

**Visions of Paradise:
Glimpses of Our Landscape's Legacy**

John Warfield Simpson
Berkeley: University of California Press
1999. 387 pages. \$35 (HB)

Review by Donald A. Krueckeberg

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This is a well-written work of U.S. environmental history and policy, surveying the open range of the American West in the 18th century, the environmental preservation movement of the 19th century, and the impetus toward suburban sprawl in the early 20th century. Simpson, an associate professor in the Knowlton School of Architecture and Natural Resources at Ohio State University, focuses on the area from Appalachian Range to the Rocky Mountains, particularly Ohio.

There is some excellent material in this book. Early chapters study the Land Ordinance of 1785, the young nation's debates over property and national ideals, the doctrine of Manifest Destiny and its impact on the cattle kingdom of the open range, and Major John Wesley Powell's intellectual efforts to promote the wise settlement of the West. The best section of the book is one I would use in any class on environmental history. It begins with a brief treatment of the pseudo-wilderness of the Transcendentalists, and turns on the work of George Perkins Marsh, John Muir, and Gifford Pinchot in the great debate over national wilderness policy, focusing on Yellowstone National Park. The treatment of these major players—their intellectual development and impact—is fascinating, evenhanded, and very satisfying.

The next section covers Aldo Leopold, the National Environmental Policy Act, the Council on Environmental Quality, and strip mining. The last major section treats suburbs and transit, Catherine Beecher, Andrew Jackson Downing, Frederick Law Olmsted, and early Federal Policy in the National Conference on Home Building, the Home Owners Loan Corporation, and the Federal Housing Administration.

The book is a collection of essays, some quite short. The scholarship is good, but not overbearing. The notes are mercifully few, and collected at the back with a brief paragraph of the major references on which each chapter draws. I take issue with the obtuse chapter titles, such as "The Emotional Landscape" for the chapter on strip mining, which are completely useless as a guide to the contents. With 19 chapter titles like "Actions and Outcomes" and "Looking Ahead, Looking Back"—outdone by

partitioning of the book into parts with titles like "Out of Sight, Out of Mind," "Time Travel," and "Forgotten Sensations"—the author hides his good work behind a menu for fluff.

The focus on Ohio is tantalizing but tends to be underdone. Strong sources that show Ohio at the forefront of planning work (for example, the writings of Laurence Gerckens) are ignored. Pat Burgess' (1994) superb study of the development of Columbus is another missed opportunity to feature Ohio in the development of a national landscape. Both of these sources would have helped ground this fairly weak treatment of 20th century urbanization.

On the whole, this is a very good introduction to the subject of U.S. environmental policy debates, and I would hope that it is a promise of future work from this author.

■ REFERENCE

Burgess, Patricia. 1994. *Planning for the Private Interest: Land Use Controls and Residential Patterns in Columbus, Ohio*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.

Back from the Brink: Saving America's Cities by Design

The American Architectural Foundation
New York: McGraw-Hill Construction Information Group
Running time: 56:40. \$24.95

Becoming Good Neighbors: Enriching America's Communities by Design

The American Architectural Foundation
New York: McGraw-Hill Construction Information Group
Running time: 56:42. \$29.95

Review by Thomas Schurch

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Judging by the titles "Back from the Brink: Saving America's Cities by Design" and "Becoming Good Neighbors: Enriching America's Communities by Design," one would logically conclude these video-tapes concern urban design. One might also conclude urban design, rather than urban planning, to be their emphasis given that they are written and produced by the American Architectural Foundation, an arm of the American Institute of Architects. However, their content actually belies this fact,

because both tapes present and emphasize *planning's* role in correcting some of the problems plaguing American cities today. Ironically, the role of planning, as depicted in each production, is merely implicit. The linkages between professional planning and (urban) design are not clearly discussed or forcefully displayed. Nevertheless, both works are worthy of attention by planning educators.

The American Architectural Foundation has produced these tapes as part of its series entitled "Accent on Architecture." Both are hosted by former Seattle Mayor Charles Royer and use case study and interview methodologies. "Back From The Brink" case studies include Portland, Oregon; Chattanooga, Tennessee; and Suisun City, California. "Becoming Good Neighbors" focuses on Gaylord, Michigan; Mashpee Commons, Massachusetts; Diggs Town in Norfolk, Virginia; and Bonaparte, Iowa. Both productions present "design" as the basis for solving problems associated with each city, e.g., sprawl; loss of place, community, growth, and prosperity; deteriorated downtowns; violence; crime; and racism. Both tapes also use historical and contemporary footage to illustrate before-

and-after conditions and interviews, conducted by Royer, and to explain the design outcomes.

■ BACK FROM THE BRINK: SAVING AMERICA'S CITIES BY DESIGN

Of the three case cities illustrated in "Back from the Brink," Portland presents physical design intervention as a growth management strategy, while Chattanooga and Suisun City use design as an impetus for growth, prosperity, and retrieving a sense of community. Each city is presented as having unique problems, and the solutions to them reflect intervention frequently associated with successful urban design. The designers attempt to be comprehensive, daring, and sensitive to history and community; the approach emphasizes reducing automobile dependence, building at the pedestrian scale with compatible mixed uses, and honoring the symbolic and real value of downtown.

With Portland, these common concerns of urban design include looking beyond downtown—and for that matter looking beyond what is usually regarded as urban design.



Eden by Design

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GREG HISE AND WILLIAM DEVERELL

Afterword by Laurie Olin

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Landscapes of Desire

Anglo Mythologies of Los Angeles

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Art from *Landscapes of Desire*

Reconnecting downtown to a major feature such as the Willamette River; preserving historical buildings; addressing relationships of people, sidewalks, and buildings; limiting parking lots; and giving attention to details within the built environment are standard urban design ploys. However, Portland is also shown to have exercised other more far-reaching strategies well known in planning circles, i.e., formation of the Portland Development Commission, broad use of citizen participation, creation of regional mass transit, establishment of an urban growth boundary, municipal investment in a range of housing types, and the public sector's facilitation of private sector activities. Royer's narration and the dialogue with numerous interviewees clearly reveals these professional planning successes that have made extensive physical design possible. Unfortunately, the planner's role is implied rather than stated, and the subtle message conveyed to the viewer is that the profession of architecture is the umbrella under which urban design is made possible.

For a small community, Suisun City is depicted as very ambitious for adopting a citywide redevelopment plan; rehabilitating and recreating the city's 19th-century streets and neighborhoods; locating a new civic center in a risky location that proved to be critical to the city's revitalization; and creating a marina, promenade, and civic plaza linking city hall and the waterfront. In addition to the redevelopment plan, planning efforts that made the design solution possible include key land parcel purchases by the city, reduction of red tape in the development process, establishment of a low-interest loan program, aggressive use of tax increment financing, rezoning, etc. Again, the planner's hand is significant to Suisun City's revitalization efforts, but the uninformed viewer would never know this.

The Chattanooga case study illustrates a city rebounding from severe pollution problems, racial tensions, and a sagging economy through a "redesign" of the city that includes restoring an historic bridge and other efforts at historical preservation, revitalizing downtown and city streets, reconnecting people with the riverfront, and adding an aquarium and plaza complex as a major destination feature. Public/private collaboration, such as establishing Chattanooga Venture and its inclusive Vision 2000 plan, establishing a downtown riverfront design center, and funding numerous civic improvements are also presented as part and parcel of the physical design solutions. The role of planning is not stated.

■ BECOMING GOOD NEIGHBORS: ENRICHING AMERICA'S COMMUNITIES BY DESIGN

"Becoming Good Neighbors" presents four distinct communities and their efforts to create or recapture a "sense of community" and "neighborliness" in their respective locales.

The first case primarily concerns Gaylord, Michigan's

effort to pass a bond measure for a new high school rather than the physical design of the facility. After two failed efforts at gaining voter approval, a handful of "local heroes" conceived a strategy for a third attempt that emphasized a program for the school as a multiple-use center providing numerous community-related activities outside of school hours throughout the week. In effect the proposed high school was to be a community center for the entire social strata of Gaylord, thereby broadening the political base beyond what was mostly parents of school-age children. To encourage community involvement, local leadership realized that a high voter turnout was mandatory—and that design of the high school would be a community-wide process contributing to its perception and use as a community facility. In the case of voting turnout, the electorate was given incentives to vote, i.e., discounts at the local ice cream parlor and flexible voting opportunities. After the bond measure passed, residents could participate in workshops on the design of the facility in which the consulting architects served as "facilitators," an obvious euphemism for "planners."

Case two concerns Diggs Town, a low-income district of Norfolk adversely affected by poorly planned and managed public housing with attendant social pathology and poor quality of life. A much more "bounded" case than Gaylord, Diggs Town—through its local housing authority and concerned residents—determined a lack of "neighborliness" in its community was attributable to a lack of physical characteristics typical of neighborhood housing. Families were subsequently provided with various physical amenities, e.g., secure and private yards, front porches that enhanced housing appearances, and opportunities for socializing through spatial design, as well as a strong social program emphasizing job training, child care, education, family counseling, community policing, and home ownership. The outcomes with respect to a sense of community and neighborliness are presented as being highly successful. The architect's role is presented as critical, and, in that respect, a page seems to be borrowed here from Oscar Newman's (1972, 1996) work with project housing. However, the message conveyed by this case is clearly disingenuous in professing physical design remedies to problems that also had to be solved with creative social programs.

The Mashpee Commons case depicts a small town's effort at transforming its character of strip centers and associated problems of sprawl, automobile dependence, lack of orientation, and isolated land uses. To reverse the town's penchant for sprawl, two developers purchased numerous adjoining strip centers and recycled them according to the edicts of the New Urbanism. While private sector impetus was essential to Mashpee's transformation, a major civic dialogue developed as the community confronted the developers' proposals in light of zoning ordinances contributing to sprawl. Early efforts resulted in construction of civic buildings; a downtown hub with storefront retail, residential

units, and walkable streets; and other public spaces, all of which attempt to honor historical typologies. This case study, as with the Bonaparte example discussed below, are minor exceptions to the planning-versus-architecture dilemma because it showcases the community's success due to leadership on the parts of visionary developers and citizens concerned about their town's quality of life. Nevertheless, architects' roles loom large. Planning as related to the efforts of the visionary developers and citizens groups is ignored, and another opportunity to more fully inform the viewer is missed.

Bonaparte, Iowa, population 465, was founded in 1837 on the Des Moines River. It struggled to keep its downtown, and therefore its existence, until enterprising individuals proposed that interested residents could buy it if enough of them would pitch in \$2,000 apiece. With that amount, they created a for-profit corporation that restored buildings, created a historical district, and became a Main Street community. With their identity reestablished and strengthened, the community and historical downtown are presented as attractive forces for inhabitants and visitors alike.

In sum, both "Neighbors" and "Brink" emphasize physical design and the role of architects as keys to the cities' successes. However, they make no secret of the importance of government, e.g., through establishing special districts, economic development and growth management strategies, or social programs, as well as through citizen participation and the public will, public-private partnerships, and civic-minded entrepreneurs. The viewer learns this through Royer and through the numerous interviews with key individuals, with particular emphasis on architects and their roles, but also with individuals from government, including HUD Secretary Andrew Cuomo, quasi-governmental organizations, foundations, various business interests, and citizens groups.

Both tapes are very good video productions effectively weaving together a range of historical and contemporary imagery that is largely from the seven interesting case sites, although a number of introductory and concluding studio segments are also used. Background narrative information for the cases and related imagery are mutually supporting, as are the well-conducted interview segments, although the interview with Secretary Cuomo is unnecessary. Charles Royer is very comfortable in the role of host and interviewer, and is further evidence of successful politicians' mastery of the video medium. Compared with other similar video productions on the market in recent years these two efforts by the American Architectural Foundation can be regarded as more comprehensive and applicable to the planning profession and planning education.

"Neighbors" and "Brink," however, are not without faults. The most glaring is the implication that strategies usually associated with the invisible web of planning as described above are part and parcel of physical design—and that the profession of architecture is fully capable of facilitating such a broad and complex view of the design process. The

productions' focus in this respect is particularly apparent in the many interviews with architects who are identified by their affiliation with the American Institute of Architects, whereas no other individuals instrumental in the various communities' revitalization, e.g., planners or landscape architects, are given professional recognition. For example, why is there no mention of Lawrence Halprin, who was instrumental in downtown Portland's early rejuvenation? Furthermore, the awkwardness of architects depicted in public participation forums and the emphasis on complex revitalization strategies beyond the purview of physical design simultaneously undermine proprietary and narrow approaches to physical design, planning, or "design determinism" as a panacea.

Fault can also be found in the regional focus—or lack thereof—of the two productions. One has an East Coast and Midwestern emphasis; the other a West Coast and Southern focus. The tapes are rather explicit in the local nature of community problems and solutions to them, although more could have been made of the regional distinctions between the locations, i.e., the relationships between the built and natural environments, especially given the tapes' emphasis on physical design and the well-understood importance of a sense of place to urban design.

A general lack of statistical data explaining and supporting the strategies used by each of the communities is also apparent. Statistical references to real estate matters, income levels, tax revenues, alternative forms of transportation, and social indicators could have rounded out the arguments being made for community revitalization with little or no risk of losing the viewers' attention.

In spite of the shortcomings of these two productions, both are worthwhile and should appeal to what appears to be the target audience, i.e., viewers of the Public Broadcasting System. The problems of built environments these tapes present are ubiquitous, and the solution to these problems as illustrated in the tapes should be informative to a broad spectrum of the country today. A greater audience comprised of interested citizens and citizen groups; planning and governmental officials; and students, educators, and practitioners in the environmental design community seems likely. In particular, planning educators should find these tapes useful in effectively presenting the relationship of design, planning, and community involvement. Theory or studio courses in urban design, courses taking a broad look at planning method, and even "Introduction to Planning" or similar courses should find these tapes useful.

■ REFERENCES

- Newman, Oscar. 1972. *Defensible Space: Crime Prevention through Urban Design*. New York: Macmillan.
- Newman, Oscar. 1996. *Creating Defensible Space*. Washington D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development.