

Culture and the City
Fall 2018
Some Important People in the History of Urbanism

Pierre L'Enfant, 1754-1852

Pierre L'Enfant was the French architect and engineer **responsible for the design of Washington, D.C.** The plan of the city is based on **Baroque or “Grand Manner” principles** employed by Andre Le Notre in the palace and garden of Versailles, where L'Enfant's father had worked as a court painter, and on Domenico Fontana's scheme (1585) for the redesign of Rome under Pope Sixtus V. **Through the use of long avenues joined at key points marked by important buildings or monuments, the U.S. capital city is a symbolic representation of power radiating from a central source.**

Baron Georges-Eugene Haussmann, 1809-1891

Baron Haussmann was a **French civic planner who is associated with the rebuilding of Paris.** He was born in that city of a Protestant family of German descent. Commissioned in 1852 by Napoleon III to initiate a program of planning reforms in Paris, Haussmann laid out the Bois de Boulogne, and made extensive improvements in the smaller parks. The gardens of the Luxembourg Palace were cut down to allow of the formation of new streets, and the Boulevard de Sebastopol, the southern half of which is now the Boulevard St. Michel, was built through a populous district. Additional, **sweeping changes turned narrow medieval streets into wide "boulevards."** A new water supply, a gigantic system of sewers, new bridges, the opera and other public buildings, and the inclusion of outlying districts were among the new Haussmann's achievements. He was indicted for mishandling public funds in 1867.

Frederick Law Olmsted, 1822-1903

Frederick Law Olmsted is widely recognized as **the founder of American landscape architecture** and the nation's foremost park-maker. His first, most loved, and in many ways his best known work was his **design of Central Park in New York City** (1858-1876) with his partner Calvert Vaux. But Olmsted would go on to have a significant influence in the way cities and communities are built to incorporate the idea of nature and parks. He was one of the first to espouse the principles of the **City Beautiful** movement in America as articulated by Charles Robinson.

Camillo Sitte, 1843-1903

An Austrian who was greatly impressed by Italian cities, Camillo Sitte is best known among urban planners and architects for his book ***City Planning According to Its Artistic Principles*** from 1889. He strongly criticized the prevailing emphasis on broad, straight boulevards, public squares arranged primarily for the convenience of traffic, and efforts to strip major public or religious landmarks of adjoining smaller structures that were regarded as encumbering such monuments of the past. Sitte proposed instead to follow what he believed to be the design objectives of those whose streets and buildings shaped medieval cities. **He advocated curving or irregular street alignments to provide ever-changing vistas.** He pointed out the advantages of what came to be known as **"turbine squares"** — civic spaces served by streets entering in such a way as to resemble a pinwheel in plan. His teachings became widely accepted in Austria, Germany, and Scandinavia. In less than a decade, his style of urban design came to be accepted as the norm in those countries.

Daniel Burnham, 1846-1912

Daniel Burnham was raised and educated in Chicago. He gained his early architectural experience with William Le Baron Jenney, the "**father of the skyscraper**." However, Burnham earned an even greater reputation for his influence as a city planner. He supervised the layout and construction of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. In 1909, Burnham and his assistant Edward H. Bennett (who designed the Michigan Avenue Bridge) prepared **The Plan for Chicago, which is considered the nation's first example of a comprehensive planning document**. Burnham also worked on other city plans, for Cleveland, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., Manila, and other cities.

Burnham's most **famous quote continues to inspire**: "*Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood and probably will themselves not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will not die.*"

Ebenezer Howard, 1850-1928

Ebenezer Howard came to America from England at the age of 21. He settled in Nebraska, and soon discovered that he was not meant to be a farmer. He moved to Chicago and worked as a reporter for the courts and newspapers. By 1876, he was back in England, where he found a job with a firm producing the official Parliamentary reports, and he spent the rest of his life in this occupation.

Howard read widely and thought deeply about social issues, and one result was his book *Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* (1898), reprinted in 1902 as **Garden Cities of Tomorrow**. This book called for the creation of new suburban towns of limited size, planned in advance, and surrounded by a permanent belt of agricultural land. **Many suburbs were modeled after Howard's "Garden Cities."** He believed they were the perfect blend of city and nature.

His ideas attracted enough attention and financial backing to begin Letchworth, a garden city in suburban London. A second garden city, Welwyn, was started after World War I. Their success led the British government to develop New Towns after World War II. This movement produced more than 30 communities, most significantly perhaps Milton Keynes. Howard's ideas inspired other planners such as Frederick Law Olmsted II and Clarence Perry. In a sense **Denver's Stapleton development** is an expression of Garden City principles.

Charles Mulford Robinson (1869–1917)

C.M. Robinson was a journalist and a writer who became famous as a **pioneering Urban Planning theorist**. He was the first Professor for Civic Design at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, which was only one of two universities offering courses in Urban Planning at the time, the other being Harvard.

Robinson wrote *The Fair of Spectacle* in 1893, an illustrated description of Chicago's World Columbian Exposition, a watershed event for the **City Beautiful** movement. In 1901 he wrote the first guide to City Planning in 1901 based on City Beautiful principles, titled *The Improvement of Towns and Cities*. **Denver's Civic Center Park** and several **parkways** (Monaco, 6th Avenue, 17th Avenue, and Alameda Boulevard) are expressions of City Beautiful principles.

Frank Lloyd Wright, 1867-1959

American architect, interior designer, writer and educator. Wright promoted organic architecture and developed the concept of the **Usonian** home that we can see examples of in the Denver neighborhood of Arapahoe Acres within walking distance of DU. His work includes original and innovative examples of many different building types, including offices, churches, schools, skyscrapers, hotels, and museums like the **Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum** in New York City.

Wright proposed the urban development concept of **Broadacre City**. He presented the idea in his book *The Disappearing City* in 1932 and would go on refining the concept in later books and articles until his death in 1959. Broadacre City was the antithesis of a city and the ideal of the newly born suburbia, shaped through Wright's particular vision. It was a planning statement and a socio-political scheme by which each U.S. family would be given a one acre (4,000 m²) plot of land from the federal lands reserves, and a Wright-conceived community would be built anew from this. Broadacre City represents the exact opposite of transit-oriented development. All important transport is done by automobile and the pedestrian can exist safely only within the confines of the one acre (4,000 m²) plots where most of the population dwells. In a sense the sprawling **Sun Belt cities of the American West** like Houston, Phoenix, Los Angeles, and Denver are contemporary manifestations of Broadacre City.

Wright was recognized in 1991 by the American Institute of Architects as "the greatest American architect of all time."

Le Corbusier, 1887-1965

Le Corbusier was without doubt **the most influential, most admired, and most maligned architect of the twentieth century**. Through his writing and his buildings, he is the main player in the **Modernist** approach to urban planning and design. Many of his ideas on urban living—especially the notion of “**towers in the park**”—became the **blueprint for post-war reconstruction**, and the many failures of his would-be imitators led to Le Corbusier being blamed for the problems of western cities in the 1960s and 1970s.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Le Corbusier's most significant work was in urban planning. In such published plans as *La Ville Contemporaine* (1922), the *Plan Voisin de Paris* (1925), and the several *Villes Radieuses* (1930-36). He advanced ideas dramatically different from the comfortable, low-rise communities proposed by earlier garden city planners. During this 20-year span, he also built many villas and several small apartment complexes and office buildings.

Robert Moses, 1888-1981

Robert Moses was **the master builder of 20th century New York City**. As the shaper of a modern city, his only peer is Haussmann. Although he never held elective office, Moses was the most powerful person in New York City government from the 1930s to the 1950s. Moses literally changed shorelines, built roadways in the sky, and invested in public parks and pools. At the same time, Moses displaced hundreds of thousands of people, turned vibrant neighborhoods in slums, contributed to the departure of the Brooklyn Dodgers to Los Angeles, and presided over the decline of public transit. However, in a way, Moses's projects were necessary. His mistakes were in believing that "**cities are for traffic**," and "if the ends don't justify the means, what does?"

Despite his elitism and, arguably, racism Moses did many jobs extraordinarily well, such as the development of Jones Beach as a public park. At a time when the public was used to Tammany Hall

corruption and incompetence, Moses was seen as a savior of government. Shortly after President Franklin Roosevelt's inauguration, the federal government had millions of dollars to spend, but states and cities had few projects ready. New York City was an exception. At one point, one-quarter of federal construction dollars were being spent in New York, and Moses had 80,000 people working under him.

Lewis Mumford, 1895-1988

Lewis Mumford's long life was marked by **work in urban planning, history, and political and social commentary**. He viewed architectural congestion as a dehumanizing influence and was **instrumental in founding the Regional Planning Association of America in 1923**. His series of writings tracing the history of cities over the last 1,000 years was very successful and included *The Culture of Cities* (1938), *The Condition of Man* (1944), and *The Conduct of Life* (1951). Mumford continued his prodigious output well into his later years, producing *The Pentagon of Power* in 1971. Mumford received the National Medal of Arts in 1986.

Jane Jacobs, 1916-2006

Jane Jacobs was born in Scranton, Pennsylvania. Her father was a physician and her mother taught school and worked as a nurse. After high school and a year spent as a reporter on the *Scranton Tribune*, Jacobs went to New York, where she found a succession of jobs as a stenographer and wrote freelance articles about the city's many working districts, which fascinated her.

In 1952, after a number of writing and editing jobs ranging in subject matter from metallurgy to U.S. geography for foreign readers, she became an associate editor of *Architectural Forum*. She became increasingly skeptical of conventional planning beliefs as **she noticed that the city rebuilding projects she wrote about did not seem safe, interesting, lively, or economically beneficial for cities once the projects were operational**. She gave a speech to that effect at Harvard in 1956, and this led to an article in *Fortune* magazine entitled "Downtown Is for People." This in turn led her to write *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. The book was published in 1961 and permanently changed the debate about urban renewal and the future of cities.

Thirty years after its publication, the New York Times described *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* as "**perhaps the most influential single work in the history of town planning**. ... [It] can also be seen in a much larger context. It is first of all a work of literature; the descriptions of street life as a kind of ballet and the biting satiric account of traditional planning theory can still be read for pleasure even by those who long ago absorbed and appropriated the book's arguments."