurel Hill in Philadelphia – “natural” landscape style
 - ii. 1838: Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn – views of New York Harbor
 - iii. In 1849, Downing noted that “there is scarcely a city of note in the whole country that has not its rural cemetery”
- e. Rural cemeteries as illustrations of Victorian aesthetic ideals
 - i. Spaces for contemplative recreation
 - ii. Alternative to formal rectangularity in landscape design
 - iii. New goal of art as stimulating a mental impression in the viewer
 - iv. Egyptian-revival gateways – associations with cultural strength, durability, sublimity, history – admiration of accomplishments of earlier civilization
 - v. Lavish attention and great expense spent on monumental decoration
- f. Rural cemeteries possessed the “double wealth of rural and moral associations”
- g. Stood as pastoral counterpoints to the urban environment (curvilinear vs. gridiron)
- h. Introduction to “natural” landscape gardening
- i. Overpopularity soon marred the contemplative intent
- j. Success of rural cemeteries provides a model for the creation of public parks

Part II—The Evolution of the Urban Park

4. Chapter 4—The Ideology of the Public Park
 - a. Creation of public parks within cities gaining momentum as a Western movement
 - b. Importance of open spaces to public health
 - i. 1832 cholera epidemic, belief in miasmas, impure air as a cause
 - ii. Public parks become known as “the lungs of the city,” a contrast to cramped, stale working quarters/factories
 - iii. Realization that traditional public squares inadequate on their own for recreational purposes, air circulation
 - c. Realization of existing parks’ inadequacy
 - i. Startling rate of urban growth
 - ii. Belated recognition of state of urban squalor – large, dependent working class
 - iii. Fear for a civilization in which so many people were cut off from nature
 - d. American admiration of European parks
 - i. Regret of lack of foresight in American city planning (European cities historically incorporate open spaces – royal estates, etc.)
 - ii. Self-esteem of nation as a republic at risk – competitive feelings
 - iii. Lack of American parks for all classes of people (as in Europe); desire to cultivate similar social benefits
 - e. Parks’ curvilinearity of “natural landscape” as a new urban symbolism
 - i. Sharp contrast to straight lines and right angles of gridiron
 - ii. Greatest possible contrast to scenes and artificiality of the city
 - f. Downing’s 1851 design for public grounds at Washington, D.C. as the confluence of sanitary, recreational, scenic, and reformist ideas; also the first application of the maturing theory of public parks – three main purposes:
 - i. To form a national park, an ornament to the capital city
 - ii. To influence the country’s taste with an example of the natural style of landscape gardening
 - iii. To form a public museum of living trees and shrubs
 - g. In 1853, New York City adopts Downing’s suggestion of a centrally located park; Olmsted and Vaux follow in the design tradition of Downing, with modifications
 - i. Olmsted saw Downing’s contributions to the park movement as “gardening,” not necessarily park-making

- ii. Believed that parks should be a natural (or at least seemingly natural) landscape
- iii. Parks as the antithesis of the confining conditions of the urban gridiron (the country within the city)

5. Chapter 5—The Naturalistic Landscape: Central Park

- a. Construction of Central Park begins in NYC in the late 1850's
- b. Creation of a "naturalistic" landscape
 - i. Appearance so natural, many thought the landscape had been altered little
 - ii. Site had previously been swampy and covered in squatters' shacks
 - iii. In the end, the park was an entirely man-made environment
- c. Urban conditions cause cultural leaders to rethink the elements of the city
 - i. Concern for landmarks, urban scale (identity, placemaking)
 - ii. Traffic congestion worsening as distance from country increases
- d. Political controversy surrounds creation of Central Park
 - i. Issues of land acquisition, expenditure, lucrative patronage opportunities in construction, local/state government relations become strained
 - ii. Republican state legislature takes control of park from Democratic city government in an early instance of an attempt to eliminate machine rule
 - iii. State-appointed Board of Commissioners of the Central Park created
- e. Significance of public competition for park design
 - i. First such competition to determine major public landscape design in U.S.
 - ii. Involved most talented designers practicing at the time
 - iii. Texts of competition entries and surviving plans provide a record of what 19th century Americans thought a public park should be
- f. Competition entries: didactic vs. naturalistic
 - i. In most plans, the works of man (architecture, sculpture, engineering) dominated the natural landscape – pastoral/didactic landscape design
 - ii. In Olmsted and Vaux's Greensward plan, large expanses of natural beauty demonstrated the antithesis of urban conditions
- g. Winning "Greensward" entry by Olmsted and Vaux
 - i. Primary intent to create an expanse of rural beauty within the urban environment
 - ii. Equally artificial but seemingly natural environment in manmade city
 - iii. Thick boundaries of trees screen buildings, Croton reservoir from view
 - iv. All structures placed in one corner of the plan to maximize rural expanse
 - v. Landscape elements arranged to enhance impression of spaciousness – a suggestion of "freedom and repose" to refresh overcrowded urbanites
- h. Significance of Greensward design – Olmsted's ideals
 - i. Rejection of public health rationale; naturalistic recreation ground as a combination of landscape and art "to meet deep human needs"
 - ii. Unconscious influence of pastoral scenery upon visitor
 - iii. Felt that exertive recreation would interfere with the quiet contemplation of scenery
 - iv. Creative response to New York's dramatic growth after 1845 – approximation of scenic country beauty within the city
 - v. Instrument of social and moral progress – park as a republican institution that would "combat the forces of barbarism that existed not only in the slaveholding south and on the frontier but in American cities as well"
- i. Reactions to park design
 - i. New York Herald: "Nothing but a huge beer garden for the lowest denizens of the city"
 - ii. Olmsted: the park exercised "a distinctly harmonizing and refining influence over the most unfortunate and lawless classes of the city"
 - iii. Park Commissioners: some wanted a more formal plan with more structures
- j. Controversy over Richard Morris Hunt's designs for the gateways
 - i. Intended to frame the park – to turn it into more of a garden/less of a park
 - ii. Design for grand entrance – massive paved plaza, fountain, sculptures, etc.
 - iii. Vaux writes publicly in defense of the park's original conception; wants change from city to country to be instantaneous (no grand entrances)

- k. Challenge to Olmsted's ideas about unconscious influence of natural scenery remain; traditional belief in education through a didactic landscape persists
6. Chapter 6—Cities and Parks: The Lessons of Central Park
- a. "A Park is but one of many public improvements that serve to give character to a city." –Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux
 - b. Central Park led to other cities closely watching NYC's example
 - c. "Parkomania" swept the nation
 - d. Public health justification for park development
 - e. Philadelphia's Fairmount Gardens
 - i. Utilization of the existing beauty of the area
 - ii. Separation of city and park—evidenced by edges and roadways
 - iii. Philadelphia noted that Central Park increased surrounding value and issued bonds based on tax increment to acquire additional land
 - iv. By 1870, land in Fairmount Park equaled 2648 acres
 - v. Several factors led to piecemeal planning of the park, including the 1876 international exhibition
 - f. Olmsted defined three types of activities generally associated with parks
 - i. Enjoyment of scenery
 - ii. Athletic events
 - iii. General education from museums and zoological and botanical gardens
 - g. Baltimore
 - i. Mayor Thomas B. Swann and the *Baltimore American* began pushing for a park
 - ii. City joined streetcar funding to park acquisition (1 cent of every ride to parks) and in the first nine months of 1863 city earmarked \$35,624
 - iii. Commission purchased Lloyd Roger's 517-acre estate for park use
 - iv. Howard Daniels assigned to improve the park (he had come in 4th place in the Central Park competition)
 - v. Work began on Druid Hill in 1860 and was especially noteworthy for its trees
 - vi. A police force was hired to guard and educate users about the park
 - vii. The park became "a scene of rural beauty where they might escape the noise of the hammer and the smoke of the furnace and the workshop."
 - h. Brooklyn
 - i. First lots in Brooklyn Heights sold in 1823
 - ii. Brooklyn evolved quickly from village to city, while realizing the inadequacy of public spaces
 - iii. Success of Central Park inspired similar undertaking
 - iv. NY state legislature approved Prospect Heights site and an east NYC parade ground
 - v. The Mount Prospect Park site, however, was awkward, bisected by Flatbush Ave.
 - vi. City employed civil and topographical engineer Egbert L. Viele who, despite a grand statement of intent, was unable to overcome the difficulties of the site
 - vii. Viele proposed separating Flatbush Ave. from the park with a double row of trees
 - viii. In 1865, Vaux and Olmstead were brought in to create a new park plan and suggested abandoning the land east of Flatbush Ave.
 - ix. Olmstead and Vaux defined two purposes of a city park:
 - 1. Contemplation of "scenery offering the most agreeable contrast to the rest of the town."
 - 2. Provide opportunities for all classes of people to meet on an equal basis
 - x. Designed Prospect Park with a pastoral scenery and took advantage of the site's topography
 - xi. Included a lake providing for fishing, boating and ice-skating
 - xii. Prospect Park showed the lessons learned in Central Park design including the location of a parade ground and the propriety of structures within the park
 - xiii. "...greatest lesson of Central Park was that by itself the park was inadequate to the task of refining and civilizing America's cities."

7. Chapter 7—Parks, Parkways, and Park Systems
 - a. In 1870s, Central Park too far away to be enjoyed by the masses: “for practical every-day purposes... the Park might as well be a hundred miles away.”
 - b. Creation of concept of “pleasure drive”—part of articulation of concept of extending the benefits of parks throughout the city
 - c. Look at larger city planning concepts (of which parks were only one element)
 - i. Improvements in public transportation
 - ii. Separation of work and home
 - iii. Alternatives to the gridiron form
 - iv. Creation of parkways
 - d. In Buffalo, Olmsted and Vaux had the opportunity to create a master park plan with parks and parkways
 - i. First superb example of comprehensive park planning in the US
 - ii. “The Park” (Delaware Park) principal feature
 - iii. Additional smaller parks
 - iv. System of 200-foot wide, tree-lined roads uniting the three parks
 - v. Development of Parkside suburban development
 - e. Chicago
 - i. Very different example than Buffalo
 - ii. Debate: should parks be a naturalistic or an educational and associational landscape?
 - iii. H.W.S Cleveland (landscape architect) attempted to define the debate with pamphlet *The Public Grounds of Chicago: How to Give them Character and Expression*
 - iv. However, legislative acts establishing the parks system appointed two separate commissions, neither of which selected Cleveland
 - v. Olmsted, Vaux & Co were chosen for the south park; William LeBaron Jenney selected for the west parks
 - vi. Two separate parks commissions resulted in parks grounds that were not complimentary
 - vii. Chicago’s flat landscape led to different types of parks than the eastern cities
 - f. Boston
 - i. City acquired Public Garden and issued a competition for designs
 - ii. Prize awarded to George F. Meacham, whose plan was closer in intent to Fort Greene Park and the Washington Mall, than the naturalistic landscape
 - iii. This park was more of an extension of the city
 - iv. After the Civil War, the city realized that it needed a much larger park
 - v. Park commission acquired the site for the Fens and invited Olmsted to oversee the improvements
 - vi. Olmsted later designed the West Roxbury site (Franklin Park)
 - vii. Focus on creating the Emerald Necklace for Boston
 - viii. After 1890 began a more metropolitan approach—Eliot recommended that the system embrace five types of areas—oceanfront beaches, the shores and islands of the bay, tidal rivers and estuaries, large expanses of native forest, and smaller parks in the built areas of the city.
 - ix. Boston’s metro park system “marked the culmination of the evolution of the naturalistic urban landscape in nineteenth-century America.”
 - x. Other commendable park systems
 1. H.W.S. Cleveland’s proposal for Minneapolis
 2. Olmsted’s plan for Atlanta
 - xi. What began as a vague and generalized believe that parks protected public healthy and provided recreational opportunities, evolved from an “associational and educational space that was essentially an extension of the city into a naturalistic landscape... the antithesis of the urban environment.”

Part III—The New Urban Landscape

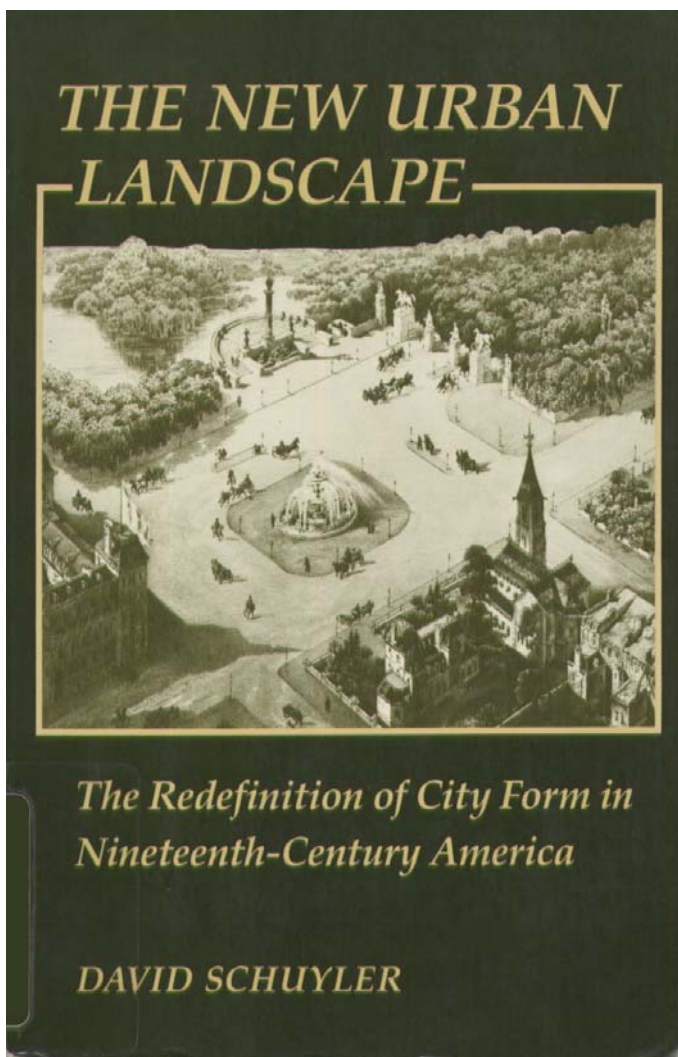
8. Chapter 8—Urban Decentralization and the Domestic Landscape

- a. Central Park, as a result of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, athletic fields, skating rinks, statues, carousels, and playgrounds, became a dramatically different place than that conceived of by the designers
 - b. Olmstead and Vaux platted large new areas within the city as appropriate for middle-class homes
 - c. Their solution to the congested, corrupt and filthy neighborhoods in the city included parks, parkways and openly built residential neighborhoods
 - d. New transportation systems “literally turned the city inside out, making possible the separation of residential and commercial neighborhoods, enabling the rich to move to homes in the suburbs, while the poor huddled in increasingly congested downtown areas”
 - e. While at first only those with carriages (the wealthy) could afford to live outside the walking city, transportation systems changed this
 - f. The railroad caused concentration of activity, and also resulted in urban decentralization and the separation of uses
 - g. For the most part, the suburbanization of America’s cities followed the gridiron pattern of the urban areas
 - h. Some designers believed that if the suburbs were going to take characteristics of the country, they should have winding roads, not gridded streets
 - i. Notable early planned communities
 - i. Evergreen Hamlet (Pennsylvania 1851)
 - ii. Llewellyn Park (New Jersey 1857)
 - iii. Irving Park (New York 1859)
 - j. Riverdale (Illinois)
 - i. Connected by railroad to Chicago
 - ii. Designed by Olmsted and Vaux
 - iii. Planned broad pleasure drive supplementing the railroad—a grand promenade that would be the “umbilical” cord to urban life (Chicago)
 - k. Most suburban development, however, was as unplanned as the city
 - l. Flight to the suburbs led to people turning away from the problems of the city and its less fortunate residents
9. Chapter 9—The New City: A House with Many Rooms
- a. Olmsted realized the ability of mass transportation systems to allow for a new type of life, with more “elbow-room” for people
 - b. In Olmstead’s view, cities provided distinct advantages in terms of education and cultural institutions; specialization of labor, services and sanitation also all contributed to the superiority of cities to the country
 - c. Olmstead castigated the gridiron and pointed out its negative effects on Manhattan
 - d. Olmstead believed that commercial and residential neighborhoods should be separated—he chose the efficient home as a metaphor for the modern city
 - e. Olmstead and Vaux had opportunities to design several subdivisions, the plans of which did not reach implementation
 - i. Manhattan north of 155th St.
 - ii. Staten Island
 - f. Olmstead and John James Robertson Croes created a plan for the Bronx
 - i. Key plan elements (proposed) included adaptation of streets to the natural topography, a multipurpose land use pattern, separation of commercial traffic from recreational drives and pedestrian paths, and a comprehensive transportation system
 - ii. City ultimately didn’t want to invest the money in implementing Olmstead and Croes’ plans and only in terms of park development did the area take shape according to their plan
10. Chapter 10—Transformation: The Neoclassical Cityscape
- a. Henry W. Bellows (1861) writes about Central Park as a testament to American democracy
 - b. Bellows considered the reformation of the land in the center of Manhattan an example of the evolving civilization in the east (as opposed to the tree cutting in the west)

- c. In Bellows' view, "the park was a large and handsome, yet accessible expanse of nature scientifically designed to meet the daily needs of the urban population."
- d. The park was not an expression of anti-urbanism, but a complementary element in the complex city fabric
- e. At this time, city life was becoming more healthful with sanitary systems, urban transportation and fire prevention techniques
- f. Bellows equated civilization with urban life
- g. Railroads impact provided 'consolidation in towns and cities' and a scattering of population to outlying areas
- h. Like Olmsted, Bellows believed that a metro area must provide for three ways of life:
 - i. Compactness necessary for a city's economy
 - ii. Open spaces of the country
 - iii. Middle ground of the suburb (which "provide the optimal surroundings for domesticity")
- i. New urban landscape involved planning parks, parkways, park system, suburbs and residential neighborhoods in urban subdivisions
- j. US was becoming a nation of contrasts, with disparities in income and quality of life in the cities
- k. Manhattan example of fragmentation of discrete neighborhoods divided by economic use, race, class and ethnic origin
- l. Park design example of the battleground to redefine cities—example of changes to Prospect Park—the adding of recreation as opposed to a naturalistic environment
- m. Rise of monumental city space and the White City model
- n. This City Beautiful movement was recasting parks and the rest of the urban environment
- o. Transformation of Prospect Park and the relocation of many NYC cultural institutions "stand for metaphors for the new conception of urban form that dominated civic culture at the end of the nineteenth century."
- p. Example of City Beautiful influence giving dignity to Washington DC

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The New Urban Landscape: Intellectual Biography



Biography—David Schuyler

David Schuyler is Arthur and Katherine Shadek Professor of the Humanities and Professor of American Studies at Franklin & Marshall College, where he has taught since 1979. A native of Newburgh, New York, Schuyler received the Ph. D. in history from Columbia University, where his dissertation was awarded the Richard B. Morris Prize. Professor Schuyler is author of *A City Transformed: Redevelopment, Race, and Suburbanization in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, 1940-1980* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2002), *Apostle of Taste: Andrew Jackson Downing 1815-1852* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) and *The New Urban Landscape: The Redefinition of City Form in Nineteenth-Century America* (Johns Hopkins, 1986), co-editor of *From Garden City to Green City: The Legacy of Ebenezer Howard* (Johns Hopkins, 2002), and co-editor of three volumes of *The Frederick Law Olmsted Papers*, the most recent of which is *The Years of Olmsted, Vaux & Company, 1865-1874* (Johns Hopkins, 1992), as well as author of more than twenty articles in books and professional journals.



Schuyler is Associate Editor of the *Journal of Planning History*, is an advisory editor of the *Creating the North American Landscape* series at The Johns Hopkins University Press, and is a member of the editorial board of the Olmsted Papers publication project. He is chair of the Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Board, serves on the board of directors of the Center for American Places, is a member the National Advisory Committee of Olana, the Frederic E. Church house and grounds, which is a New York State historic site, and is past president of the Society for American City and Regional Planning History.



Schuyler is recipient of the Christian R. and Mary F. Lindback Foundation Award for distinguished teaching (1994), the Bradley R. Dewey Award for scholarship at Franklin & Marshall (2003), and the Lawrence C. Gerckens Award of the Society for American City and Regional Planning History for distinguished teaching (2003).

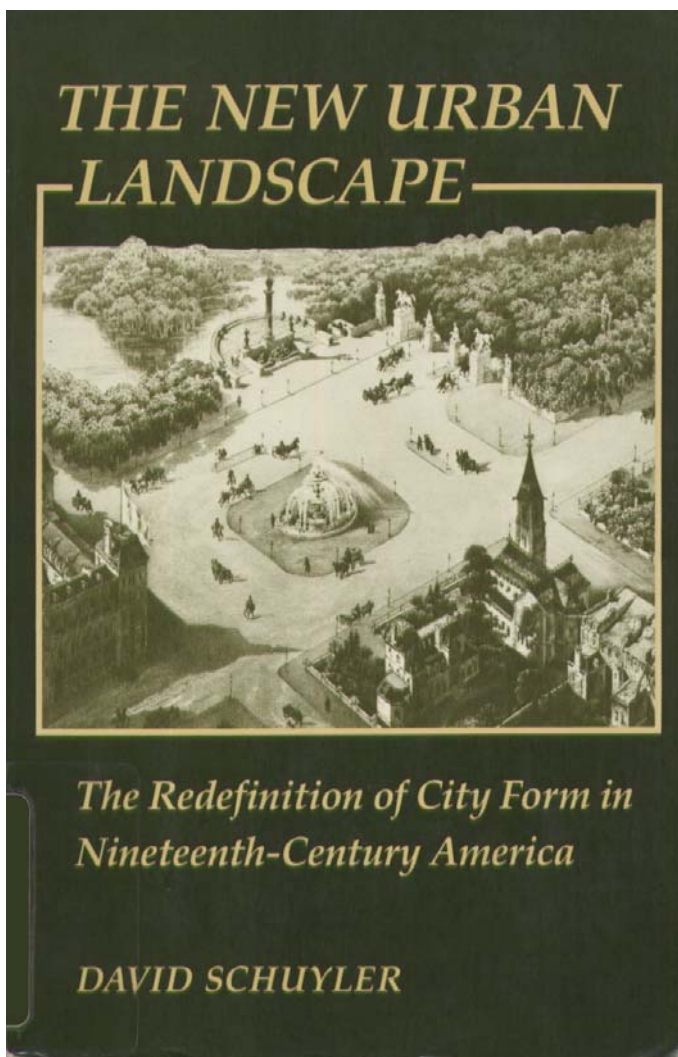
Sources:

<http://www.fandm.edu/x6720.xml>

<http://www.fandm.edu/Images/Organizations/RelayForLife/2005/relay2005024.jpg>

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The New Urban Landscape: Book Review Critique



Critical Reception

The New Urban Landscape: The Redefinition of City Form in Nineteenth-Century America, by David Schuyler, is praise for the author's ability to reinterpret the relationship between nineteenth American ideals and their manifestation in the resulting landscape. Putting a new spin on the wealth of scholarship already amassed regarding Frederick Law Olmsted and Central Park, Schuyler's perspective places the parks movement in a larger cultural context, and explores both the ideology that drove the changing cityscape and its design applications.¹ Jon Teaford (*Reviews in American History*) commends the book as "the best single volume on nineteenth-century park development...no existing work describes the origins and evolution of the naturalistic vision as capably..."² The book is especially noted for its tight focus, logical organization, and straightforward arguments.

The book traces the evolution of the republican agrarian ideal into that of the pastoral, "middle" landscape that became the basis for park design. Schuyler carefully explains the close relationship between concepts of what was considered "rural" and how they interacted to form the concept of the park. He effectively dispels the myth that the rural/suburban ideal was inherently anti-urban;³ numerous well-illustrated examples are given of how the new parks were meant to complement the urban environment and to serve as a counterpoint to the daily experience of the city.

The foremost criticism of *The New Urban Landscape* is that with this book, Schuyler has created a veritable "Ode to Olmsted." Schuyler is one of the editors of the Olmsted Papers, but this does not necessitate his "disturbingly uncritical"⁴ account of Olmsted's accomplishments. One reviewer observes that "indeed, Olmsted looms so large in this whole story that his name could have appeared in the title."⁵ Several reviewers would like to see Schuyler question the merit of Olmsted's achievements in a more critical manner. Absent from the text are explorations of how Olmsted's designs for wealthy suburbs laid the groundwork for class-segregated cityscapes and why his designs have not stood the test of time, being significantly modified in the twentieth century (or never having been built in the first place).

Schuyler is also criticized for oversimplifying the causes of the phenomenon that he is depicting. For example, one sentence in the book links the abandonment of Olmsted's curvilinear street plan for the gridiron in the Bronx as having "contributed to the eventual deterioration of the South Bronx into one of the city's worst slums."⁶ However, the implementation of similar compact right-angled grids also produced some of New York City's finest and most fashionable neighborhoods.⁷

Similarly, Schuyler fails to give a face to the actors in the story that were not landscape designers or architects. The "cultural leaders" so often mentioned as having influenced the reform of urban spaces are never fleshed out as characters, and it is difficult to understand the political and social motivations these players may have had. Furthermore, he does not question the representation (or lack thereof) the urban masses received throughout this transformation of the cityscape. Schuyler does not discuss whether or not the landscape reformers were sufficiently considerate of the needs of the majority of city inhabitants, or whether Olmsted and the other landscape designers were simply imposing their own middle-class preference for pastoral scenery over active recreation and social congregation onto the larger population.⁸

Overall, *The New Urban Landscape* was received as a solid, informative contribution to the studies of landscape architecture and urban social history. In Schuyler's attempt to keep the book focused, he perhaps focuses too much on Olmsted and too little on the other citizens affected by the evolution of urban open spaces. However, this does not detract from the book's achievements; it simply invites further study.

¹ Orser, 551.

² Teaford, 660.

³ Sies, 1059.

⁴ Teaford, 660.

⁵ McGreevy, 90.

⁶ Schuyler, 178.

⁷ McGreevy, 91.

⁸ Orser, 554.

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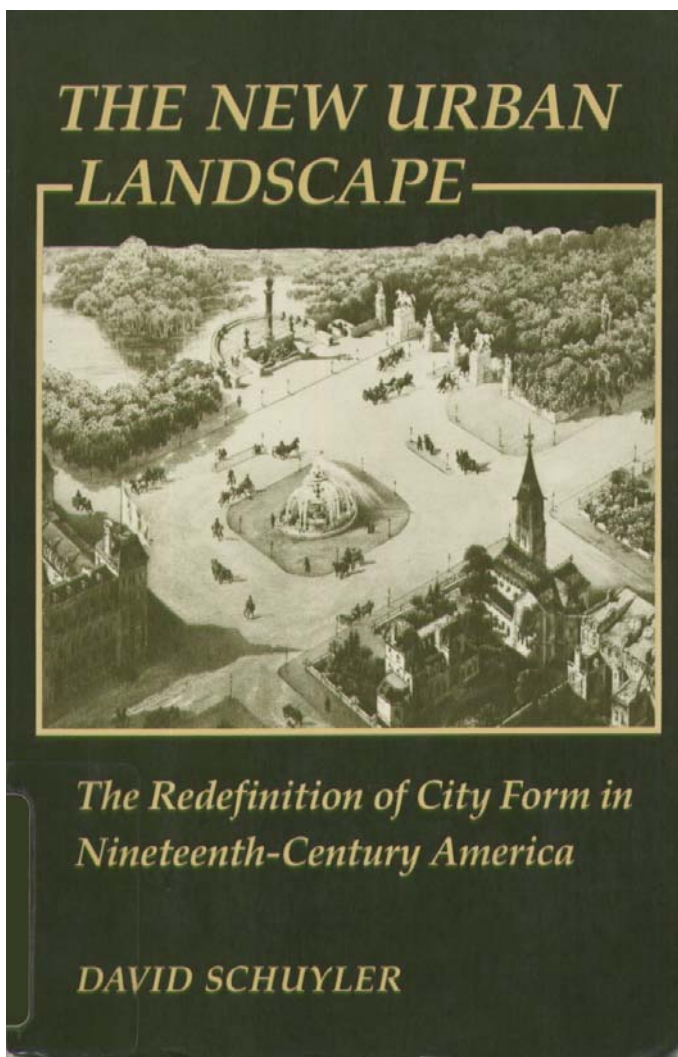
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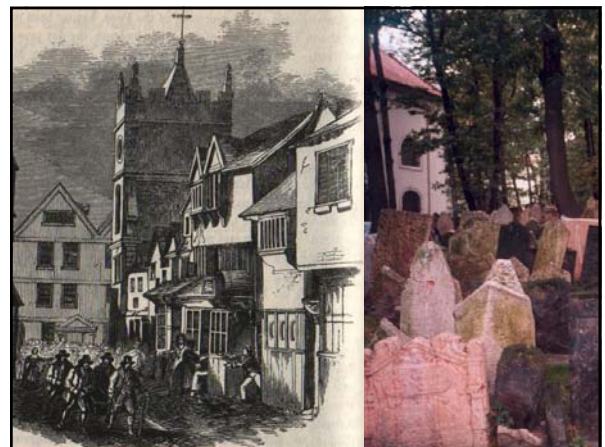
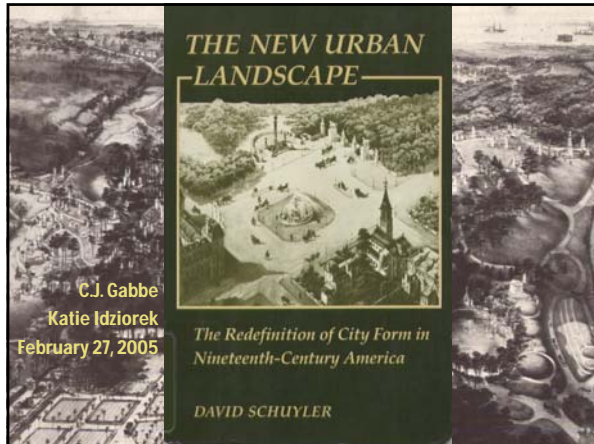
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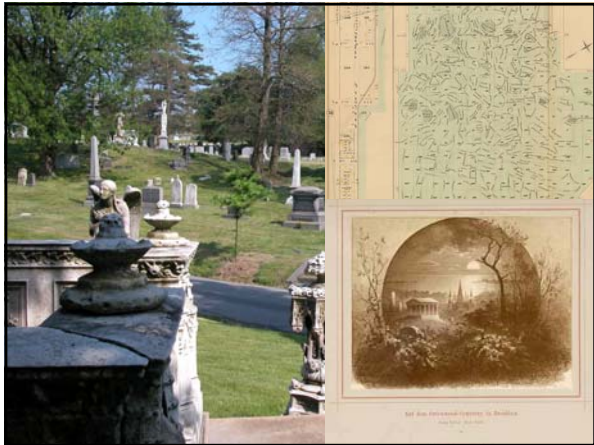
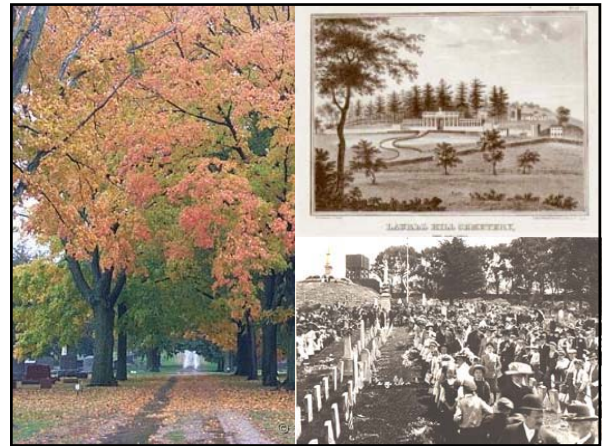
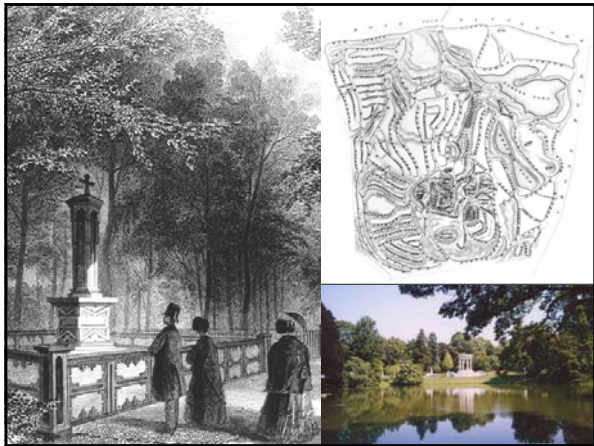
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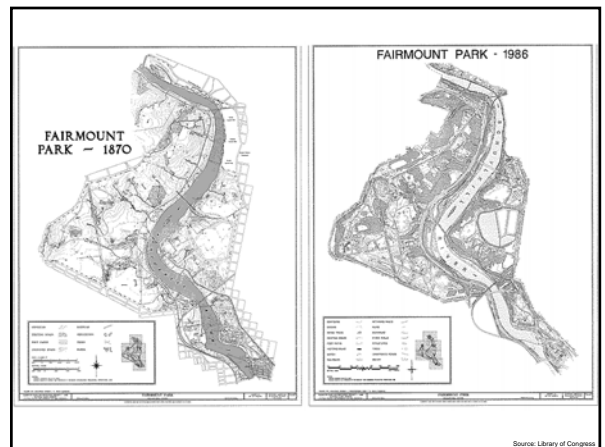
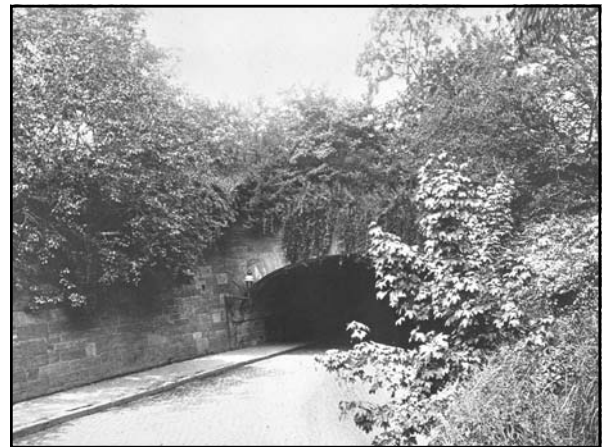
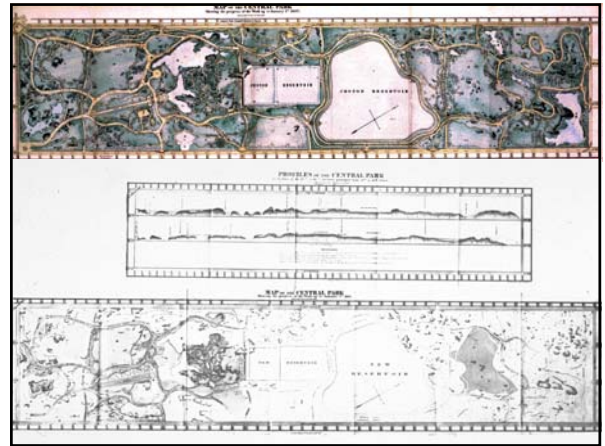
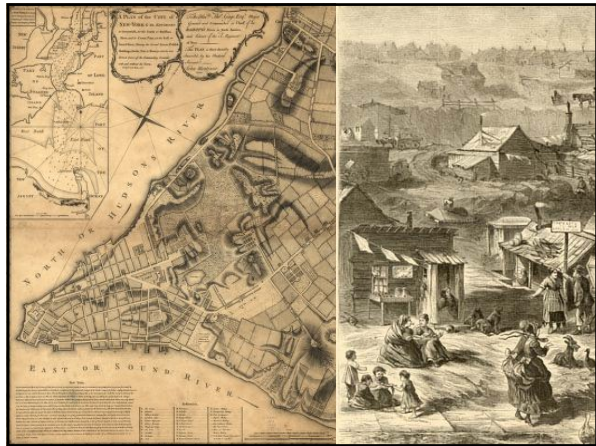
C.J. Gabbe
Katherine Idziorek
URBDP 565: American Urban History
02.26.06

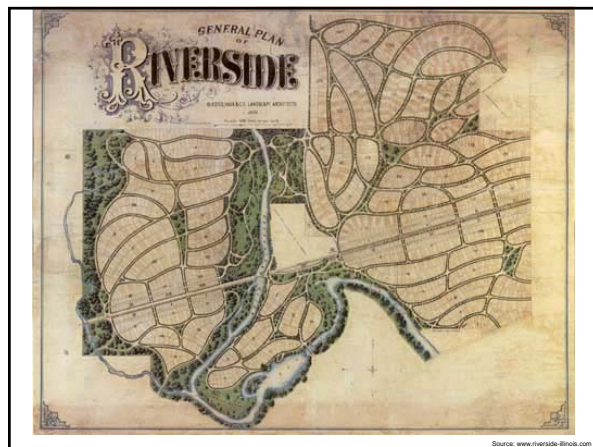
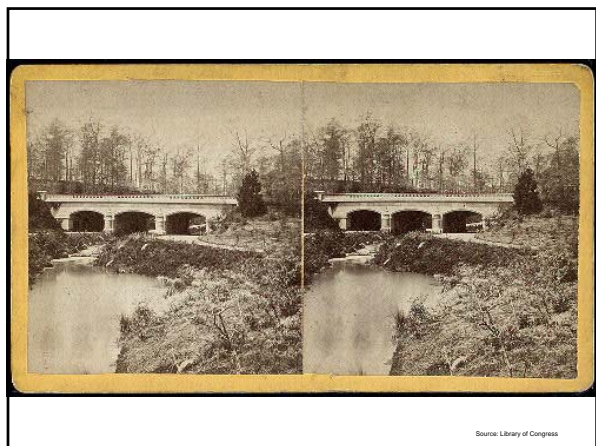
The New Urban Landscape: PowerPoint Presentation











We ❤️ Frederick Law Olmstead
and Calvin Vaux



**C.J. Gabbe
Katherine Idziorek
URBDP 565: American Urban History
02.26.06**

The New Urban Landscape: Appendices:

**Discussion questions
Charrette activity
Book reviews**

The New Urban Landscape

Discussion Questions

- What forces engendered the styles of planning and construction of urban form in L'Enfant's Washington, D.C. plan and the Commissioners Plan of 1811 for New York City? What was learned as a result of their implementation?
- Why was the rural cemetery a model for early park design? Which of their characteristics were found desirable, and how were they manifested in the design of urban parks?
- How did Olmsted and Vaux's winning competition entry for Central Park represent the changes that had been occurring in American society in the 19th century?
- How did urban park planning evolve between Central Park in Manhattan and Prospect Park in Brooklyn?
- How did the earliest planned communities relate to these park models?
- Schuyler describes Olmsted and Croes' Bronx plan as "the most complete articulation of the vision of a new urban landscape." What elements of the plan contribute most to this characterization?

city street grid:

Based on the “lessons learned” from the street grid layouts of New York City and Washington, D.C., how would you design a street grid for a nineteenth-century American city? Be prepared to explain the reasoning behind your design.

(if it helps, consider: commercial/residential/industrial uses; open spaces, monumentality vs. functionality)



rural cemetery:

What would you consider to be the design of an “ideal rural cemetery” based on the needs and ideals of the typical nineteenth-century American city? Be prepared to explain the reasoning behind your design.

(if it helps, consider: didactic contemplation, private burial sites, stimulating artwork, spectacular views)



urban park:

Taking into consideration the differing opinions about the form of the early urban park (picturesque, didactic landscapes vs. naturalistic landscapes), how would you, in the form of a park design, respond to the physical and social conditions of the nineteenth-century American city? Be prepared to explain the reasoning behind your design.

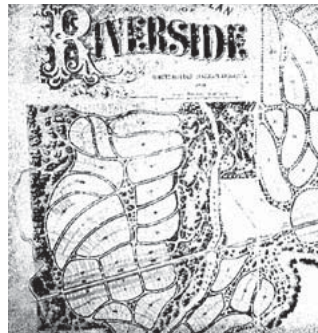
(if it helps, consider: “lungs of the city,” naturalistic vs. formal landscaping, needs of inner city residents)



suburban subdivision:

How would you design an early suburban subdivision? Take into consideration the reasons for their creation in the nineteenth-century American city. Be prepared to explain the reasoning behind your design.

(if it helps, consider: connection to the city, grid vs. “naturalistic” layout, access to open space)



**The New Urban Landscape: The Redefinition of Urban Form in
Nineteenth-Century America**



Review Author[s]:
Patrick McGreevy

Geographical Review, Vol. 78, No. 1 (Jan., 1988), 89-91.

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acceptance of landuse zoning, emphasized economic efficiency rather than aesthetic order. That quest for efficiency may have been repeatedly frustrated, but the rise of planning commissions did provide a bureaucratic means for dealing with the capitalist-democracy contradiction without stripping the business class of its power and influence. And zoning offered a legal method for public regulation of landuse that did not fundamentally challenge private-property rights.

"Planning the Capitalist City" conveys the essential historical details of early American urban planning in an imaginative and at the same time challenging way. Foglesong portrays both the individuals involved in key episodes and the institutions they created and through which they worked. He states the personal motives and ambitions as well as the structural constraints of class and professional interests, politics, and economics, in addition to the social meaning of the different phases and movements in urban planning. He also comments about the differences between American and European planning.

Foglesong attempts what may ultimately be an impossible task: reconciling structure and agency in the history of urban planning. In this book he clearly favors a structural explanation despite the mass of individual details presented. This difficulty is particularly manifest in his rather weak conclusion, which is a plea for greater popular involvement in city building and for the expansion of "society's existing commitment to democracy." If the goals of urban planning have been steered continually by a conservative elite in the interests of capital, what real hope is there that expanded popular involvement in city building will lead to markedly more democratic cities? Foglesong's own analysis suggests that popular involvement may need to induce radical structural change in society before democratized urban planning can bring forth humane cities. Overall the commitment to providing the details of urban planning, adroitly balanced with an intellectual questioning of the purpose of planning in its large social context, make this book one of the strongest histories of urban planning.—NEIL SMITH and LEYLÂ VURAL

THE NEW URBAN LANDSCAPE: The Redefinition of Urban Form in Nineteenth-Century America. By DAVID SCHUYLER. xiv and 237 pp.; maps, ills., bibliogr., index. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986. \$29.50. 24 × 16 cm.

Between 1840 and 1900 American cities acquired a new, more open form, as parks, parkways, and suburban subdivisions introduced patches of naturalistic landscape into these rapidly expanding urban areas. In "The New Urban Landscape," David Schuyler interprets this transformation as a unified development reflecting a new conception of urban form. Schuyler's emphasis on spatial patterns within the city and on the relation between city and

country will naturally interest historical and urban geographers. Many, however, could find themselves at odds with his interpretation of these changing patterns.

American cities experienced unprecedented growth during the two decades preceding the Civil War. Newcomers from rural areas and from Europe crowded into dense, unsanitary urban districts. The introduction of the omnibus and, later, the horse-drawn trolley allowed the middle class to escape the worst of these conditions, but as the urban grid burst the limits of the old walking city, the benefits of the countryside were for the first time completely beyond walking range for most city dwellers. Schuyler interprets the efforts to make the city more open as a response to these new conditions. Many nineteenth-century leaders were convinced that introducing pastoral nature into the city not only would benefit public health but also would alleviate the psychological oppression of crowding and improve the civility and taste of the working class. Schuyler traces the origin of the new urban form to the construction of spacious new cemeteries on the fringes of many American cities in the 1830s. These cemeteries were the first North American examples of naturalistic landscapes and curvilinear road patterns; significantly, they were used for recreation as well as for burial. Schuyler points out the importance of European precedents both for these cemeteries and for urban parks. Nevertheless, by insisting that the urban park movement was essentially American, he leaves unexplained its relationship to these European roots.

Schuyler sees the successful design of Central Park in New York City by Calvert Vaux and Frederick Law Olmsted as the pivotal event of the urban transformation. Indeed, Olmsted looms so large in this whole story that his name could have appeared in the title. Schuyler convinces us that Olmsted was a genius, a man of tremendous energy and vision, who foresaw at midcentury that urban growth would eventually engulf the proposed park and render it "central." He predicted the same expansion for other large American cities and advocated securing land ahead of the relentlessly advancing gridiron. The grid became a symbol for all that Olmsted disliked about the city: its commercialism, its unnaturalness. Schuyler obviously shares these sentiments.

Olmsted believed that, to serve as a corrective to city stresses, a park should represent "the antithesis of the urban environment," a piece of rural countryside "complete in itself." Hence his design for Central Park included walls of vegetation and sunken roadways to eliminate all views of the surrounding city. The park was to be a place of contemplation, where action—playing baseball, for example—would be inappropriate. But if the park was designed to be the antithesis of the city, how could it represent the redefinition of urban form? One might argue that it was actually the total abandonment of that form. Olmsted wanted no trace of the city in Central Park; the only relation between the two was one of contrast. Even the entrances

were to be free of contrivance. In Olmsted's words, an urban park should afford "the most agreeable contrast to the confinement, bustle, and monotonous street-division of the city" to provide "a poetic and tranquilizing influence" on visitors. This concept, based on middle-class attitudes toward nature and the city, saw the lower classes essentially as part of the problem: Olmsted believed that parks would act as a civilizing influence, elevating the tastes of workers until they too appreciated pastoral scenery.

Schuyler correctly links the urban park movement to the later development of parkways and suburban subdivisions. Olmsted was again a key figure, and these developments reflected the same attitudes toward nature and the city—though this time, the class basis of those attitudes was more obvious. Justified at first as a way of extending the benefits of parks to the poor, the parkways, as Schuyler observes, were suitable only for coach rides, an activity of the rich. The new suburbs, meanwhile, were clearly attractive to many because they offered shelter from the "dangerous classes." Schuyler admits that the movement to integrate country and city into a new urban form ultimately failed. However, he does not consider the possibility that the failure might have been inherent in the initial conception: that Olmsted and his followers found the cosmopolitan city distasteful and seized on pastoral landscapes not to modify that city but to retreat from it.

Olmsted's evolving vision of urban form culminated in his design for an integrated system of parks and parkways for Buffalo and in his never-implemented plan for the Bronx, which included transport systems, parks, and street plans for whole neighborhoods. Like Olmsted, Schuyler gives too much emphasis to street patterns. He even comments that the rejection of Olmsted's curvilinear street plan "contributed to the eventual deterioration of the South Bronx into one of the city's worst slums." Why then did that same compact grid not lead to the deterioration of fashionable Upper East Side on Manhattan?

Although Schuyler's interpretations should be approached critically, his book contains much of value. He describes the evolution of a new urban form in nineteenth-century America with scholarly care. Unintrusive footnotes and a bibliographical essay reveal a wealth of detail for those who want it. Schuyler also handles illustrations, so essential to this story, very effectively. My objections notwithstanding, geographers with urban and historical interests will find "The New Urban Landscape" both informative and thought-provoking.—PATRICK MCGREEVY

THE LIMITS OF POWER: Great Fires and the Process of City Growth in America. By CHRISTINE MEISNER ROSEN. xii and 395 pp.; maps, notes, index. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986. \$39.50. 23.5 × 15.2 cm.

In the same manner that a crisis in a social system can expose otherwise obscure processes, so can an episode of shock in a city reveal normally hidden

The Contested Terrain of Nineteenth-Century Urban Landscape Design

W. Edward Orser

American Quarterly, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Dec., 1988), 550-555.

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The Contested Terrain of Nineteenth-Century Urban Landscape Design

W. EDWARD ORSER

University of Maryland, Baltimore County

The New Urban Landscape: The Redefinition of City Form in Nineteenth-Century America. By David Schuyler. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986. 237 pages. \$29.50.

IN NINETEENTH- AND TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN CITIES, PARKS HAVE BEEN contested terrains. Variations in intention, design, development, and upkeep have reflected competing ideologies and political realities. Recreational and social functions frequently have vied with scenic and conservation goals. And one salient characteristic of urban parklands—open space—has left them in jeopardy as other needs—transportation, housing, commercial development, institutional sites—have asserted their claims. The roots of the debate over the nature and value of urban parklands lie in the origins of the grand parks and park systems instituted in major eastern cities in nineteenth-century America as a response to rapid and massive urban growth. The result was what David Schuyler has delineated astutely as “the new urban landscape.”

Schuyler adds his careful scholarship and superb style to an extremely promising field of cultural study which seeks to explore the relationship between ideas and the landscape, viewing both as texts. *The New Urban Landscape* focuses primarily on the work and thought of Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux. Their collaboration in New York's Central Park and their involvement in a host of succeeding projects dominated urban park development for half a century, leaving

W. Edward Orser is the long-time Chairperson of the American Studies Department at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. His “The Making of a Rowhouse Community: The Edmondson Avenue Area, 1915–1945” appeared in *Maryland Historical Magazine* (Fall 1985). He is also the author of the history of a communal society, *Searching for a Viable Alternative: The Macedonia Cooperative Community 1937–1958* (1981).

its distinctive legacy in countless American cities, both in physical form and in ideology.

Focusing primarily upon the influence of these seminal individuals, Schuyler provides an exciting model for exploring the relationship between the evolution of the ideas and values associated with the naturalistic landscape and their application in a variety of tangible forms — from central parks to park systems to suburban development. He extends traditional intellectual history by considering a wide range of documentary sources and subject matter more often associated with social history and cultural geography. At the same time, the limits of the intellectual history tradition in culture study are also evident in Schuyler's approach. He does not always fully ground his subject in the social and political context of American society in the Victorian age. Moreover, he does not systematically explore the array of competing interests and constituencies contesting public terrain in the late nineteenth-century city. The vision of the naturalistic reformers was impressive, and their legacy monumental; still, Schuyler presents us with only one set of voices in an urban debate that was dynamic and fluid—and one in which not all had voices.

Schuyler argues that the nineteenth-century “shift from country to city, from farm to factory, was perhaps the most fundamentally dislocating experience in all of American history” (2). This transformation produced unprecedented demands in a young nation with a distinctly anti-urban bias, a nation with small and undeveloped cities. In response, Schuyler asserts, “a new generation, born primarily in New England and New York after the Revolutionary War, perceived these challenges and sought to redefine urban form and culture” (2). Accepting the value and necessity of the city, but concerned about its social, physical, and moral shortcomings, these Americans wedded their faith in the salience of natural settings to their social concerns for the sanitary and recreational needs of an urban populace in a new vision of urban form: “The result of their efforts is a heritage of urban parks and suburban communities, which represent attempts, admittedly imperfect, to recast the shape of America's cities in the second half of the nineteenth century” (3).

The 1858 Olmsted-Vaux “Greensward” plan for New York's Central Park takes center stage in Schuyler's book as the hallmark of this movement for urban reformation. While we already have much excellent scholarship both on Olmsted and on Central Park, *The New Urban Landscape* puts the achievement of the mid-nineteenth-century parks movement in the context of a larger cultural argument, tracing both its ideological underpinnings and its design applications. Ideologically, Schuyler identifies its roots in the transformation of the earlier agrarian ideal into a nostalgic view of “nature,” a conceptualization which lent itself to the growing argument for public parks as antidotes to urban social problems, such as overcrowding and disease, and as realms for blending the benefits of both countryside and city. Physical precedents Schuyler locates in the rural cemeteries of the 1830s—

Mt. Auburn in Cambridge; Laurel Hill in Philadelphia; and Green-Wood in Brooklyn—which not only offered quiet places of contemplation and meditation, but also embodied in their design a conception of domesticated “nature” as a refuge from the turbulence of urban life, their curvilinear layout representing a conscious alternative to the rectangularity of the gridiron city. In Olmsted’s and Vaux’s conceptions for Central Park, ideology and physical precedents merged to become the “naturalistic landscape,” a distinctly urban form, yet one committed to a vision of parkland as “an expanse of rural beauty within the urban environment, a consciously constructed piece of ‘the country’ that would meet the psychological and recreational needs of residents of the city” (85). The moral didacticism of rural cemeteries yielded to an equally strong conviction that the naturalistic landscape was a vital agent of moral improvement.

The vision of the park as a naturalistic landscape, an essential part of the urban complex as well as the antithesis of the city, was evident in several distinctive elements in the Olmsted and Vaux design for Central Park: their steadfast rejection of using the park as a garden setting for educational and cultural institutions, their provision for screening the city and the existing reservoir with trees, their innovative sunken and screened transverse roads, and their insistence that the park’s heartland must be a combination of rustic and pastoral landscape. As Schuyler notes, “In Olmsted’s conception of the park, nature would reign supreme” (88).

In the “parkomania” (a term attributed to Andrew Jackson Downing) that rapidly followed on the heels of the development of Central Park, Schuyler traces in other cities what he calls the “lesson of Central Park,” as a reformist rhetoric of sanitation, recreation, and nature was applied to large urban settings: Fairmont Park in Philadelphia (the Sidey and Adams plan of 1859), Druid Hill Park in Baltimore (the Howard Daniels plan of 1861), and Prospect Park in Brooklyn (the Egbert Viele plan of 1861 and the subsequent Olmsted and Vaux plan of 1866–68). In the latter instance, Schuyler argues that Olmsted and Vaux were more successful than they had been in Central Park in implementing their vision of a “rural enclave” in a developing city because they were able to restructure the boundaries to accommodate their goals and because they remained in control of design and construction.

Schuyler maintains that the success of these large-scale urban parks as the implementation of a new vision of urban form led to the application of an ideology of moral and civic improvement in other areas of urban design: parkways, park systems, urban street layout, and suburban development. In each of these arenas the imprint of Olmstedian ideas made its mark, and while Schuyler tells a larger story, it is primarily that imprint he traces. Olmsted’s conceptions for metro-wide park systems, linked by scenic parkways, took its most comprehensive form in the 1890s in proposals for Boston’s regional park system, a plan which Schuyler contends “marked the culmination of the evolution of the naturalistic urban landscape in nineteenth-century America” (144).

Olmsted's projects also contributed to the incipient, but powerful trend toward decentralized suburbanization, a process that would become inexorable with new transportation technologies. In Riverside (1868) he applied his naturalistic conceptions to the planning of a projected elite suburb outside Chicago, and in the Bronx (1876-77) he sought to devise a comprehensive plan for future city development which differentiated residential, commercial, and recreational functions. Both projects illustrated not only his commitment to naturalistic reform, but the degree to which those principles were compatible with an emerging metropolis carefully structured along lines of class. The contoured property lines of Riverside and of the Bronx's Riverdale clearly depended upon elite residences, the latter for "that class of citizens to whom the confinement, noise, and purely artificial conditions of the compact city are oppressive, and who are able to indulge in the luxury of a villa or suburban cottage residence" (Schuyler quoting Olmsted, 175). Naturalistic reform and social reform were not always identical.

Schuyler concludes that by the century's end the magnitude of city growth and the multiplicity of associated social problems ushered in a new wave of urban reform, embodied politically in Progressivism and culturally in the City Beautiful movement, combined visions which tended to eclipse the ideals of the naturalistic landscape in park and urban design. He briefly notes the new priorities given to the active recreation needs of urban populations. However, the Neoclassical principles of urban design and the manner in which they eroded and altered earlier naturalistic assumptions are the primary focus of his concluding argument: "The City Beautiful invaded the naturalistic landscape and so littered it with mock temples and statuary that instead of being an alternative to the urban environment the park became an extension of it" (190). The naturalistic had become urbanized.

Though impressive, Schuyler's model for cultural analysis provides only a partial view of the competing interests at stake. First, Schuyler fails to define and identify the group of reformers responsible for this urban transformation. Who were these "cultural leaders" (23), and what was their social and political base? His discussion of the emerging ideology of the public park identifies them in this generalized way:

Acknowledgement of worsening urban conditions and of the importance of open spaces in fostering public health and recreation, as well as a concern for the nation's self-esteem as a republic and its intellectual and moral improvement, led Americans of various regions and occupations to advocate the establishment of public parks in their cities. (66)

For much of the book, these "Americans" are the landscape architects themselves—primarily Olmsted and Vaux—whose own social and cultural context might have been more fully established. Their accomplishment and influence are undeniable, but their voices were among many clamoring to shape the nature and uses of urban space.

Second, a deeper consideration of social context might have led to a closer examination of the notion of reform embodied in the naturalistic designers' conceptions. Schuyler argues convincingly that their proposals grew out of a genuinely "republican vision" of parks as natural and therapeutic settings for all elements of society. Yet, though he also makes explicit their basic assumption that parks must be "escapes" or "refuges" from the ills of the city—"rural enclaves" and places of "retreat"—he does not fully examine the extent to which such sentiments may have betrayed uneasiness with the diversity of urban populations. When Baltimore Mayor Thomas Swann is cited as pleased that Druid Hill Park would provide a "scene of rural beauty" for the "swarming multitudes" (114), one must wonder how the landscape designers and reformers viewed new urban constituencies and their needs. That doubt is further amplified in Schuyler's citation of Olmsted's 1871 comments on a proposal for Philadelphia's Fairmont Park. Olmsted characterized the three functions of parks as "simple recreation" ("the enjoyment of scenery"); "special open air exercises" (athletic events); and "general education" (museums, zoos, botanical gardens). Yet he rejected the latter two in favor of the first because of the need "to provide for counteracting the special evils which result from the confinement of life in cities" (107). Isn't it necessary to question the extent to which Olmsted and the urban landscape reformers were sufficiently attentive to the full needs of the urban masses? And indeed, was their preference for "pastoral serenity" over active recreation and social congregation more indicative of a middle-class rather than "republican" vision, the urban design counterpart of the emerging cult of domesticity? Schuyler acknowledges these considerations, but their implications deserve more systematic development than he provides.

Finally, Schuyler considers but tends to dismiss the argument that the reform ideology of urban parks may have included an impulse of social control, contending that such analysis "ignores the more positive aspects of their creators' motivations" (6). However, several recent studies have suggested that the notion of parks and other public spaces as contested social terrain must be given substantial consideration. For instance, Susan Davis in *Parades and Power: Street Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* argues that the use and control of streets and public areas became a battleground for competing social groups in antebellum Philadelphia.¹ And Roy Rosenzweig's *Eight Days For What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City* calls attention to the conflict in Worcester, Massachusetts over regulation and control of parks used by working-class patrons in that city later in the century.² Both suggest that the political implications of the ideology and implementation of urban park development deserve close and systematic examination.

David Schuyler's *The New Urban Landscape* represents a major contribution in its delineation of the cultural underpinning of the nineteenth-century nat-

uralistic park movement, especially as expressed in the epochal work and influence of Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux. Tracing the evolution of an ideology and its implementation in the physical design of municipal spaces, it serves to remind us how parklands came to be a focal point for the reconceptualization of urban form in a period of dynamic growth and social change. I hope that it will pave the way for a larger consideration of the multiple social and economic forces competing for control over the nature and future of the urban landscape in late nineteenth-century American cities. Analysis and understanding of those forces are critical, since the design and use of public urban spaces continue to represent contested terrain in American cities today.

NOTES

1. Susan G. Davis, *Parades and Power: Street Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1986).

2. Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870–1920* (New York, 1983).

**The New Urban Landscape: The Redefinition of City Form in
Nineteenth-Century America**



Review Author[s]:
Mary Corbin Sies

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and content of this book all would make it a candidate for classroom use. The price (\$19.95 for the paperback and \$39.50 for the hardcover) precludes that. As a result, yet another fine book will be underutilized.

Elizabeth Barnaby Keeney
Harvard University

The New Urban Landscape: The Redefinition of City Form in Nineteenth-Century America. By David Schuyler. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986. xv + 237 pp. \$29.50.)

The publication of Kenneth T. Jackson's *Crabgrass Frontier* (1985) has focused considerable attention on a lively body of scholarship concerned with understanding urban and suburban form and culture and their interrelationships. David Schuyler's contribution to that literature is an examination of an important strain in the nineteenth-century debate on the ideal spatial and cultural organization of the American metropolis. Between 1840 and 1900, a "new generation" of civic leaders, "including social reformers, physicians, religious leaders, landscape designers, and cultural arbiters," crusaded to create a new urban landscape, "one that introduced nature as a means of countering the over-civilization of the city." Schuyler chronicles the development of that naturalistic perspective as it emerged in the design and promotion of "rural" cemeteries, large public parks, comprehensive metropolitan park systems, and planned residential suburbs. Although he analyzes the planning ideas of A. J. Downing, Calvert Vaux, and Charles Eliot, the central figure in his account is Frederick Law Olmsted, whose writings and landscape designs best articulated the vision of a built environment that, as Schuyler properly emphasizes, was pastoral and civilizing without being anti-urban. Schuyler's precise depiction of the new perspective that "was a creative synthesis of the divergent values associated with country and city in nineteenth-century American culture" is based on a careful reading of the primary sources—landscape plans as well as writings of major participants in the urban debate. His is the best account to date of the restructuring of

agrarian ideology to accommodate the pastoral ideal of the middle landscape that profoundly influenced the design of certain urban and suburban recreational and domestic spaces until World War I. His analysis should, mercifully, lay to rest the widespread misunderstanding of the "rural" or suburban ideal as inherently anti-urban.

If *The New Urban Landscape* disappoints, it is in the author's failure to clarify the place of the naturalistic alternative to the commercial urban gridiron within the larger nineteenth-century debate on urban form. We do not learn how widespread and widely implemented the new perspective was, whether it influenced the design of recreational and domestic spaces in major metropolitan areas only or in smaller cities as well, or whether it won adherents in regions other than the East and Midwest. By arguing that "the conception of the park evolved from an associational and educational space that was essentially an extension of the city into a naturalistic landscape that in its very rusticity was the antithesis of the urban environment," Schuyler implies a direction and purity that neither the larger debate nor the actual designs of urban recreational spaces possessed. This same false dichotomy obscures the common social ends to which pastoral, associational, and other reform-oriented landscape designs were directed—the promotion of moral and physical well-being among the urban populace. In his last and least satisfactory chapter, Schuyler swaps his historian's hat for that of the critic, lamenting the late nineteenth-century eclipse of Olmsted's pastoral vistas by the less appealing neoclassical landscapes of the City Beautiful movement. But if Schuyler hasn't yet written the definitive account of nineteenth-century urban landscape design, he has made an important contribution to our understanding of a design perspective that fostered a strong American heritage of urban parks and suburban spaces.

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Southern Capitalists: The Ideological Leadership of an Elite, 1832-1885. By Laurence

Landscaping America

Jon C. Teafor



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LANDSCAPING AMERICA

Jon C. Teaford

David Schuyler. *The New Urban Landscape: The Redefinition of City Form in Nineteenth-Century America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986. xiv + 237 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. \$29.50.

Phoebe Cutler. *The Public Landscape of the New Deal*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985. xv + 182 pp. Illustrations, appendix, notes, bibliography, and index. \$25.00.

During the past twenty years, a growing number of historians have focused attention on the evolution of America's public infrastructure, the seemingly prosaic waterworks, sewers, streets, and highways that support the nation's high standard of living and economic growth. Of special interest, however, has been the development of the green infrastructure, the park networks that have offered urban Americans breathing space and the wilderness and seaside preserves that have provided new destinations for millions of tourists. Norman T. Newton has written a standard history of landscape architecture in America and Galen Cranz has attempted to record the history of urban park planning.¹ Moreover, there has been a minor scholarly boom in studies on the nineteenth century's most notable park planner, Frederick Law Olmsted, with two fat biographies appearing in the 1970s followed by the initial volumes of his papers, and more recently a specialized study on Olmsted's work in Boston.² The most controversial, and recently most villified, park figure of the twentieth century, Robert Moses, also is the subject of burgeoning scholarship, including a Pulitzer-Prize-winning indictment encompassing almost twelve-hundred pages of charges and criticisms.³ Though historians virtually neglected the history of parks and landscape architecture until the 1960s, they clearly have been making up for lost time in the succeeding years.

Two of the newest contributions to this body of scholarship are David Schuyler's *The New Urban Landscape* and Phoebe Cutler's *The Public Landscape of the New Deal*. Though Schuyler focuses on urban park planning and suburban land design in the nineteenth century and Cutler describes twentieth-century landscape programs in city and country, both works ask basically the same question: how did landscape architects and the prevailing

fashions in land planning influence public policy and the creation of the green infrastructure? Together they perform an admirable service, shedding new light on the development of the landscape architecture profession as well as illuminating the history of city planning and the programs of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal.

As one of the editors of the *Frederick Law Olmsted Papers*, David Schuyler is eminently qualified to discuss the changing ideas on urban planning and park development during the nineteenth century. He begins by examining the two most notable examples of American city planning at the beginning of the century, Pierre L'Enfant's plan for the nation's capital and the Commissioners Plan of 1811 that imposed a rigid gridiron on most of Manhattan. Schuyler views both as "flawed visions" with unfortunate consequences for Washington and New York City. L'Enfant's grandiose baroque plan with broad radial boulevards and monumental squares and circles was ill-suited to the small capital city of the nineteenth century and contributed to the dismal emptiness that so many visitors observed in early Washington. The commissioners' gridiron created a city more suitable for real estate speculation than for decent living and made inadequate provision for parks or open spaces. According to Schuyler, in the field of city planning nineteenth-century Americans were off to a bad start.

By the mid-nineteenth century, however, American city dwellers would find inspiration for a better life in the unlikely confines of the rural cemetery. Beginning in the 1830s with the opening of the famous Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts, a series of rural burial grounds offered a welcome resort for families seeking a weekend escape from the city. With curving lanes and romantic landscaping, the new cemeteries presented a sharp contrast to the repetitious grid of city streets and the grim brick and stone of tenements and townhouses. According to Schuyler, these cemeteries were "didactic landscapes whose scenery and monuments instructed visitors in morality and respect for the dead" (p. 37). But they also instructed city fathers in the desirability of developing parks for the growing number of urban dwellers. The thousands of urban residents who converged on the cemeteries each weekend were ample testimony to the need and demand for sylvan breathing spaces in the city.

Having described these precursors to the city park, Schuyler then proceeds to the heart of his subject, the development of the first great urban parklands and most notably Central Park. The designers of Central Park, Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, offered a new vision of the urban landscape, what Schuyler calls the naturalistic landscape. Olmsted and Vaux's naturalistic park was intended to be a rural island amid an urban environment. A thick border of trees would shut out the surrounding city and prevent un-

wanted urban intrusions into the oasis of rural meadows, glens, ponds, and groves that Olmsted and Vaux desired to create. By contrast, some early park advocates favored a didactic landscape, parklands with inspirational statues, informative museums, and educational botanical gardens. For example, the distinguished architect Richard Morris Hunt conceived of Central Park becoming "one great open air gallery of Art, instead of being, as some dreamers fancy it, a silent stretch of rural landscape caught up and inclosed within the raging tumult of a vast metropolis" (p. 96).

Following their much-heralded success designing Central Park, Olmsted and Vaux applied their vision of the naturalistic landscape in a number of cities throughout the nation. Schuyler describes their work in Philadelphia, Brooklyn, Buffalo, Chicago, and Boston, discussing not only the development of individual parks but also the emerging demand for park systems linked by tree-lined parkways. But whether designing individual parks or ambitious networks of green space, Olmsted and his followers adhered to their vision of the naturalistic landscape, creating rural preserves uncluttered by museums or classical monuments.

Moreover, Schuyler relates how Olmsted and likeminded planners extended this naturalistic landscape to the design of suburban communities. Thus he recounts the origins of Llewellyn Park, New Jersey, a community of large lots and romantic scenery just twelve miles west of New York City. Olmsted and Vaux's plan for Riverside outside of Chicago also receives ample attention as does Olmsted's unrealized plan for the South Bronx. But Schuyler closes with a chapter on the neoclassical landscape of the 1890s with its emphasis on Beaux Arts architecture and civic monuments reminiscent of ancient Rome and Renaissance Italy. The construction of a massive memorial arch, a grand plaza, and classical peristyles and colonnades compromised the naturalistic rusticity of Brooklyn's Prospect Park, regarded by many as Olmsted and Vaux's finest creation. And by the turn of the century the overpowering Beaux Arts facade of Richard Morris Hunt's Metropolitan Museum occupied the eastern flank of Central Park. According to Schuyler, a neoclassical vision had thus supplanted the naturalistic urban landscape of the mid-nineteenth century.

From Phoebe Cutler's study of New Deal landscape architecture, however, it is evident that numerous conflicting visions were to coexist during the early twentieth century and through the 1930s. Thus Cutler discusses the work of practical, no-nonsense recreation planners, designers of Renaissance gardens, and devotees of a rustic revival. During the New Deal, the recreation planners were especially busy, designing utilitarian playgrounds with more black-top than grass and dedicated to vigorous athletic competition rather than leisurely contemplation of naturalistic meadows and glades. No one was more successful in garnering WPA funds than New York City's park commis-

sioner Robert Moses, who mass-produced standardized playgrounds throughout the metropolis, even locating twenty within the once-rustic confines of Central Park.

Yet Cutler notes the continuing influence of Italian Renaissance design with its formal water cascades, balustrades, arbors, amphitheaters, and symmetrical garden layout. Italianate design had dominated American landscape architecture through the 1920s and was amply evident in the layout of private estates during the early twentieth century. In the 1930s this style remained influential, especially in the design of municipal rose gardens, a common creation of the era.

Rusticity, however, made a strong comeback in the 1930s as troubled Americans seemed to take solace from their pioneer roots. Consequently, log lodges and shelterhouses with massive chimneys of unfinished stone were commonplace in the numerous state parks developed with federal funds. According to Cutler, the CCC, guided by landscape architects, dotted the landscape with log creations, including log seesaws, and even in the less wooded regions of the Great Plains and the arid West structures of unfinished timber and rugged stone were standard equipment for state parks. Throughout the nation, the desired effect was a rough-hewn naturalism that glorified America's past.

Playgrounds, rose gardens, and state parks were not the only depression-era legacies of landscape architecture. In fact, Cutler claims that the 1930s represented a high point for the profession, arguing that "land designers' influence skyrocketed with the Great Depression but appears to have ended with it too" (p. 89). In support of this contention, she recounts the New Deal efforts to create shelterbelts of trees in the Great Plains to forestall another Dust Bowl and the introduction of the kudzu vine in the South to halt soil erosion. Moreover, Cutler discusses the significance of land planning in the federal government's subsistence homestead and greenbelt community programs. The landscape architect Earle Draper served as director of the TVA's Division of Land Planning and Housing, and Cutler contends that the "TVA represented the culmination of the landscape architects' early initiative in planning" (p. 135). Even though the TVA built only one model community and the subsistence homestead and greenbelt programs likewise produced only a few new towns, Cutler finds the hopes and dreams of the New Deal planners exhilarating. Kudzu proved as much a nuisance as a friend and the shelterbelt was a failure, but for a few short years government-employed land designers were making big plans that excited the imagination and stirred the soul.

Together Cutler and Schuyler add considerably to the historian's understanding of the development of landscape architecture and the land designer's role in fashioning the physical environment of the nation.

Schuyler's study is the best single volume on nineteenth-century park development, and no existing work describes the origins and evolution of the naturalistic vision as capably as *The New Urban Landscape*. Moreover, Schuyler handles his subject with admirable economy and grace, packing his story into only 195 pages of well-written prose. He does not deluge the reader with a flood of superfluous detail or head off on irrelevant tangents. Instead, he presents the necessary information clearly and well and proceeds logically through his tightly-organized study. Overall, Schuyler's volume is a model of scholarship.

Though not as tightly structured or well written, Cutler's work also merits praise. It surveys the diverse public landscaping projects of the 1930s and includes over one hundred illustrations that are helpful in understanding the physical artifacts described in the text. Like Schuyler, Cutler compresses a great deal into a relatively few pages and admirably conveys the exciting sense of experimentation, innovation, and idealism that underlay so many of the New Deal programs. But the brevity of Cutler's work is perhaps its chief shortcoming. The study arouses the reader's interest without satisfying it. Cutler is often too sketchy and too unsystematic in her coverage, presenting an example of a municipal rose garden in California or a playground in New York City without fully developing her themes. Cutler's work introduces the subject of landscape architecture in the New Deal era, but it does not offer the definitive account.

Moreover, both Cutler and Schuyler are at times disturbingly uncritical of their subjects. Both are unashamed admirers of the creations they describe, with Schuyler genuflecting before the achievements of Frederick Law Olmsted and Cutler eager to sign up with the CCC. Schuyler's devotion to Olmsted's vision is, at times, particularly irritating, in part because his attitude is so commonplace among students of nineteenth-century urban planning. For Schuyler, Olmsted's opinions too often appear to be the standard of right and wrong in city planning and park design. Schuyler repeatedly notes that other park planners or public officials had "learned the lesson" taught by Olmsted or regrettably had failed to learn the lesson. Olmsted is the authoritative teacher laying down the rules that others should dutifully memorize. In the pages of Schuyler's work, those who dare challenge Olmsted's vision are philistines at best and more likely dullards. Even such a notable figure as the architect Richard Morris Hunt, whom few would label an aesthetic boob, appears in Schuyler's book in the role of insensitive defiler because he favored a monumental neoclassical entrance to Olmsted's Central Park. And Comptroller Andrew Green assumes the part traditionally assigned him in Olmsted hagiography, that of penny-pinching bore, simply because he cared more about balancing the books of the financially-distressed city than realizing Olmsted and Vaux's costly vision.

With Schuyler's work rounding out two decades of study on Olmsted and his creations, it is perhaps time to jostle the pedestal on which the great planner has been placed and challenge some of his beliefs and question the merits of his achievements. Why was Olmsted's vision so much more admirable than that of Hunt? Though remnants of Olmsted's parks are still admired for their beauty, his vision has not stood the test of time, for in the twentieth century there have always been more people interested in pitching a baseball, throwing a few baskets, or visiting a museum than in contemplating a bucolic flock of sheep grazing in a pseudo-rural meadow. Similarly, why praise Olmsted's suburban schemes for upper-middle-class enclaves which purposely laid the foundations for the class-segregated city of the twentieth century? For all its faults, the gridiron of the Commissioners of 1811 did not provide for any privileged quarter nor plan for social apartheid. Instead, the republican commissioners imposed a monotonous but egalitarian grid upon the landscape, giving preference to no area and creating no preconceived bastions for an urban aristocracy. As one of the editors of the Olmsted Papers, it is perhaps natural that Schuyler sees the history of nineteenth-century planning from Olmsted's perspective. But it would have been refreshing had he viewed his subject from a more detached perch.

Yet no matter the vantage point, the works of Schuyler and Cutler are valuable additions to the literature on the nation's green infrastructure. Both authors illuminate the American landscaping tradition and the evolution of the nation's physical environment. They may not present the last word on their subjects, but any student of the American past can learn from their efforts.

Jon C. Teaford, Department of History, Purdue University, is the author of The Twentieth-Century American City: Problem, Promise, and Reality (1986).

1. Norman T. Newton, *Design on the Land: The Development of Landscape Architecture* (1971); Galen Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design* (1982).

2. Laura Wood Roper, *FLO: A Biography of Frederick Law Olmsted* (1973); Elizabeth Stevenson, *Park Maker: A Life of Frederick Law Olmsted* (1977); Charles Capen McLaughlin, Charles E. Beveridge, and David Schuyler, eds., *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted* (1977-); Cynthia Zaitzevsky, *Frederick Law Olmsted and the Boston Park System* (1982).

3. Robert Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (1974).