

# Frederick Law Olmsted Democracy by Design

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## Abstract

Frederick Law Olmsted, one of New England's native sons, played a significant role in nineteenth-century American politics—as chronicler of life in the ante-bellum South, cofounder of the *Nation* magazine, first director of the American Sanitary Commission (future Red Cross), and designer of New York City's Central Park and Boston's Emerald Necklace of parks. The relevance of this esteemed landscape architect's and planner's ideas to contemporary politics is the attention Olmsted paid to the *spatial requirements* of democracy; that is, he believed the built environment could promote democratic values and behaviors and set himself the task of designing spaces to match the country's democratic aims and aspirations. To be sure, some of Olmsted's ideas are antiquated or simply wrong, but his overarching vision for a democratic landscape—which combines both civic republican and liberal elements—is compelling and provides a thoughtful and incisive critique of our current built environment.

## Introduction

Frederick Law Olmsted (1822-1903), the vaunted American landscape architect and planner, was fond of explaining how prime tracts of land—areas universally recognized for, among reasons, their aesthetic qualities—were originally the property of the most powerful and affluent families, their beloved “pleasure” or “kept” grounds, before they became the fashionable public parks of the great cities of Europe (Olmsted 1997d, 308). That the lands of some former manorial seats or royal hunting grounds were now the preserve of commoners was a tangible and potent symbol of political change—a remarkable physical manifestation of the cultural shift toward democracy, a

shift inspired at least in part by a revolutionary war fought in Olmsted's America. Olmsted was, however, interested in much more than the movement to build public parks. As a keen observer of nineteenth century American life—pace his travelogues and social criticism describing such disparate places as the antebellum South and the post-war Western frontier—Olmsted identified and wrote eloquently about many of the serious challenges the young republic faced, including the need to assimilate waves of immigrants and to address the economic and social dislocation associated with rapid industrialization. The key question for him was whether the democratic experiment launched in America could be sustained over time, whether America would prove to be resilient in the midst of social change. Olmsted believed that America's success in this endeavor would hinge on the effectiveness of a multitude of civic institutions and on good governance and planning at the local and national levels. But he was especially eager to demonstrate the contribution that creative and thoughtful urban design could make to democratic capacity-building.

To explore, as Olmsted does, how the built environment can assist in citizen formation and contribute to overall human flourishing focuses much needed attention on the political significance of urban design. The conversation about the relationship between physical space and politics in America did not, of course, commence with Olmsted. The founding generation, for example, sparred over the appropriate size of republics: whereas the antifederalist writer "Centinel" built his case on "the opinion of the greatest writers [of antiquity] that a very extensive country cannot be governed on democratical principles" (Ketcham 1986, 234), James Madison urged his readers to embrace an "extended" republic, by which means alone majority tyranny could be avoided and individual liberty preserved (Pole 2005, 53). When Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville visited America in the early nineteenth century, spatial politics took on a new valence. Tocqueville sought to weigh the effect of America's physical geography on its democratic evolution. He reached the conclusion that Europeans overestimated the impact of "geographic position" upon the "duration of democratic institutions," for South America enjoyed the same propitious setting, yet with very different political

results (Tocqueville 1981, 192-193). The relative success of American democracy, Tocqueville decided, was more attributable to its laws and customs—its habits of the heart. And, by the end of the nineteenth century, Frederick Jackson Turner was wondering what impact the closing of the frontier, the crucible in which he believed each succeeding generation of Americans had been formed, would have on America's future (Turner 1996). With most of his scholarly output and correspondence falling between the careers of Tocqueville and Jackson, Olmsted is unique in that he telescopes the spatial question down significantly, to the "street" level, where the urban landscape becomes the indispensable prop for democratic life.

Perhaps one of the most incisive descriptions of Frederick Law Olmsted's genius comes from his contemporary, Charles Eliot Norton, who observed that, among American artists, Olmsted ranks "first in the production of great works which answer the needs and give expression to the life of our immense and miscellaneous democracy" (Mumford 1971, 40). This essay will attempt to explain what democratic needs Olmsted identified and how—sometimes in words, sometimes in the artful arrangement of soil, rock and vegetation—he expressed the diverse character of the American democratic tradition. Given the complexity of both theme and artist, we will encounter, to borrow phraseology from the realm of music, a number of "variations"—different answers to the question of democratic needs and disparate physical embodiments of democratic ideals. Specifically, Olmsted blends at least three different visions of democracy in his designs and essays.

First, Olmsted believes that in a democratic society people, regardless of socio-economic standing, should sense that they belong to a community, and he attempts to create civic spaces where this feeling of fraternity can be nurtured. Second, Olmsted links democracy to an even broader concept, that of "civilization." If his thoughts about democratic community emphasize *integration* and belonging, his treatment of civilization highlights the need for individual *transformation* or character formation, a process that involves not only political and social institutions but also the world of nature, especially when enhanced by human design. Third, the aforementioned

republican features of Olmsted's thought—which emphasize democratic solidarity and virtue acquisition—rest on a classically liberal commitment to individual liberty. Whereas the republican elements are more familiar to most readers, Olmsted's liberalism should not be overlooked; both are woven into his art and thinking—each strand answering different needs but together reflecting that grand “miscellany” of American democracy.

The purpose of this essay, however, is not merely to interpret Olmsted's thought but to highlight its value for framing and thinking about the relationship between the built environment and democracy in our contemporary setting. This will entail a process of critically sifting through Olmsted's claims about the democratic potential of urban design. Olmsted, for example, was not sufficiently concerned about the ways parks can function as spaces of social control, and he probably exaggerated the moral efficacy of landscape architecture. Nevertheless, it is hard to deny that Olmsted's tireless efforts to preserve national treasures for posterity and to create beautiful and accessible public parks has enriched our democratic landscape—a landscape constantly threatened by excessive privatization and social isolation.

### **Fraternity**

In *Frederick Law Olmsted: The Passion of a Public Artist*, historian Melvin Kalfus adroitly depicts some of Olmsted's contemporaries' attitudes toward American society in the Gilded Age. Men like Charles Norton, Washington Irving, and Henry Adams, to name a few, decried the rampant materialism and individualism of their day and yearned for the moral clarity and civic spirit of the early Republic (Kalfus 1990, 15-16). In a letter to a colleague, Norton bemoaned that “[m]en in cities and towns feel much less relation with their neighbors than of old; there is much less civic patriotism; less sense of a spiritual and moral community (273). One practical response to this perceived communal deficit was to create physical spaces where people of varied backgrounds could gather and interact with one another.

Andrew Downing, the leading landscape gardener of the mid-nineteenth century, urged his fellow landscape designers to apply their craft to nurture a “more fraternal

spirit in our social life" (Kalfus 1990, 278-279). To translate this conviction into reality, Downing, in a series of letters dating from 1849 and 1850, argued for the "necessity of a great Park" for New York City (Blackmar and Rosenzweig 1992, 15). Interestingly, as part of his campaign for a stately park in Manhattan, Downing's *Horticulturalist* published Olmsted's first essay—an article in which Olmsted describes his visit to Birkenhead Park in Liverpool, England. That Birkenhead was a publicly built and financed park (as opposed to being a former aristocratic estate) impressed Olmsted greatly, as did its fostering of inter-class association. "I was glad to observe," Olmsted writes, "that the privileges of the garden were enjoyed about equally by all classes" (Rybczynski 2003, 93). There was, then, a strong intellectual affinity between the two men, and they seemed to share a common social vision. After Downing met an untimely death in a steamboat accident, implementation of this vision was left to Olmsted, among others.

That the promotion of fraternal spirit through landscape design is an important Olmstedeian theme can be seen in his essay titled "Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns." Recreation, explains Olmsted, can take two forms: exertive and receptive. Under the first heading, the exertive, one would find "[g]ames chiefly of mental skill, [such] as chess" and "athletic sports" (Olmsted 1997e, 184). By contrast, receptive types of recreation "cause us to receive pleasure or benefit without conscious exertion" (184). The receptive can be further sub-divided based on the size of the group pursuing the activity. Olmsted contends that the desire to interact with "large congregation[s] of persons" is "dependent upon the existence of an instinct in us of which I think not enough account is commonly made," namely, the "gregarious class of social receptive recreation" (185). In Olmsted's own experience, the "most complete gratification of this instinct" was on the promenade of the Champs Elysees in Paris or "upon the New York Parks" (185). Indeed, this instinctual need to assemble and mingle in large groups was specifically addressed by Olmsted's plans for New York's Central and Brooklyn's Prospect Park. An outstanding example of a park element designed to satisfy the gregarious instinct is the Mall in Central Park. Extending from 66<sup>th</sup> to 72<sup>nd</sup> Streets, the

forty foot wide promenade, lined with American elms, was built to provide a place for New Yorkers to socialize. As Charles Beveridge notes, areas dedicated to the use of large groups, like the Mall, had to be carefully designed to minimize damage and to avoid interference with the “more solitary enjoyment of natural scenery,” such as are afforded by the many secluded paths that cover the grounds of Central Park. In terms of arrangement, however, the Mall’s placement—at the center of the park—is an aberration. More commonly, according to Beveridge, Olmsted sought to place these kinds of facilities on the periphery, as in Prospect Park’s “Concert Grove” or Franklin Park’s “Greeting” (Beveridge and Rocheleau 1995, 50).

In an oft-quoted passage, Olmsted describes, with manifest satisfaction, the way in which his landscape designs facilitated social togetherness:

Consider that the New York and Brooklyn Park are the only places in those associated cities where, in this eighteen hundred and seventieth year after Christ, you will find a body of Christians coming together, and with an evident glee in the prospect of coming together, all classes largely represented, with a common purpose, not at all intellectual, competitive with none, disposing to jealousy and spiritual or intellectual pride toward none, each individual adding by his mere presence to the pleasure of all others, all helping to the greater happiness of each. You may thus often see vast numbers of persons brought closely together, poor and rich, young and old, Jew and Gentile...I have looked studiously but vainly among them for a single face completely unsympathetic with the prevailing expression of good nature and light-heartedness (Olmsted 1997e, 186).

What Olmsted captures in this excerpt—the simple joy of human togetherness that can be experienced by a large group of people that is at once marked by its diversity and its common fate—is an aspect of democratic life that is mostly absent in our contemporary discussions of democratic institutions and processes. To find another statement about the delights of democratic togetherness that rivals Olmsted’s in eloquence, one would probably have to turn to the writings of Rousseau, where he eulogizes democratic togetherness—accomplished through recreations like feasting, games and militia drilling.

In small venues, physical spaces more hospitable to a modest compass of human relations—the gathering of family and close friends—social intercourse would be more intimate, would facilitate what Olmsted calls “neighborly” as opposed to gregarious receptive recreation:

[Such] circumstances are all favorable to a pleasurable wakefulness of the mind without stimulating exertion; and the close relation of family life, the association of children, of mothers, of lovers, of those who may be lovers, stimulate and keep alive the more tender sympathies, and give play to faculties such as may be dormant in business or [even] on the promenade; while at the same time the cares of providing in detail for all the wants of the family, guidance, instruction, and reproof, are, as matters of conscious exertion, as far as possible laid aside (Olmsted 1997e, 186-187).

Olmsted’s designs intentionally made room for this more intense (because bonds are tighter and more developed) form of fraternity. Thus Olmsted’s plan for Prospect Park, for instance, envisioned ample opportunity for “several thousand little family and neighborly parties to bivouac at frequent intervals throughout the summer, without discommoding one another (188).

Whether a particular design element was meant to nurture the neighborly or the gregarious form of receptive recreation, the togetherness of family and friends or of a larger body of citizens, the promotion of civic brotherhood loomed large in Olmsted’s moral vocabulary. In his masterwork, *The Idea of Fraternity in America*, Wilson Carey McWilliams attributes Olmsted’s “crusade for parks and recreation areas” to the latter’s hope that “citizens might be able to overcome isolation and suspicion” (McWilliams 1974, 475). The idea of fraternity, as McWilliams concedes, is rather ambiguous. Its dictionary definition “proceeds like a rudderless ship, in ever widening circularity” – though that does not prevent McWilliams from offering his own definition, which includes the notions of bonds “based on intense interpersonal affection” and shared values and goals “considered more important than ‘mere life’” (2, 7).

At this juncture, we should consider how Olmsted’s commitment to designing urban spaces that nurture fraternity cast light on our current built environment. One

issue that springs to mind is the proliferation of common interest developments (CIDS). According to Evan McKenzie, common interest developments are a form of private housing that can include condominiums, cooperative apartments, and single-family houses in planned-unit developments (PUDS) (McKenzie 1994, 7). While CIDS residents “own or exclusively occupy their own units,” they also “share ownership of the ‘common area’ of the development” (19). Other legal characteristics that distinguish CIDS are a mandatory requirement to join the homeowner association and to comply with its charter of covenants, contracts and deed restrictions (CC&Rs) (McKenzie 1994). The central goal of these developments is the preservation of property values; additionally, especially for those CIDS that include gates or other types of fortification, such communities promise to provide security for persons as well as their property.

McKenzie and other social scientists have raised concerns about CIDS, questioning whether the democratic freedoms afforded to citizens are undermined by the oligarchic powers of the homeowner associations under which many of them live. Indeed, after rehearsing many of the powers of homeowner associations – the power to buy and sell property, to regulate (in the minutest detail) the use and decoration of property, to impose fines and attach liens (with scant due process), to proscribe certain (otherwise lawful) behaviors of residents and visitors – McKenzie concludes that we have created a “peculiarly American form of private government in which the property rights of the developer, and later the board of directors, swallow up the rights of the people, and public government is left as a bystander” (McKenzie 1994, 148). This micropolitics of excessive private control and regulation of residential developments, however, does not exhaust the democratic critique of CIDS.

What we learn from Olmsted is that one of the aims of democracy is to promote fraternity--a spirit of civic community. Yet, it is difficult to overcome isolation and suspicion on a landscape dotted with CIDS whose effect, if not intentional design, is to impede civic commerce.<sup>1</sup> For instance, these CIDS are increasingly gated enclaves.

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<sup>1</sup> Olmsted, it would be fair to point out, designed one of the first planned community's in the U.S. – the village of Riverside, a suburb of Chicago. Riverside, however, has never been



Anthropologist Setha Low observes that “gated communities restrict access not just to residents’ homes, but also the use of public spaces and services—roads, parks, facilities, and open space—contained within the enclosure” (Low 2003, 12). Thus, instead of Olmstedean spaces--democratically measured spaces, where, as he describes them, people from all walks of life come together—Low encounters something more like medieval feudalism, where people seek “haven[s] in a socially and culturally diverse world,” where “desire for safety, security, community and ‘niceness,’ as well as wanting to live near people like themselves because of a fear of ‘otherness’ and crimes,” leads the residents she interviews to seek shelter behind a barricade (9-10).

However, this critique of a balkanized modern landscape—where social intercourse is severely limited--presupposes that urban public spaces, Olmsted’s included, can foster public spiritedness when, in fact, they may not. In an essay titled “Binding Problems, Boundary Problems: the Trouble with Democratic Citizenship,” Clarissa Rile Hayward assesses the work of contemporary political theorists who focus attention on urban public spaces and their purported ability to facilitate a level of civic mindedness that can yield “public-regarding political engagement” (Hayward 2007, 181). Like Olmsted’s parks, these spaces (streets, sidewalks, plazas) are rarely the locus of *explicit* deliberation and dialog about the common good; instead, in the words of Gerald Frug, these spaces promote “community building—where ‘community’ signals not identity understood as sameness or commonality, but the capacity to coexist peacefully and to ‘collaborate’ politically with ‘strangers who share only the fact that they live in the same geographic area’” (194). Hayward characterizes the notion that increased social contact will change beliefs and perceptions so as to foster social solidarity as “naïve” (197). Citing social psychological research, Hayward notes that increased social contact can catalyze a reduction of intergroup bias and conflict, but only under the most demanding conditions—i.e. where strangers “enjoy equal status”

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governed as a common interest development and, furthermore, while Olmsted’s Riverside contained large lots with deep setbacks, to provide the ample living space and privacy lacking in the city, the suburban village was designed to be civically vibrant, and it did not restrict access to non-Riverside residents—an increasingly common element of modern, gated CIDs.

or where the “potential for becoming acquaintances is high” – conditions, she argues, that *do not* exist in most urban settings (196). At the very least, Hayward’s critique would seem to undercut a “strong” version of fraternity, one that could reliably motivate citizens to act in concert to achieve common, political goals. For his part, it seems that Olmsted advanced a “weaker” version of fraternity. Recall that Olmsted speaks of neighborliness and gregariousness as social “instincts” or sentiments. Olmsted believes these are “given” or part of the human endowment—as opposed to being *engendered* by contact. The primary issue, then, is whether these instincts can be expressed or satisfied, a satisfaction highly dependent on physical space: the city can accommodate these instincts (through public design) or neglect them. Whether designing space for the expression of neighborly and gregarious sentiments will actually help build civic capacity is, as Hayward observes, uncertain. But Olmsted does not seem to view these sentiments *instrumentally*, as essential props to democracy, but *diagnostically*. That is, the recognition of and commitment to satisfying these social sentiments or instincts is one *measure* we can use to assess whether a democracy, a regime form dedicated to the protection and development of the humanity in all persons, is achieving its mission.

### **Civilizing Spaces: The American Frontier and Urban Parks**

The value of fraternity is a hallmark of republican theory. And within republicanism it is commonly associated with another concept, namely virtue (Bailyn 1980; Wood 1993). Republicanism, therefore, posits not a simple brotherhood but a brotherhood of virtue. According to historian Gordon Wood, the notion that people should acquire the virtue of self-sacrifice, that they should place the good of the whole community above private interests “formed the essence of republicanism and comprehended for Americans the idealistic goal of their Revolution” (Wood 1993, 53). Of course republicanism did not vanish after the Revolutionary generation; Olmsted, as we will see, adapted these ideas to his own circumstances. Fostering social solidarity – fraternity—is a key value for Olmsted, but it shares pride of place with the cultivation of civic virtue. Thus the political tradition of republicanism, embracing the notion of

fraternity and emphasizing the importance of civic virtue, shapes Olmsted's mental and physical landscapes.

In Olmsted's work, however, the associated republican oppositions of virtue and vice (or corruption) are transformed into a new binary opposition: civilization and barbarism. These terms form the backbone of Olmsted's social theory, which, arguably, is best articulated in a series of notes discussing living conditions on the American frontier and in pioneer settlements. Olmsted intended to use these notes to pen a monograph (never completed) that would describe and assess the civilizing and de-civilizing currents associated with this frontier life. Seen in this context, Olmsted's writings on parks can be understood as an implicit *urban* theory of social development--a compliment to his reflections on the pioneer condition's role in helping people acquire the habits and practices of civilization.

If parks, among a host of other social institutions, are going to contribute to the process of civilization, it begs the question: What, exactly, does Olmsted mean when he employs the term "civilization"? Olmsted defines civilization as a condition "in which every individual on the whole during his life is of service to and is served by every other therein, in which consequently all the intelligence and other forces of those who constitute them are employed with the least waste and to the highest ends" (Olmsted 1990a, 725). Under this definition, one extraordinarily cultivated person a civilization does not make. Neither are limited partnerships for various social, cultural or economic ends the primary object. Instead, civilization is about building a social system of efficient exchange of individuals' gifts, talents, and creative abilities--and the goods and services these human resources supply. Put differently, it is a dynamic pooling and sharing of human talent in which the whole transcends the parts and, thereby, creates something stable and resilient that can be passed down from one generation to the next.

As Olmsted sees it, for a civilization to be built and to endure sacrifices will have to be made and human skills will have to be developed, for "the cloud which rests on all civilized communities comes from the fact that while each man's demands upon others increase and become imperative, his will and ability to supply wants of others

does not correspondingly advance" (735). According to Olmsted, the way to chase this dark cloud away is to *either* "cut down the measure of wants to the measure of service" – the motif of individual "sacrifice" and delayed gratification--*or* "to enlarge the measure of service to the measure of wants," i.e. to educate and improve people, to develop new technologies and the means of delivering services (735). As is often the case, the "either/or" choice of solutions is a rhetorical device; *both* chastened desire and cultural development are needed, as Olmsted's notes make clear.

Remarkably, Olmsted also provides a theoretical account of the stages of "change in the character and habits of men" which unfold as Americans evolve to a more civilized state (Olmsted 1990a, 724). For our purposes it will suffice to establish the basic logic of his model: it appears that, as individuals pass through the various stages, they a) gain increasing control over their appetites, become more autonomous, and b) expand the scope of their moral community, those with whom they identify and to whom they owe duties. Compared to contemporary philosophical and psychological models of personality and moral development-- e.g. those proposed by Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg--Olmsted's account is somewhat vague and lacking in conceptual clarity (Crain 2000). Nonetheless, to Olmsted's credit, his theory demonstrates a keen awareness of the phenomenon of moral-civilizational development. And we must remember that it was not intended, buried as it is in his observations of pioneer life, to be a social science paradigm supported by mounds of empirical data or a philosophical theory resting firmly on rigorous, logical analysis.

Rather, Olmsted's pressing concern, shared by many of his intellectual contemporaries, was the United States' prospects for continued vigor and resilience given its immigrant character. Horace Bushnell, Olmsted suggested, had put the problem succinctly: "A new settlement of the social state, involves a tendency to social decline: there must in every such case, be a relapse toward barbarism more or less protracted, more or less complete. We are a people trying out the perils incident to a new settlement of the social state" (Olmsted 1990a, 691). The reasons for "social decline" and a "relapse toward barbarism," as Olmsted tracks them, were numerous.

According to Olmsted, from the very beginning, American immigrants embark on a journey from which only the most fortunate and morally upright can arrive uncorrupted. On board ship,

. . . the strong, the cunning, the sly and selfish rule over and spoil the weak, the sick, the simple with only so much check, from regard for future consequences, as is necessary to make falsehood, perjury, and the practice of all sorts of deceit and subterfuge and petty swindling and tyranny so common that after a voyage of ordinary length few emigrants have not been taught by severe lessons to consider that when among strangers 'every man must take care of himself,' 'all advice must be regarded with suspicion,' 'a man must wear a bold face,' that 'if he waits for constables and courts to protect him, he will soon not have a rag to his back' (682-683).

Once he makes landfall, explains Olmsted, it is out of the proverbial frying pan and into the fire, for the immigrant will most likely find work and lodging among people of his same class, precisely those who have been schooled in the immoral atmosphere of the ship's hull and tenement slum.

For those immigrants who continued to push westward, especially for the advanced guard, there was perpetual conflict. This "warfare of the pioneer," states Olmsted, has been going on since Europeans arrived in North America: "There is not a night in which at some point blood does not flow now, and there probably never has been one" (Olmsted 1990a, 705). Histrionics aside, Olmsted's point is simple: the pioneer condition was rough and violent. Beyond their taste for pugilism and blood sport, a less remarkable, yet for Olmsted more serious fault was what he referred to as immigrants' "short sighted, self-regard" (706). That is, one of the chief ways these pioneers revealed their lack of moral progress was in their failure to regulate their appetites and desires. Recall that a key virtue or indicator of civilized behavior for Olmsted is the practice of delayed gratification. As a result of their intemperance, valuable resources are squandered and a steady supply of basic necessities, the precondition of any civilized life, is jeopardized. Olmsted explains that this improvidence is behind the actions of the "savage and barbarous white hunter of the

plains [who] gorge[s] himself with buffalo hump this month without a thought of providing a store for the next, and the great mining corporations of Nevada to clutch by the shortest and readiest method forty percent of the silver contained in the rock they have taken from their mines, letting the remaining 60 percent go beyond recovery. [And it is the same] phenomenon of vicious economy and blundering selfishness which made the poor whites of the South the friends of slavery" (707).

That buffalo hunters and miners sometimes lack impulse control and that it takes a "blundering" degree of selfishness to enslave another human being are legitimate observations. Nevertheless, Olmsted's broader implication—namely, that immigrants as a class of people are generally less willing to defer gratification and make the kinds of sacrifices necessary to build civilization—is quite controversial. Here we must object that Olmsted paints with too broad a brush. Contrary to what Olmsted implies, do not immigrants make significant sacrifices by uprooting their families and starting over in a new place? Might not the plight of immigrants be paradigmatic of deferred gratification—the drama of a people willing to scale a mountain of inconveniences and difficulties for the sake of a better life? The most that can be said is that Olmsted does not give up on them, for operating right alongside the forces of barbarism, he witnesses a host of civilizing forces—influences he believed would, in the long run, prove more beneficial to the cause of civilization than anything similar the class-based society of the Old World could provide.

These salubrious factors of the American "pioneer condition" can be grouped into various categories, like voluntary associations, family life, property ownership, free enterprise, and civic life. Viewed as a package, these institutions and social practices augured well for the prospects of a nascent civilization on the American frontier. But what about the multitudes that did not make the journey West? Those who found themselves crowded into the urban centers? Arguably, the immigrant urban dweller, no less than the immigrant pioneer, was in desperate need of a regimen of character formation.

Olmsted did indeed pose the “civilization question” in regard to urban spaces, even if his sociological analysis of the frontier was more fully elaborated. Mirroring the character deforming aspects of the frontier elucidated above, Olmsted speaks frankly about the mean streets of the city: “[M]en who have been brought up, as the saying is, in the streets, who have been the most directly and completely affected by town influences, so generally show, along with a remarkable quickness of apprehension, a peculiarly hard sort of selfishness. Every day of their lives they have seen thousands of their fellow-men, have met them face-to-face, have brushed against them, and yet have had no experience of anything in common with them” (Olmsted 1997e, 180). Or, again “consider how often you see young men in knots of perhaps half a dozen in lounging attitudes rudely obstructing the sidewalks, chiefly led in their little conversation by the suggestions given to their minds by what or whom they may see passing in the street, [people for whom] they have no respect or sympathy. There is nothing among them or about them which is adapted to bring into play a spark of admiration, of delicacy, manliness, or tenderness” (187).

The urban magnet, attracting people with the promise of economic opportunity, often cloaked a cesspool of industrial ills; Olmsted was keenly aware that the great cities of the mid and late nineteenth century provided more than their fair share of opportunities for mischief and dissolution. It led him to doubt “which of two slants toward the savage condition is most to be deplored and to be struggled with, that which we see in the dense, poor quarters of our great cities...[or in] the more sterile regions of the great West” (Beveridge and Rocheleau 1995, 116). Thus, Olmsted surmises, if the pioneer had to be coaxed out of his anti-social individuation into a social settlement, the corresponding problem of the city-dweller was to call him out of the unseemly crowd or mass and turn him into a person capable of democratic citizenship--of consciously fulfilling his duties to humanity.

Beyond his writings on parks, Olmsted does not supply a detailed account of the urban institutions that exercised an important moral influence, though such an account would be relatively easy to imagine. In the cities, as on the prairie, there were a

plethora of voluntary associations, religious institutions, political parties, and private enterprise. That most of humanity would, in the future, live in cities, Olmsted was certain—hence the utter seriousness with which he approached the task of designing urban spaces that would promote the virtues of civilized behavior. “[T]he further progress of civilization,” he propounds, “is to depend mainly upon the influences by which men’s minds and characters will be affected while living in large towns” (Olmsted 1997e, 179).

In assessing the validity of the claims Olmsted makes on behalf of parks and other designed urban spaces, we will need to untangle two separate propositions. As noted in the quotations above, Olmsted bemoans the lack of civility and moral culture in cities—seeing, instead, people who are “selfish,” “rude” and bereft of “respect or sympathy.” Olmsted seems to believe that, just as the landscape artist grooms and sculpts an overgrown piece of property into something beautiful, these lovely parks will, in turn, have a “harmonizing and refining influence [on park visitors]...favorable to courtesy, self-control and temperance” (Hall 2002, 46). This claim about the moral efficacy of beautiful landscapes, however, is highly implausible; it never moves from assertion to demonstration and will thus be put aside.

The more plausible claim Olmsted makes about the civilizational benefits that his “pleasure grounds” can bestow is this: much as natural resources are depleted or machinery worn out in the process of production, industrial workers (and their white collar counterparts) are exhausted by their labor (and, importantly, by their working and living environments); thus, in order for Olmsted’s great exchange of civilization to continue, human beings need to be re-constituted—landscape beauty playing a key role in this process of restoration. There is no denying the economic advantages that have accrued from the growth of towns and the expansion of commerce, but there is also no denying, Olmsted proposes, the “grave drawbacks” of this state of affairs: “We may yet understand them so imperfectly that we but little more than veil our ignorance when we talk of what is lost and suffered under the name of “vital exhaustion,” “nervous irritation,” and “constitutional depression” (Olmsted 1997a, 345).



How can we remedy these modern urban maladies of exhaustion and depression? A proverbial walk in the park may not be a cure-all, but its medicinal qualities, claims Olmsted, should not be overlooked. “It is one great purpose of [Central Park],” he announces, “to supply to the hundreds of thousands of tired workers, who have no opportunity to spend their summers in the country, a specimen of God’s handiwork that shall be to them, inexpensively, what a month or two in the White Mountains or the Adirondacks is, at great cost, to those in easier circumstances” (Rybczynski 2003, 177). Whereas the wealthy of New York City could “summer” out in the Hamptons or in the mountain resorts, and thus gain refreshment, the great Park would have to serve that function for the vast majority who could not afford to travel to such inspiring natural landscapes. “Thus it must be that parks are beyond anything else recreative of that which is most apt to be lost or to become diseased and debilitated among the dwellers in towns” (Olmsted 1997b, 152). Commenting on Olmsted’s faith in the curative powers of natural beauty, Olmsted biographer Witold Rybczynski observes that “[w]hen he discussed the recuperative power of natural scenery, he literally meant healing. He believed that the contemplation of nature, fresh air, and the change of everyday habits improved people’s health and intellectual vigor” (Rybczynski 258).

In addition to the exhaustion of the daily routine—factory toil, followed by the long march against the current of one’s fellow-downtrodden to make it home to a cold, dank tenement--there was a further psychological malaise that attended modern life, and it was especially acute among the business or professional classes, for whom intellectual labor was the norm. Olmsted, discussing the desirable psychological effects of well-designed parks, explains that “a combination of elements [should be included] which shall invite and stimulate the simplest, purest and most primeval action of the poetic element of human nature, and thus tend to remove those who are affected by it to the greatest possible distance from the highly elaborate, sophisticated and artificial conditions of their ordinary civilized life” (Olmsted 1997b, 152). In his use of the term “elaborate” in juxtaposition to the “poetic element in human nature,” Olmsted seems to be referencing the divide between *reason*—its penchant for dividing (and then

categorizing) the world into very distinct conceptual pieces, the process of “elaboration” and articulation—and *feeling*, a theme common among romantic poets, philosophers, and social critics. More than a Faustian inner-division of the soul, a tug-of-war between one’s reason and passions, the deeper implication of Olmsted’s narrative, evidenced by his claim that natural scenery must awaken (“invite and stimulate”) the affective (or “poetic”) capacities, is that the latter has been buried, undernourished—if not repressed. The therapy of natural scenery, Olmsted hopes, will create psychological clearings or openings, induced by the aesthetic design and physical topography of his parks, where feelings can be acknowledged and gladly embraced.

Olmsted leaves little doubt that civilization’s efficient exchange of services will cut a distorted figure unless the humans who embody that civilization lead lives of “integrity,” lives in which reason and feeling are harmoniously intertwined. Intriguingly, in the past several years, a growing body of scientific literature, while expressed in an entirely different idiom than Olmsted’s, provides strong empirical support for his claim that spending time “connecting” with nature has a number of positive psychological (not to mention physical) health benefits (Louv 2005; Wells 2000). In sum, whereas the purported moral benefits of parks—their ability to instill the virtues of self-control and temperance—are highly suspect, Olmsted’s belief that his designs would have a recuperative or psychological benefit are more persuasive.

As we reflect again on the relevance of Olmsted’s work, we see that there is more than his concern about fraternity that helps to anchor criticisms of our contemporary urban environments. To rehearse the argument: Olmsted believes that democracy, as a regime form, is the best vehicle of civilization; civilization, in turn, requires a steady flow of citizens who are physically and psychologically fortified, so that the development of their unique talents can benefit the community at large. As we have observed, Olmsted worried that the urban setting of his day, instead of promoting health (broadly defined) engendered depression, agitation and exhaustion. For the so-called “new urbanists”—a group that includes people like Andres Duany, Elizabeth

Plater-Zyberk, and Peter Calthorpe--Olmsted's concerns are as pertinent today as they were in the late nineteenth century.

One of the sources of our current malaise, the new urbanists contend, is our practice of assiduously separating land uses. While it may have made sense at the height of the industrial revolution to cordon-off noxious industrial processes from the other pursuits of city life, this functional segregation has gone too far. Residential and commercial areas are also separated. Not only are these activities separated but, thanks to the central role played by the automobile, they are often separated by long distances (Duany and Plater-Zyberk 2000). The result, sprawl, is very costly: it is environmentally damaging and requires massive energy inputs to sustain it. But the human impact is just as devastating. In his book, *The Geography of Nowhere*, Howard Kunstler describes many people's predicament this way:

The amount of driving necessary to exist within this system is stupendous, and fantastically expensive. The time squandered by commuters is time that they cannot spend with their children, or going to the library, or playing the clarinet, or getting exercise, or doing anything else more spiritually nourishing than sitting alone in a steel compartment on Highway 101 with 40,000 other stalled commuters. Anybody who commutes an hour a day in each direction spends seven weeks of the year sitting in his car (1993, 118).

The new urbanists, therefore, contend that the inhospitable landscape of the nineteenth century has been replaced by the equally inhospitable one of the twenty-first; civilization's grand exchange of talents and development of human capital is compromised as much by one as the other. Olmsted's legacy--his determination to regularly question whether our urban plans and designs match our democratic aspirations--continues to inspire progressive thinking in the fields of architecture and urban planning.

### **The Park: A Three Dimensional Symbol of Liberal Democracy**

Olmsted's intention to create public spaces that would promote fraternity and the virtues of civilization fits comfortably within the republican tradition. These goals are pursued, however, within a larger intellectual framework--one whose existence

Olmsted both presupposes and seeks to shore-up. That tradition is liberalism. In many respects, a model park for Olmsted is an ideal spatial representation of a liberal democratic society. For instance, most accounts of liberalism propose that individuals are equal in value (even if equality of condition is not guaranteed)—a premise reflected in Olmsted’s park design. According to John Locke (1986), one of American political thinkers’ main sources of liberal inspiration, human beings are fundamentally equal in their pre-civil or natural state—share the same rank in the chain of being. And Locke’s view is not exceptional; liberal theorists exert great effort in establishing the equality of human agents before they voluntarily enter civil society.<sup>2</sup> In liberal political thought, once a civil society is formed or joined, *natural equality* gives pride of place to *civil equality*; that is, citizens of a liberal polity are guaranteed equal treatment by the government—a guarantee often expressed as an enumerated list or charter of civil rights and liberties.

While it may lack the conceptual precision of a philosophical treatise or the elevating rhetoric of a constitutional document, a well designed public park, at least as Olmsted envisioned it, is an equally compelling *visual articulation* of civil equality. The best of these parks, as the name of Olmsted’s most famous undertaking suggests--New York City’s Central Park, designed by Olmsted and partner Calvert Vaux in 1858--are located at the geographic heart of the community. Such a park is easily accessed by people of every socio-economic class. Furthermore, a multitude of uses is envisioned by Olmsted to allow for the enjoyment of a broad spectrum of park-goers: “[A]ccommodation of various kinds are to be prepared for great numbers of people, [even] many in carriages and on horseback...each one of whom must be led as far as possible to enjoy and benefit by the scenery” (1997d, 311). The values of access and of diversity of use (which, Olmsted vigorously contended, had always to be balanced

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<sup>2</sup> Some theorists, such as John Rawls, create elaborate mechanisms (e.g. a “veil of ignorance”) to level the playing field, to ensure that agents are not able to tailor the basic principles of justice to suit their present or future social standing. Others, like Thomas Hobbes, reduce the notion of equality to something more crass—the ability of each to kill the other in the state of nature, the equality of would-be assassins (Rawls 1971, 136-142; Hobbes 1985, 183-185).

against the value of preservation) permeated his own designs – not just of city parks but especially designs to enhance human use of those places of extraordinary natural beauty, for instance, Niagara Falls (Spirn 1996, 91-113).

To encapsulate, in liberal thought human beings emerge as equals from the hand of nature and, subsequent to their entrance into civil society, via some form of social contract, are granted equal citizenship rights. From this narrative it follows logically that they are also free: where equality prevails, no one is by birth a master or slave. Thus, the individual is left with her own liberty to order her affairs as she chooses. Within the compass of liberal political theory the idea of individual liberty, like equality, is prized—even if it is simultaneously paired with the concept of mutual constraint. I will deal with constraint below. For now, however, the task is to define Olmsted’s notion of liberty, for this value, as much as equality, is integral to Olmsted’s philosophy of park design.

Addressing the Prospect Park Scientific Association in 1868, Olmsted argued that one of the key characteristics that makes a piece of land, a particular natural site, attractive to human beings is that its topography and planting fosters *movement*:

The absence of obstruction is the condition of ease of movement, and a park as a work of design should be more than this; it should be a ground which invites, encourages and facilitates movement, its topographical conditions such as make movement a pleasure; such as offer inducements in variety, on one side and the other, for easy movement, first by one promise of pleasure then by another, yet all of a simple character and such as appeal to the common and elementary impulses of all classes of mankind (1997b, 151-152).

As this quotation suggests, in Olmsted’s philosophical anthropology, apart from the importance traditionally associated with distinctive human faculties or capacities—i.e. the exercise of reason, in its theoretical or practical dimensions, the use of language as reason’s symbolic form—one of the chief marks of humanity is pleasure in physical locomotion. The desire and need for movement, *Wanderlust*, appears to Olmsted to be fundamental and must be accommodated. Indeed, this observation links up with the liberal value of equality mentioned earlier, for enjoyment of motion, in and of itself, is

one of those *common* impulses of mankind, not to mention its role in conveying a person to different locations where a variety of pleasures can be experienced. Beyond all class differences, Olmsted suggests, there is a universal appreciation of certain pleasures of “simple character.” Thus a shared humanity evinces itself first, in the pleasure received from the “ease of movement” and, second, from other pleasures, the experience of which also presupposes locomotion--the freedom to traverse geographic space.

In an urban setting, the significance of movement is magnified precisely because city living, as Olmsted and many of his contemporaries viewed it, was stultifying and confining, not to mention filthy and noisy. This urban critique would explain the appeal of Andrew Downing’s work and the later creation of garden cities (pace Ebenezer Howard) and suburbs modeled on English country living. Olmsted penned the entry for “Park” in the *American Cyclopaedia* of 1875. There he explained that the “most essential element of park scenery is turf in broad, unbroken fields, because in this the antithesis of the confined spaces of the town is most marked” (1997d, 311). And, to be sure, Olmsted did not neglect to include this “most essential element” in many of his park designs. The most famous example being “Long Meadow” in Prospect Park, a green magic carpet of turf that unfurls beneath a visitor’s feet for nearly a mile. Moreover, in Central Park, Olmsted’s and Vaux’s Greensward plan included four transverse roads that were ingeniously sunk below the line of sight to enhance the Park’s vistas (Beveridge and Rocheleau 1995, 55).

Yet, in spite of Olmsted’s lyrical description of “unbroken fields” that invite movement, Olmsted’s park designs, as I have suggested, mirror the values and principles of the liberal democratic society in which they are explicitly embedded. Consequently, locomotion will have to be legitimately restrained. In the liberal tradition, as Isaiah Berlin explains, freedom is conceived “negatively,” as the absence of interference from the state or other citizens: “Since justice demands that all individuals be entitled to a minimum of freedom, all other individuals were of necessity to be restrained, if need be by force, from depriving anyone of it. Indeed, the whole function of law was the prevention of just such collisions” (Berlin 1997, 199). If such collisions

are not prevented, Berlin warns, “the individual will find himself in an area too narrow for even that minimum development of his natural faculties which alone makes it possible to pursue, and even to conceive, the various ends which men hold good or right or sacred” (196). Limitation is, in fact, an indispensable part of both of Olmsted’s “arts” –landscape design and social planning. The artist must accept the creative potential and, just as honestly, the limitations of her chosen medium, the inalterable physical properties of the materials she uses. She works, unavoidably, within or against a horizon of inherited conventional meanings and symbols which she did not freely choose. Likewise, the social theorist or parliamentary representative must acknowledge what the philosopher Immanuel Kant calls the “warped wood of humanity” (Kant 1985, 46). This less than flattering assessment of human behavior constitutes an inexpugnable social fact or reality that chastens liberal theory and practice--necessitates the skillful promulgation of laws and social codes to “harmonize” the freedom of each with the freedom of all.

Earlier we noted that Olmsted argued that parks should accommodate a variety of people and uses. Inevitably, he notes, “many ignorant, selfish, and willful [persons] of perverted tastes and lawless dispositions” would be participants in the great park menagerie (1997d, 311). Therefore, Olmsted warns that parks would need to be designed, “as far as possible,” to ensure that each individual could “benefit by the scenery without preventing or seriously detracting from the enjoyment of it by all others” (311). So how did Olmsted propose to harmonize the liberty of each park-goer with the liberty of others? There were at least two ways. First, Olmsted would maximize movement and minimize impediments to it by segregating modes of transportation: foot, carriage and horseback. Second, he would seek to deter bad behavior that would interfere with freedom of movement or might destroy or deface public property by establishing a park constabulary.

In regard to the first strategy, Olmsted’s plan for Central Park included an elaborate system of park circulation that included carriage, bridle, and pedestrian paths that were kept separate by the extensive use of underpasses and bridges (Beveridge and

Rocheleau 1995, 55). Not only were the different uses segregated, but each type of path was built to avoid collisions. Olmsted states, for example, that “[a] drive must be so prepared that those using it shall be called upon for the least possible exercise of judgment as to the course to be pursued, the least possible anxiety or exercise of skill in regard to collisions or interruptions with reference to objects animate or inanimate” (51).

But this design with meticulous routing and partitioning was not self-policing. Thus, in 1858 the first Central Park Keepers’ Service was established and placed under Olmsted’s supervision. With the ascendance of the Tweed Ring, most positions were filled by patronage appointments; as a result, keepers’ professionalism and moral commitment waned. Vandalism and crime spiked. Finally, in 1872, in the wake of the Tweed machine’s demise, Olmsted was asked to reorganize the Keepers (Olmsted, 1997c, 307). In his 1873 reorganization plan, Olmsted introduced the “round system” in which “patrol-keepers” would dutifully walk their beats—watching for disturbances and, interestingly, providing accountability for the “post-keepers” who were stationed at gates and other key locations (1997c, 281). Olmsted emphasized that the Park Commissioners’ responsibility was to “keep” or preserve. After all, he says, it would make as much sense to neglect the Park’s “furnishings”—i.e. its expensive and carefully selected vegetation and sculpted terrain—as it would for a person to open her doors and windows to her home during a storm (298). Olmsted sermonizes “that every foot of the Park’s surface, every tree and bush, as well as, every arch, roadway, and walk has been fixed where it is with a purpose, and upon its being so used that it may continue to serve that purpose to the best advantage, and upon its not being otherwise, depends its value” (299). By such policing and routing mechanisms Olmsted hoped to achieve his liberal goal of providing the utmost freedom of each consistent with the freedom of all.

According to critics of Olmsted, however, his parks offered only the semblance of liberty; the real purpose of the parks, this line of criticism alleges, was to be an effective tool of social restraint. This is a serious allegation—one that, if true, would undercut the democratic purposes that he attributed to his landscape designs. Dorceta Taylor argues, for instance, that Olmsted’s park projects need to be interpreted in light



of class antagonisms that existed in the latter half of the nineteenth century. While workers struggled to gain more time away from factories and more autonomy over their lives, “the middle class and the employers sought to monitor and control what workers did when they were away from the workplace” (Taylor 1999, 441). This essay has suggested how Olmsted’s planned spaces for passive recreation embody the principles and values of a liberal democratic order. Taylor counters that, through the “aggressive” use of police and the “exclusion” of certain kinds of activities, Olmsted and Vaux fashioned spaces that exerted social control rather than promoting democratic freedom. “They used their social location as elite, middle class white males entrusted with enormous power and discretion,” she writes, “to implement their moral, cultural, and social agenda” (450).

Moreover, viewed through a Foucauldian lens, Olmsted’s parks, one might argue, employed a combination of design elements and park ordinances to normalize or discipline the behavior of its working class visitors. In 1860, for example, 55 Keepers in Central Park made 228 arrests, half of which were for mere violations of park ordinances (e.g. using indecent language, throwing stones, defacing property, picking flowers or walking on the grass). Drunkenness and disorderly conduct made up another third (Taylor 1999, 444). The aim of what Michel Foucault calls disciplinary technologies—namely “to strengthen the social forces...to develop the economy, spread education [and] raise the level of public morality”—bear a striking resemblance to some of Olmsted’s explicit goals (Foucault 1979, 208). And where Olmsted saw progress—“There is no doubt that the park has added years to the lives of many of the most valued citizens and many have remarked that it has much increased their working capacity” (Taylor 1999, 447)—Foucault would see the insidious application of “bio-power,” the “subjugation of bodies and the control of populations” (Foucault 1990, 140-141).

That some degree of social control and behavior modification were entailed in Olmsted’s project is undeniable. Furthermore, Olmsted, like every person, was influenced by his social conditions, and it would stand to reason that he would have

evinced certain class biases. These class biases are best described by Geoffrey Blodgett, who encapsulates them in the following way: “They included a stubborn faith in political and social democracy—provided that democracy remained responsive to the cues of trained and cultivated leadership; a belief that American society urgently needed to fortify itself against the crude and materialistic impulses of popular culture; and a hope that the tensions of a newly urban nation might be moderated by structural arrangements, both political and aesthetic” (1976, 870). No populist he, but that does not mean he was not a democrat. Olmsted and like-minded members of the “gentlemanly cosmopolitan elite” (871) believed in *noblesse oblige* and, as conservatives who were committed to democracy, dedicated themselves to community improvement and reform.

Olmsted’s efforts at control and cultivation, then, have to be put in proper perspective. To begin, as Elizabeth Blackmar and Roy Rosenzweig point out, when Olmsted discussed the need to “train” the public in the appropriate use of parks, he did not “direct his prescriptions...at any particular class”; instead, he “drew his examples of improper park use from the upper and lower classes alike” —that is, racing carriages or horses, the vice of the wealthy, was as taboo as throwing rocks (Blackmar and Rosenzweig 1992, 241). Moreover, it was Olmsted who stood against members of his own class who wanted parks to be the preserves of elites, sanitized spaces protected from the masses of the “unwashed.” Olmsted, for instance, contended that municipalities should fund parks rather than private benefactors, reflecting his concern that the latter course would lead to restricted access. Indeed, Olmsted was particularly solicitous of the needs of the indigent and ailing for park therapy. As Vice-President of the New York State Charities Aid Association during the 1870s, for example, Olmsted worked tirelessly to make sure that the cities’ poor and sick would have access to his parks’ curative properties: “[H]e sent circulars to all the doctors and ministers in the city with directions to Central Park by the street railways and a description of the facilities for convalescents.” And he did the same in Brooklyn for Prospect Park, posting notices “in tenement houses and had thousands more distributed” (Beveridge

and Rocheleau 1995, 48). For his commitment to open access and diversity Olmsted was “rewarded” with a cavalcade of negative editorials from members of his own class (Taylor 1999, 460).

In regard to concerns about social control, one could do no better than turn to Jane Jacob’s prescriptions for urban design as a way of mounting a defense of Olmsted. Jacobs points out that small communities rely on a web of interpersonal relationships, using the basic currency of reputation—shame and honor—to achieve social compliance. By contrast, a city has to control not only its own residents but visitors “who want to have a big time away from the gossip and sanctions at home.” For this reason, she suggests, city planners must employ more “direct, straightforward” methods (1993, 45). Jacobs famously recommends design elements that keep “eyes [constantly] on the street”—i.e. a control mechanism that consists of “surveillance and mutual policing.” Though this may strike one as Orwellian, she assures her readers that “in real life it is not [so] grim” (46). Indeed, the surveilling eyes are precisely what make the streets inviting and hospitable, the city neighborhoods vibrant and livable; where such eyes are absent, she observes, people fear to tread. Similarly, Olmsted’s park ordinances and park keepers encourage civility, an indispensable social virtue for democracies, without which person and property are endangered. Stephen Carter, in his book on civility, elegantly connects many of the concepts we have been discussing—democracy, freedom, civilization and social control: “the word *civilité * shares with the words *civilized* and *civilization* (and the word *city*, for that matter) a common etymology, an Indo-European root meaning ‘member of the household.’ To be civilized is to understand that we live in a society as in a household, and that within that household...our relationships with other people...are governed by standards of behavior that limit our freedom” (1998, 15). Thus, while it is true that Olmsted’s definitions of deviance and his understanding of deportment were colored by his class attachments, his overall commitment to democracy and the value of his public spaces for democratic life are not, thereby, greatly diminished.

## Conclusion

The burden of this essay has been to carefully consider the claim, first made by Charles Norton, that Olmsted's landscape architecture and planning activities represent the apogee of democratic artistry. We have learned that Olmsted's artistry entailed the pragmatic weaving together of liberal and republican traditions and ideals with the hope of nurturing a vibrant and resilient democracy. Olmsted's belief that the stakes are high, that the spatial politics of our built environment really do matter, is admirably expressed in his *Preliminary Report upon the Yosemite and Big Tree Grove* of 1865. "It is the folly of laws," says Olmsted, "which have permitted and favored the monopoly by privileged classes of many of the means supplied in nature for the gratification, exercise and education of the esthetic faculties that has caused the appearance of dullness and weakness and disease of these faculties in the mass of subjects of kings" (1990b, 505).

This egregious monarchical error—of denying the vast majority of common people the benefits of natural scenery and good community design—is one Olmsted is determined not to repeat. Between monarchies and democracies, in other words, there are more than "constitutional" differences. Free governments, Olmsted intones, seek to nurture citizens' aesthetic capacities by conserving places of extraordinary natural beauty for posterity and by establishing great public grounds for the enjoyment of all classes (504-505). In this effort, Olmsted's democratic artistry is unrivaled.

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