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Planning the Twentieth-Century American City, by Mary Corbin Sies and Christopher Silver. Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore and London, 1996, and Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth-Century Metropolis, by Greg Hise. Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore and London, 1997 (Book Reviews)

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duces her belief that the housing movement in the United States would never succeed without the support of workers and consumers, the builders and buyers of housing. Chapter 4 details the achievements of the PWA's Housing Division (first through the administration of limited-dividend loans and then through direct construction) and the widespread public acceptance of PWA housing, both conceptually and in terms of design. In chapters 5 and 6 Radford presents two fine case studies of successful PWA housing developments, one from each phase of the agency's housing work: the Carl Mackley Houses, a limited-dividend project in Philadelphia, and the Harlem River Houses, a direct-construction project in New York City. The last chapter charts the political struggle over long-term, permanent federal housing legislation, which resulted in the two-tiered system that determined the shape of the American housing system over the next several decades.

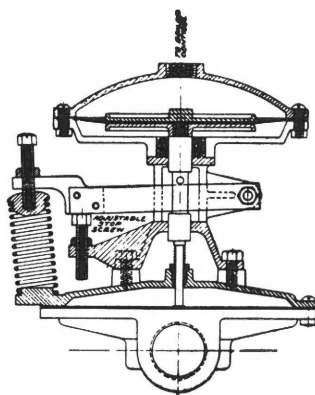
Without a doubt, Radford's greatest contribution is her in-depth analysis of two housing developments built by the PWA. Informed by oral histories of onetime residents, these case studies make early New Deal housing policy come alive for readers. Among many other things, they help us appreciate more fully the role that local constituencies played in the success of a project. In the case of the Carl Mackley Houses (named after a hosiery worker killed in a violent strike), we learn that the American Federation of Hosiery Workers was largely responsible for organizing a group of labor and housing activists to take advantage of the early wave of NIRA loans. As recipients of the Housing Division's first loan, they successfully built a multifamily complex that they hoped would serve as a model for noncommercial housing development nationwide. Fueled in part by the new unionism of the day, the Philadelphia group offered an important critique of detached, single-family houses as "fortresses of individualism," believing instead that more collective forms of housing would better modern industrial society (123).

Similarly, Radford's treatment of the Harlem River Houses reveals that a coalition of African-American activists and members of the Consolidated Tenants League of New York organized a massive publicity

campaign to ensure that the PWA would construct experimental public housing in Harlem. Responding to the severe economic distress and racism that had resulted in the Harlem Riot of 1935, tenant activists made certain that the riot commission understood housing to be one of the most pressing problems facing area residents, thus helping to galvanize support for the construction of New York's first and, as some have argued, best public housing. In both Philadelphia and New York, local activists helped prove two theoretical tenets of Bauer's plan for modern housing in the American context—that housing was more a political issue than a technical one and that demands for new kinds of housing must be backed by organized political pressure.

Although the objectives of the modern housing program did not survive the struggle to shape permanent federal housing policy during the 1930s, their history is nonetheless significant. As Radford points out, it offers today's housing activists new insights. Equally important is the history of the Regional Planning Association of America, an organization that attracted many radical thinkers interested in new ways of organizing urban and residential space. As we face the challenges of an increasingly global age, we are well advised to remember the long history of American social radicalism as it affected urban issues. This will be particularly important in the new millennium when we will undoubtedly be asked to redefine the federal government's relationship to housing policy and urban development. Spann's and Radford's volumes can help us forge new roads in historically informed ways.

— Susan Marie Wirka  
*University of Wisconsin-Madison*



*Mary Corbin Sies and Christopher Silver, editors*

**PLANNING THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN CITY**

Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, xiv + 594 pp., 58 b. & w. illus. \$55.00 (cloth) ISBN 0-8018-5163-7. \$24.95 (paper). ISBN 0-8018-5164-5.

*Greg Hise*

**MAGNETIC LOS ANGELES: PLANNING THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY METROPOLIS**

Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997, xvi + 304 pp., 60 b. & w. illus. \$35.95 (cloth). ISBN 0-8018-5543-8.

Planning has been a part of the American landscape since the establishment of the first colonial outposts, but it was not until the early twentieth century that the field's protagonists organized and professionalized. Also a relatively recent phenomenon is the field of American planning history, which for many years was the neglected stepchild of urban history and the distant cousin of architectural history. Over the past decade, however, a steady outpouring of interdisciplinary research has garnered for the field well-deserved recognition within the academy. At a time when more established disciplines are increasingly torn by ideological differences and conflicting methodologies, planning history has not only recognized the complexity and fluidity of its domain but has also welcomed the diverse outlooks of participants drawn from a broad spectrum of the humanities and social sciences. These two recent studies from the Johns Hopkins University Press, the preeminent publisher in the field, continue the high level of scholarship common in planning history. They should prove to be of great interest to architectural historians as well as to anyone interested in the history—and the fate—of twentieth-century American cities.

*Planning the Twentieth-Century American City* is a collection of eighteen essays edited by Mary Corbin Sies and Christopher Silver, scholars whose own work has been pivotal in the field's emergence. The collection was conceived as a companion to *Two Centuries of American Planning* (Baltimore, 1988), edited by Daniel Schaffer and also

published by Hopkins. According to Sies and Silver, the earlier work “presented the first intellectual products of the coalescence between urban and planning history. The present anthology showcases the more complex and contextually grounded research that has issued from this marriage” (xi).

The editors introduce the collection with a historiographic overview of the field’s literature, which they suggest first appeared in the late 1960s. Following an early phase dominated by biographical studies of luminaries in the field and historical overviews of institutionalized planning, the editors argue that the field has broadened its focus to include lesser-known figures and places, while balancing its scope of inquiry to consider the role of noninstitutional participants, their ideas, and their values. The result has been an impressive range of interdisciplinary research that interweaves the threads of design, politics, economics, social activism, education, and environmentalism, recognizing that the historical narrative of American planning is less a coherent tapestry than it is a patchwork of conflicting aims, egos, and results. Guiding this and the earlier study is the concept of a “usable past” articulated by the American writer Van Wyck Brooks to acknowledge that the historian’s outlook is inevitably biased by the present and to suggest that the lessons of the past should be applied intelligently and creatively to the current situation.

The eighteen essays—some appearing in print for the first time, others reprinted from other sources—can be divided roughly into three groups: those that introduce (mostly) new faces, those that focus on (mostly) new places, and those that examine broader themes and undermine long-held assumptions. The first group includes Jon A. Peterson’s comparative analysis of Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., a visionary planner, and his son Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., who was more of a pragmatist; Susan Marie Wirka’s investigation of Progressive women reformers Mary Kingsbury Simkhovitch and Florence Kelley, shapers of the City Social movement; Joan E. Draper’s examination of the impact of early social scientists like Charles Zueblin and others on Chicago’s public parks; and Robert E. Ireland’s discovery of the pioneering conservation efforts of Joseph Hyde Pratt in North Carolina.

Essays in the second group utilize a variety of investigative methods in planning case studies of several major, but less-studied, cities. Analyses of municipal political machinery, interconstituent conflict, and formal resolution inform essays by Eric Sandweiss on sectionalism in St. Louis, by John Hancock on free-market versus organized planning in San Diego, by Robert B. Fairbanks on land reclamation in Dallas, by Charles E. Connerly on racial empowerment in Birmingham, by Robert Hodder on historic preservation in Savannah, and by June Manning Thomas on the failure of urban renewal in Detroit. Two essays stand somewhat apart methodologically in this second group: Patricia Burgess’s statistical analysis of Columbus, in which she explicates the effects of zoning and deed restrictions on city and suburban development along class and race lines; and Michael H. Lang’s research into Yorkship Garden Village (now part of Camden, New Jersey), a U.S. Shipping Board community built at the end of World War I, whose plan and architecture he posits as an early adaptation of the Garden City in America, predating Radburn, New Jersey, by a decade.

The third group includes some of the most thought-provoking essays in the entire collection: Greg Hise’s study of community planning relative to the decentralization of industry in Los Angeles; Cliff Ellis’s analysis of the breakdown in communication between planners and highway engineers that produced the urban freeways of the 1950s; Thomas W. Hanchett’s discovery of the federal government’s largely obscured role in planning during the 1940s; Roger W. Lotchin’s related discussion of World War II’s complicated effects on planning in California; Carl Abbott’s explication of the shifting meaning of downtown to planners over the postwar decades; and Tony Schuman and Elliot Sclar’s comparative analysis of Roosevelt Island and Battery Park City, two residential and commercial developments in New York City whose divergent paths illustrate both the abandonment of the federal government’s more recent initiatives in planning and the shortcomings of private-public partnerships in effecting social and racial integration. The collection concludes with another essay by the editors, which examines the multicentered Ameri-

can metropolis and urges planning historians to do more to uncover the roots of racial and economic segregation that lie beneath the city’s increasing fragmentation at the end of the twentieth century. “[Planning historians] must acknowledge that an urban place is more than the sum of its formal components,” Sies and Silver write; “it is also the sum of the lives lived there” (473).

What could have been a hodgepodge of material is deftly edited to elicit unifying themes that cross time and place. Among these are the continued relevance and adaptability of English planner Ebenezer Howard’s Garden City model; the Progressive impulse and attendant middle-class values that drive many planning initiatives; the plight of the disenfranchised, whose needs and desires have been misinterpreted by liberal reformers and conservative speculators alike; the reluctance of the federal government to participate in the planning process; and the surprising number of federal planning successes achieved despite this reluctance. Moreover, planners such as Harland Bartholomew, John Nolen, and Catherine Bauer appear in more than one essay, indicating both the geographical and intellectual breadth of the territory these figures covered. After reading the collection of essays, one wants to know more about the individual topics presented as well as the field of planning history; that is ultimately the book’s greatest achievement. The only criticism is that the editors’ introductions to the individual essays are too lengthy, especially since they review the literature germane to each topic; an annotated bibliography would have conveyed the information more effectively and less obtrusively.

Greg Hise’s *Magnetic Los Angeles* is in many ways an ideal companion to *Planning the Twentieth-Century American City*. His study is essentially an elaboration of the tantalizingly brief essay on Los Angeles that he wrote for the collective work. In both works, Hise postulates a thesis that is as revolutionary as it is straightforward: postwar growth in Los Angeles was not as chaotic and unfocused as planners and ordinary observers have generally assumed; rather, suburban nodes of residential development were planted deliberately around established industrial locations—most notably those related to aircraft design and production—

not in opposition to the city but as mutually beneficial extensions of it. Fighting the tendency to treat community-scale projects as "scattered bits of urban flotsam," he sees them as related elements "within an expansive and expanding metropolitan region" (5). In one fell swoop he undercuts some long-established professional and academic prejudices, among them that all developers are rapacious speculators, that the search for housing rather than jobs determined the centripetal growth of American suburbs, and that greater Los Angeles represents all that is wrong with planning in the twentieth century. Hise is not an apologist for Los Angeles or suburbia in general; instead, he is a historian who has scrutinized the documentary and physical evidence carefully and has constructed a convincing narrative of a particular region that also has national implications.

The book's title contains a playful allusion to Ebenezer Howard's well-known diagram in which the separate magnets of city and country living were to be counterbalanced by a third magnet, the Garden City, which combined the best features of the other two in a self-sufficient community. In the first chapter, Hise traces the influence of Howard's ideas as they spread from Great Britain at the turn of the twentieth century to southern California during the 1920s and 1930s via the East Coast. The members of the New York City-based Regional Planning Association of America played a crucial role in the Garden City's dissemination and application on this side of the Atlantic Ocean. Crucial to understanding this process of transference is the neighborhood-unit concept developed by Clarence Perry, a peripheral member of the association, who drew upon Howard's ideas as well as on those of the settlement-house movement closer at hand.

The neighborhood unit came to represent the coordinated planning of residential districts within superblocks surround-

ing a centrally placed elementary school, with commercial development relegated to the unit's corners. While Hise explains that the neighborhood unit has a significant history prior to 1930 (notably at Forest Hills Gardens in New York City, at Yorkship Garden Village, and at Radburn), he notes that the concept's dissemination was due primarily to its incorporation into the policies and literature of the Federal Housing Authority—the New Deal era agency that did more to revolutionize the American landscape than any other institution. The Authority's stated goal of extending home ownership to the lower-middle classes in new houses built to minimum standards dovetailed almost effortlessly with local government efforts to reduce urban congestion in California and elsewhere. As Hise admits, the relationship between campaigns for individual home ownership and those for comprehensive regional planning was "an unlikely, tenuous coupling," but the peculiar exigencies of the Depression and wartime years made compromise possible and even inevitable (54).

In the first chapter, Hise introduces the reader to Leimert Park, Los Angeles, a 1920s residential subdivision that incorporated aspects of the neighborhood unit in its planning. In the chapters that follow, he tracks the remarkable convergence of people, events, and policies that propelled the decentralization of industry and housing across the entire metropolitan region. The path is complex, leading from the establishment of minimum house standards for lower-middle-class workers to the building of minimal camps for migrant workers, and from debates over prefabrication in the factory to the introduction of limited-task assembly on site. California's rapidly growing aircraft industries—located by necessity near existing airfields on the outskirts of the city—set the pace for decentralization in the interwar years, and residential developers like Kaiser Community Homes seized the opportunity to pro-

vide well-planned, balanced communities close to the new workplaces. The book concludes with an examination of Panorama City, a Kaiser development of the 1950s that utilized the neighborhood unit but also boasted one of the first regional shopping centers to compete effectively with Los Angeles's downtown retail district.

Hise's narrative is well written and clearly structured, as he nimbly guides the reader through various informational thickets, such as the often confusing proliferation of New Deal agencies responsible for housing and planning or the hierarchy of a multidivision corporation like the Henry J. Kaiser Company. At times Hise slips into industry jargon, but in a gentle way that reassures the reader that the author knows his subject thoroughly. The enormity of the material through which he has sifted to construct this narrative becomes apparent when perusing the more than forty pages of footnotes, many of them a paragraph in length.

*Magnetic Los Angeles* is bound to initiate a whole new direction in planning research, since the wealth of material Hise has uncovered in southern California during the middle decades of this century will undoubtedly spur scholars to reexamine other parts of the country that have until now received only cursory treatment. Once that happens, the usable past will be enriched enormously, and strategies for dealing with the present may be enhanced as well. At a time when maximum-standard housing priced well beyond the means of lower-middle-class buyers seems to be the suburban norm and when there is little apparent relationship between the location of residential and employment sectors, it is useful to ponder the achievements and shortcomings of suburban planning in the optimistic years surrounding World War II.

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