AICP Review Session: Histories and Theories of Planning

October 26, 2026
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University of Georgia
College of Environment and Design

Relationship between History and Theory in Planning

Planning history provides insight into current planning practice as it evolved from past practice

An applied discipline

Emerges out of social conditions and the practice solutions we have developed over time

Codified as a professional activity

Originally transmitted by practitioners via apprenticeships

Relationship between History and Theory in Planning

Planning theories provide insight into the processes and practices that underlay the profession

How cities and regions work

How planning should be conducted

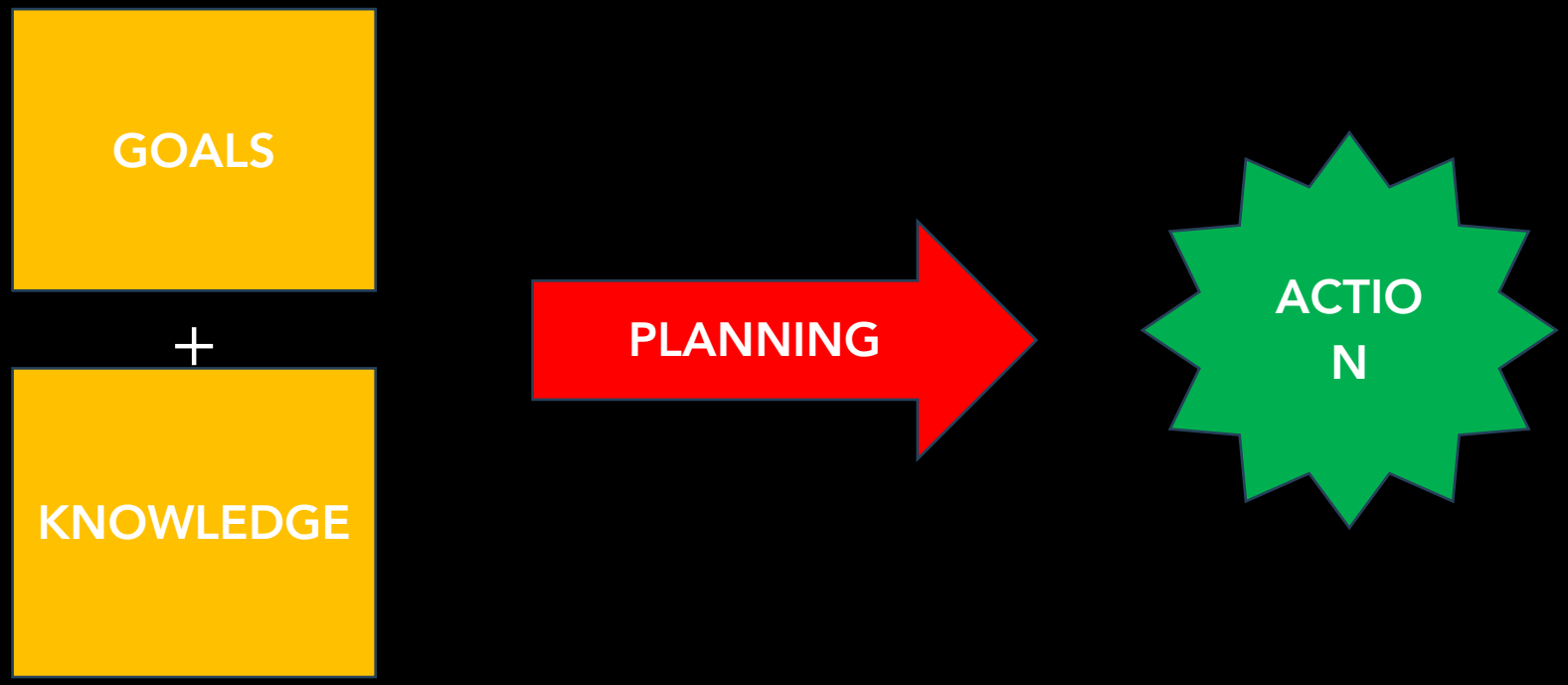
How planning activates and engages its core functions and values

Theories both learn from and inform practice.

Planning: linking goals and knowledge to action

Planning is a process, procedure, or method for setting goals, identifying and assessing options, and developing strategies for achieving desired options.

It is a pervasive human activity imbedded in future-oriented decision making.



Primary Functions of Planning

Goal	Action	Core Functions
Improve efficiency of outcomes	Optimize	1. 2. 3. 4. 1. Assess; Analyze 2. Engage 3. Envision; Design 4. Synthesize 5. Implement
Enhance social welfare	Balance interests Engage justice	
Widen the range of choice	Create visions Enhance options	
Enrich civic engagement and gove rnance	Expand opportunity and understanding in community	

Early Planning Theories

Little distinction between goals, knowledge and planning process

Nascent theories were embedded in utopian visions

Efforts to develop a coherent theory emerged in the 1950s and 60s

Need to rationalize the interests and activities of planning under conditions of social foment

The social sciences provided a broader interpretive lens

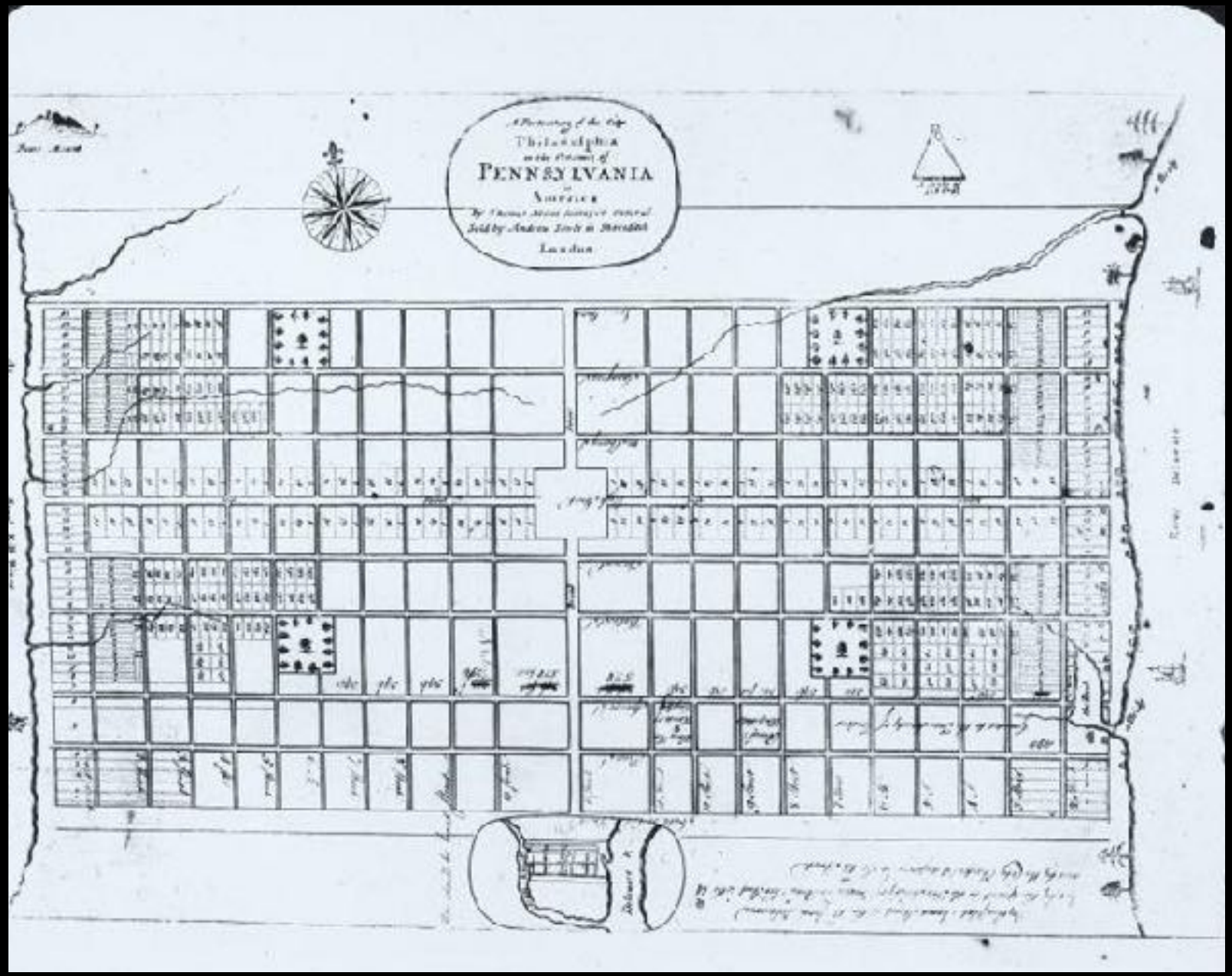
Emergence of Planning and Utopianism

- Colonial Planning / Early Urban Designs
- National Land Ordinances
- Housing and Social Planning

William Penn’s grid system

Philadelphia

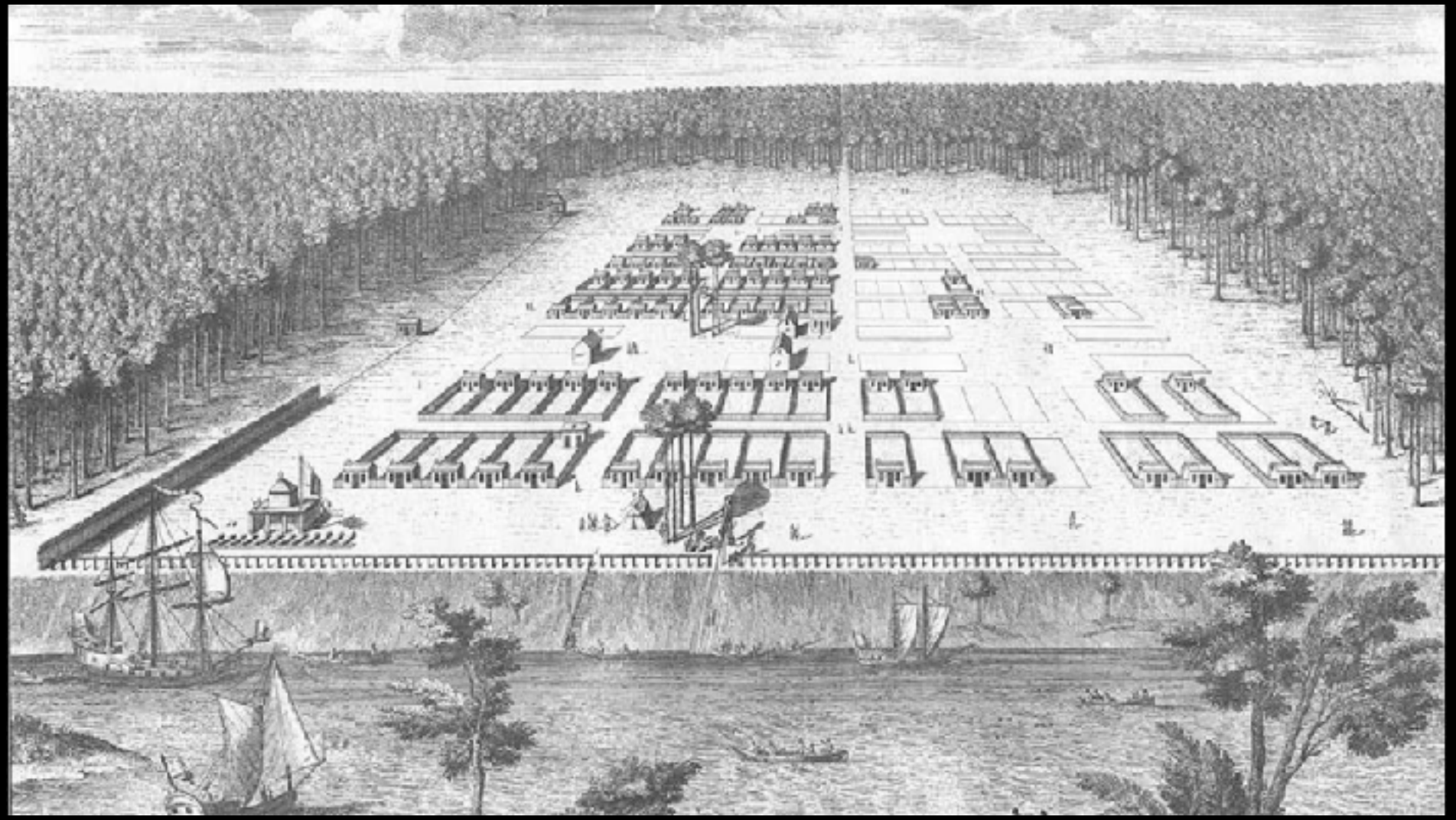
1682



Oglethorpe

Plan for Savannah

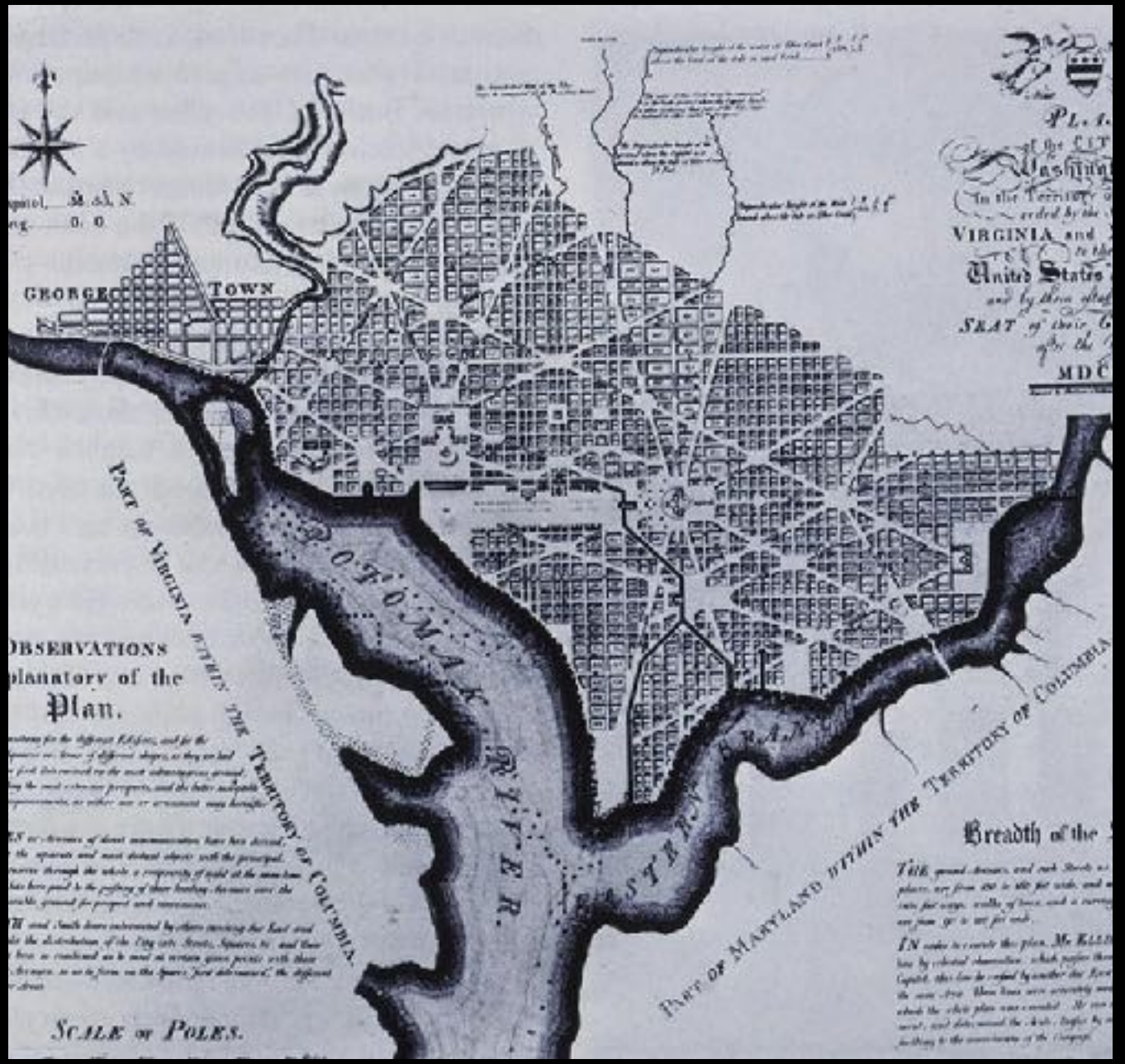
1733



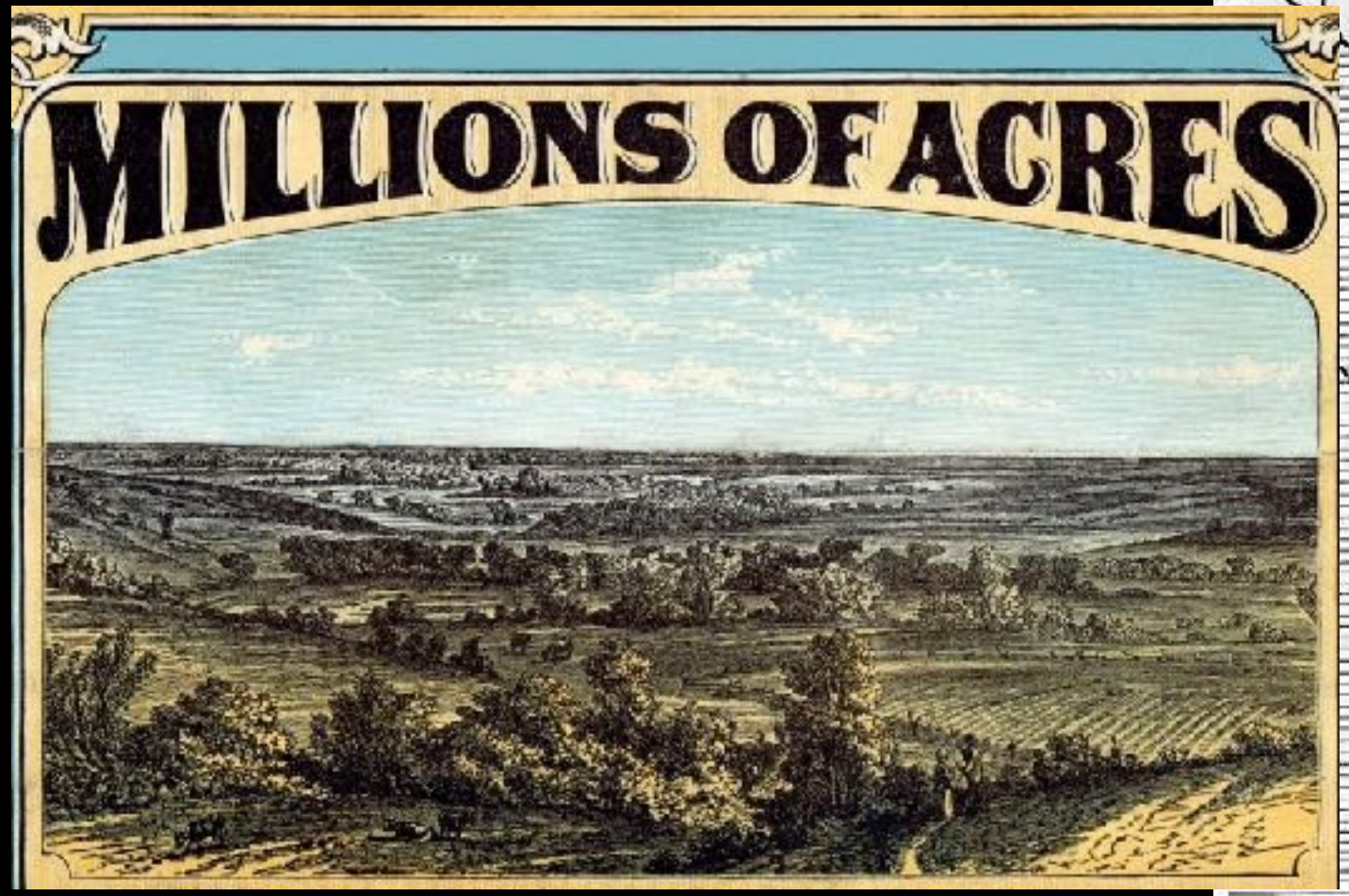
L’Enfant, et al.

Plan for the District of Columbia

1792

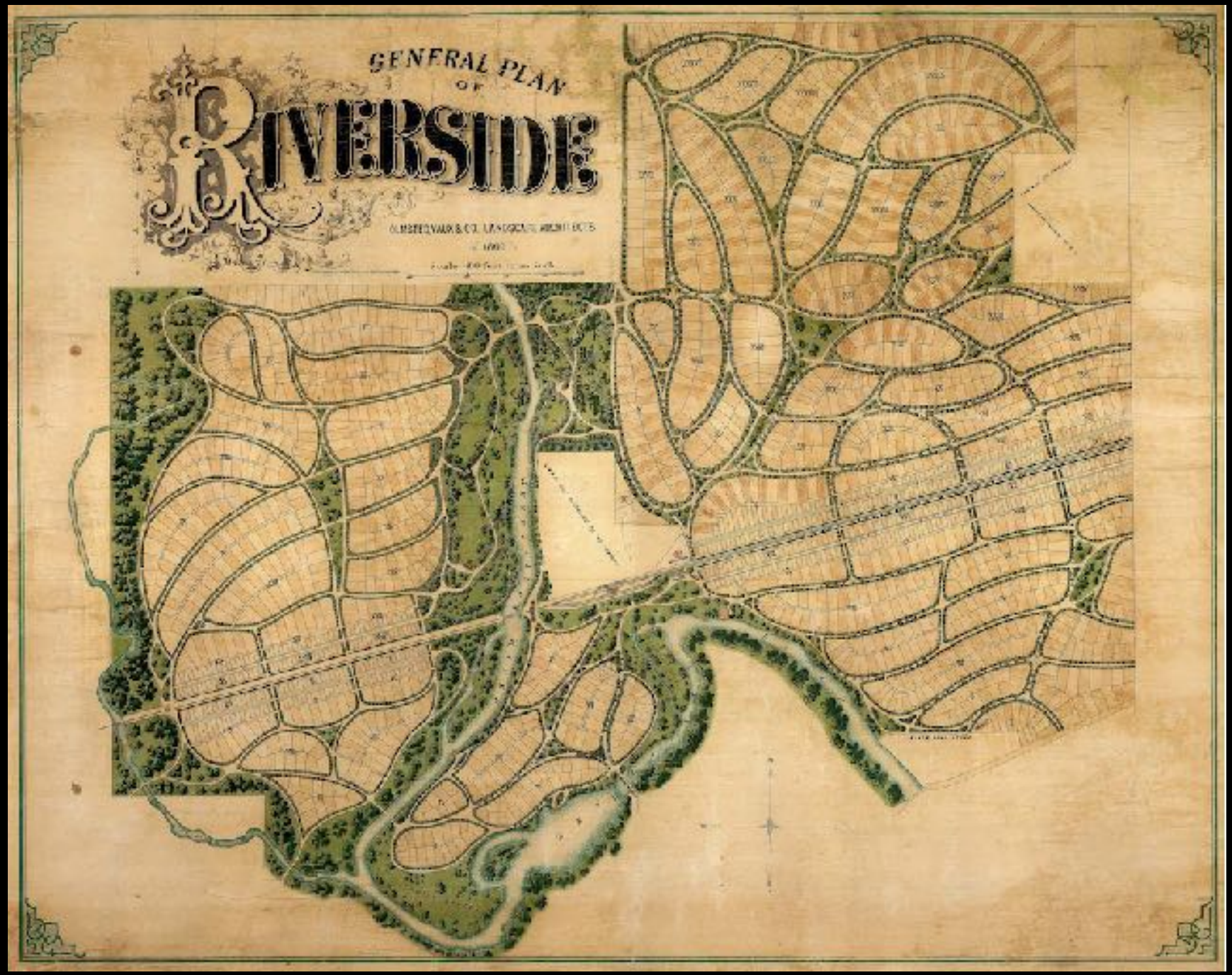


Land Ordinances
1785, 1825, 1862

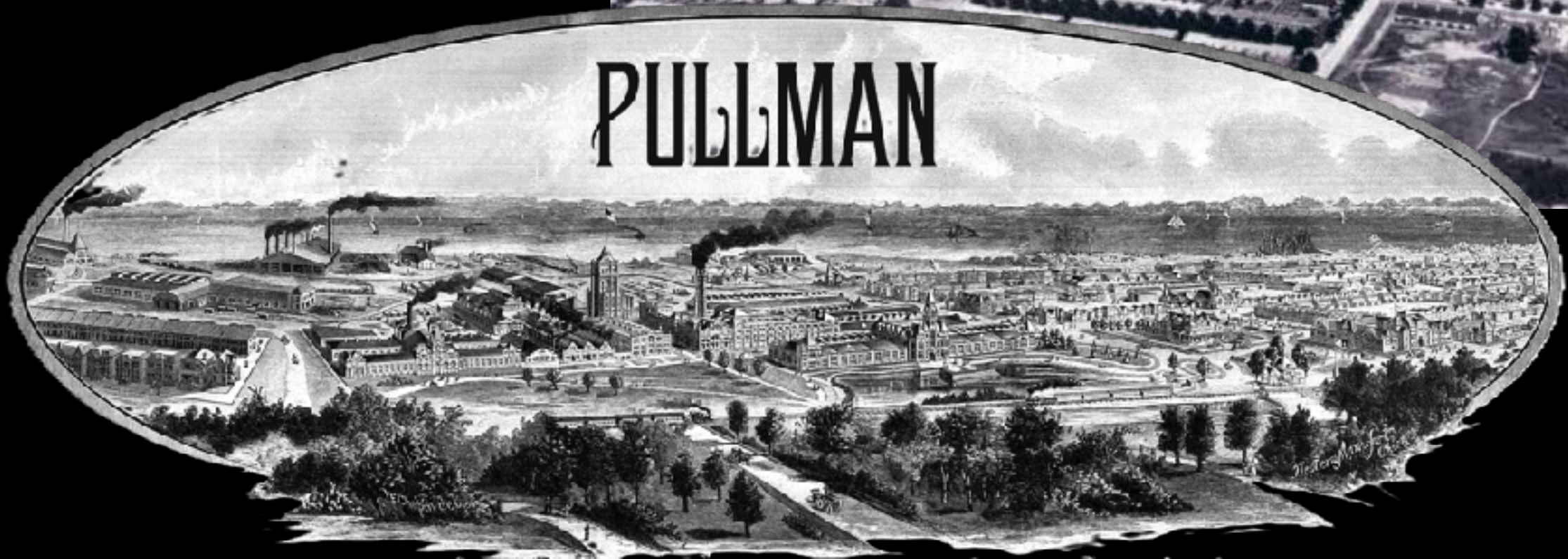


Riverside, IL

1868 - 1875



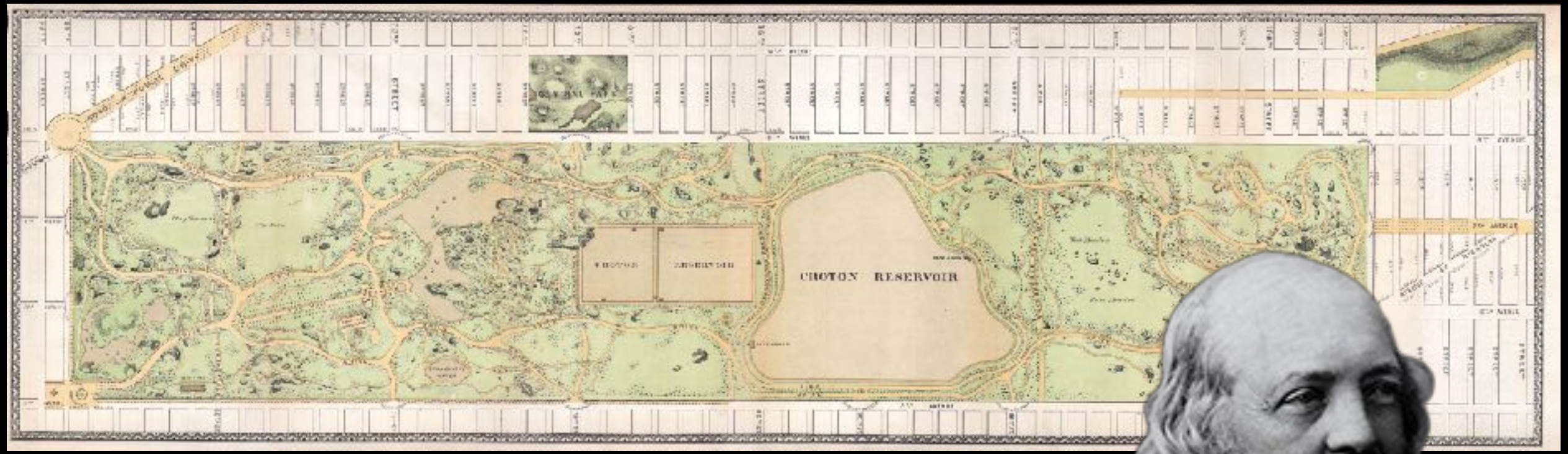
Pullman Company Town
1879-1884

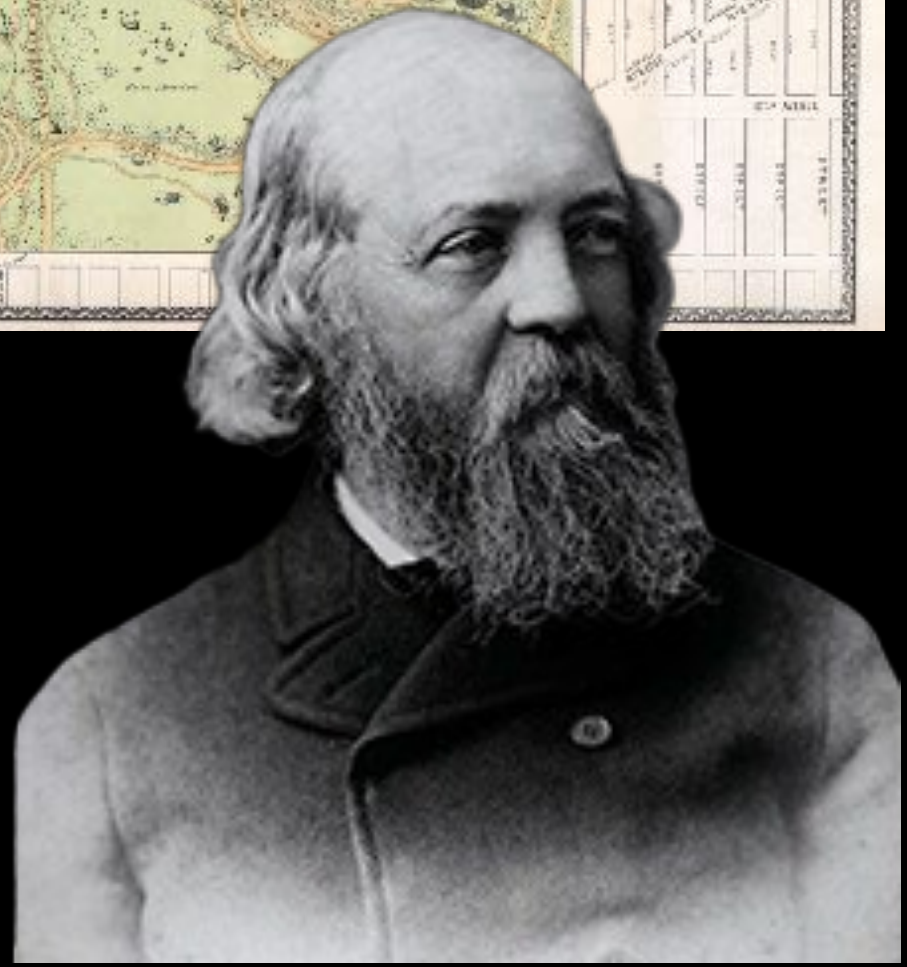


Emergence of Planning and Utopianism

Major Movements and Their Impact

- **Parks Movement**
- **Sanitary Reform Advances**
- **Settlement House Movement**
- **City Beautiful Movement**

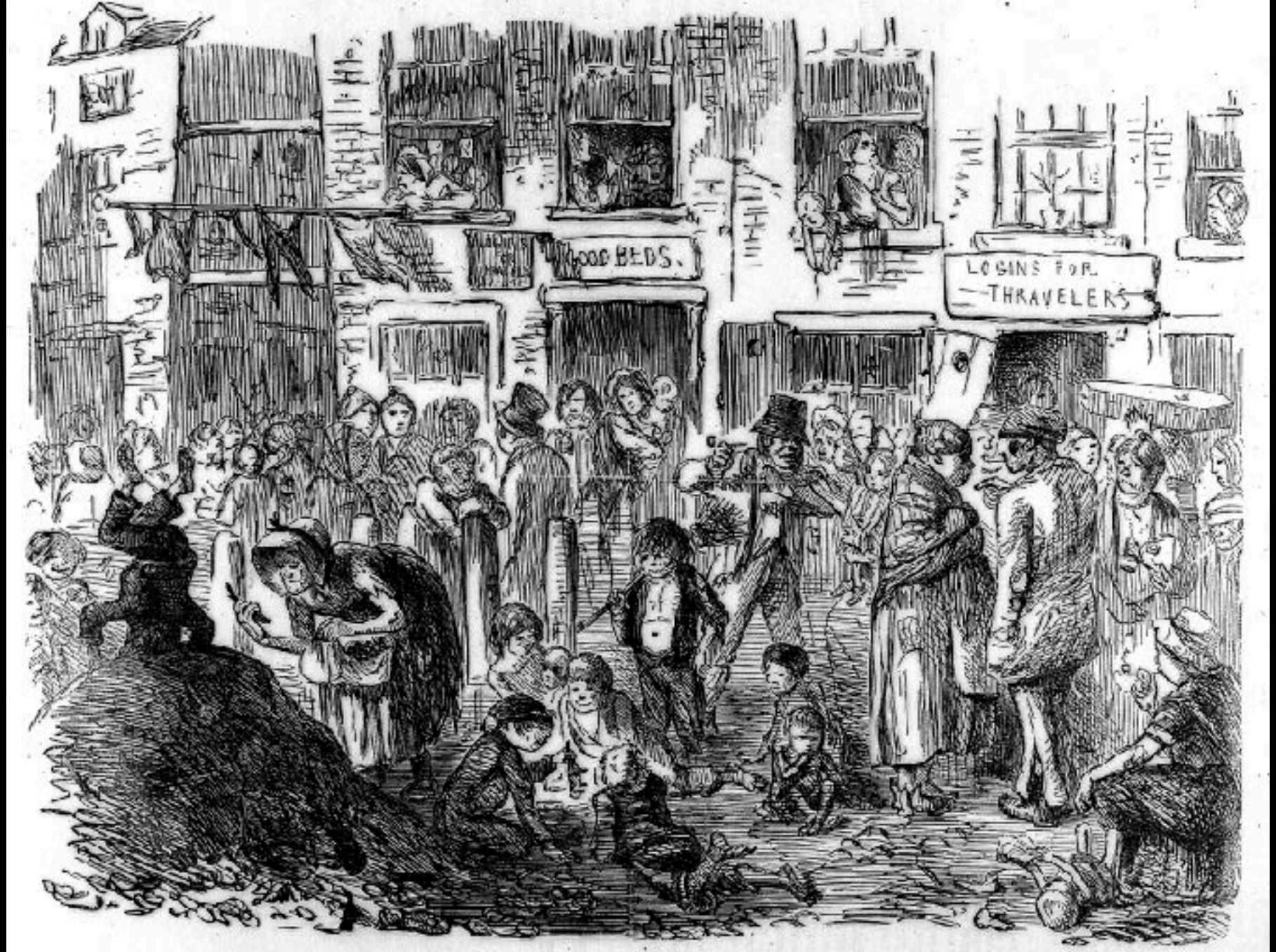




Frederick Law Olmstead

Central Park, New York City

1868 - 1875



A COURT FOR KING CHOLERA.

Tenement Housing Laws
1901

THE TENEMENT HOUSE PROBLEM

INCLUDING THE REPORT OF THE NEW YORK
STATE TENEMENT HOUSE COMMISSION
OF 1900

BY VARIOUS WRITERS

EDITED BY

ROBERT W. DEFOREST AND LAWRENCE VEILLER

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
LONDON: MACMILLAN & CO., Ltd.
1903

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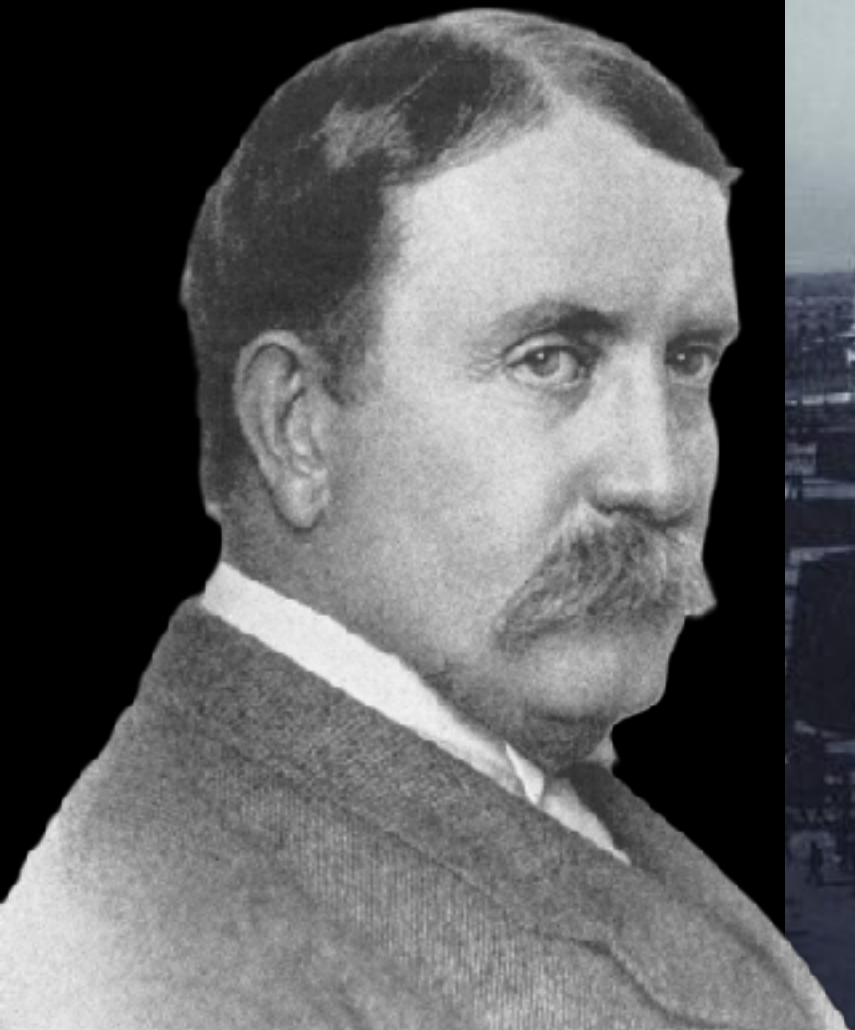
Reform Movement

The good we secure for ourselves is precarious and uncertain until it is secured for all of us and incorporated into our common life.

-Jane Addams
Twenty Years at Hull House

World Columbian Exposition
Chicago, IL
1891-1893
Daniel Burnham
Superintendent of Construction



McMillan Plan | Washington, DC | 1902 | Daniel Burnham

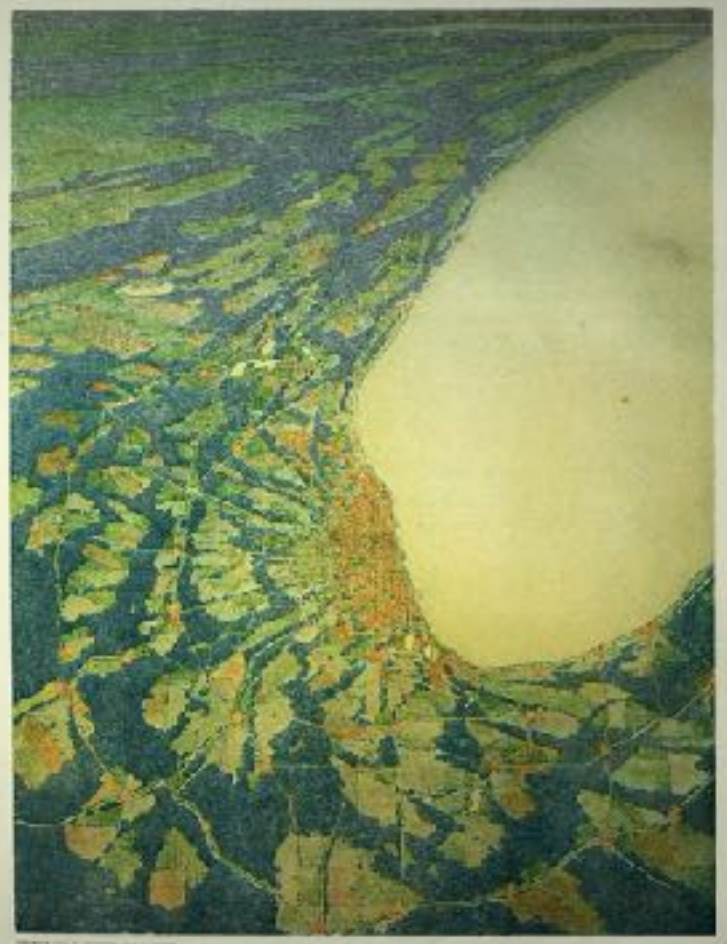
Washington, DC | ca. 1860s

Washington, DC | ca. 1901

Union Station | Washington, DC | 1906 | Daniel Burnham

Chicago, IL | ca. 1890

Plan for Chicago | Chicago, IL | 1909 | Daniel Burnham



PLAN OF
CHICAGO

PREPARED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF

THE COMMERCIAL CLUB

DURING THE YEARS MCMVI, MCMVII, AND MCMVIII

BY

DANIEL H. BURNHAM

AND

EDWARD H. BENNETT

ARCHITECTS

EDITED BY

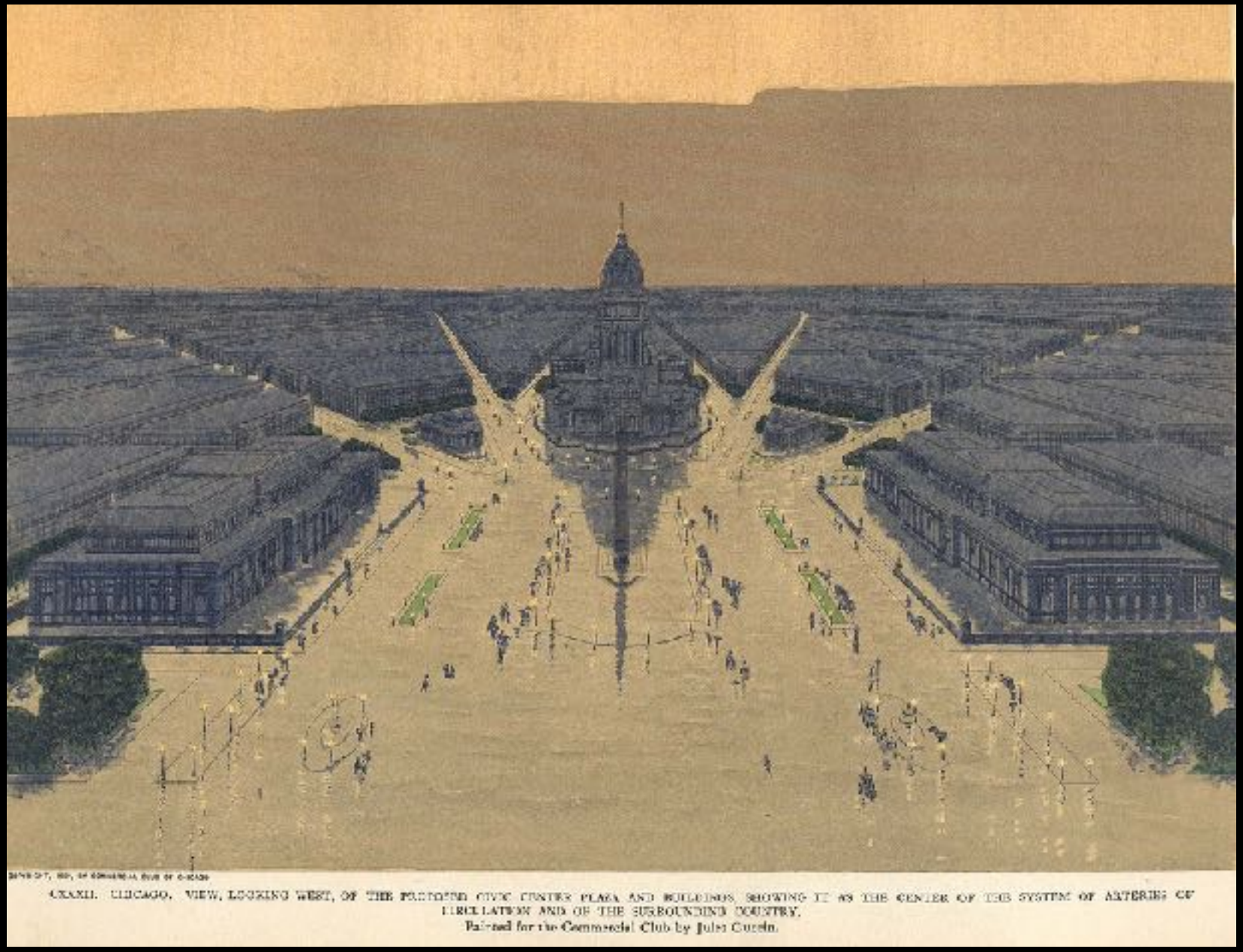
CHARLES MOORE

CHICAGO

THE COMMERCIAL CLUB

MCMIX

Plan for Chicago | Chicago, IL | 1909 | Daniel Burnham



CXXXII. CHICAGO. VIEW, LOOKING WEST, OF THE PROPOSED CIVIC CENTER PLAZA AND BUILDINGS, SHOWING IT AS THE CENTER OF THE SYSTEM OF ARTERIES OF CIRCULATION AND OF THE SURROUNDING COUNTRY.
Painted for the Commercial Club by Jules Guerin.

First Official City Planning Commission | Hartford, CT | 1907

Early Planning Education

1909: Harvard introduced "The Principles of City Planning" through its Department of Landscape Architecture, marking the first formal city planning course in the U.S.

1923: Harvard offered the first formal North American city and regional planning degree (Master in Landscape Architecture in City Planning).

1929: Harvard established the first independent Graduate School of City Planning in the United States.

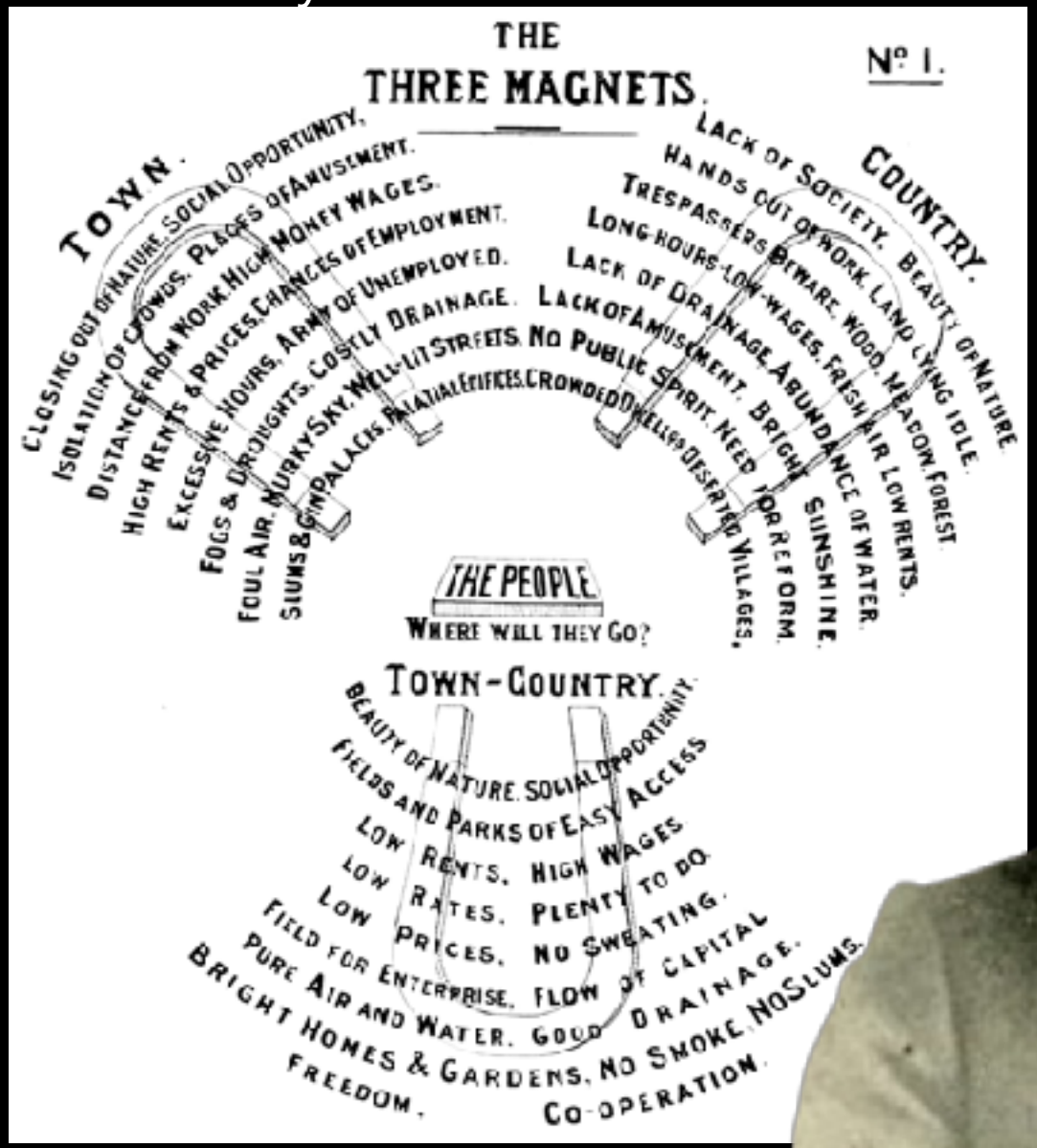
1936: Harvard's planning program evolved into the Department of City and Regional Planning when the Harvard Graduate School of Design was created.

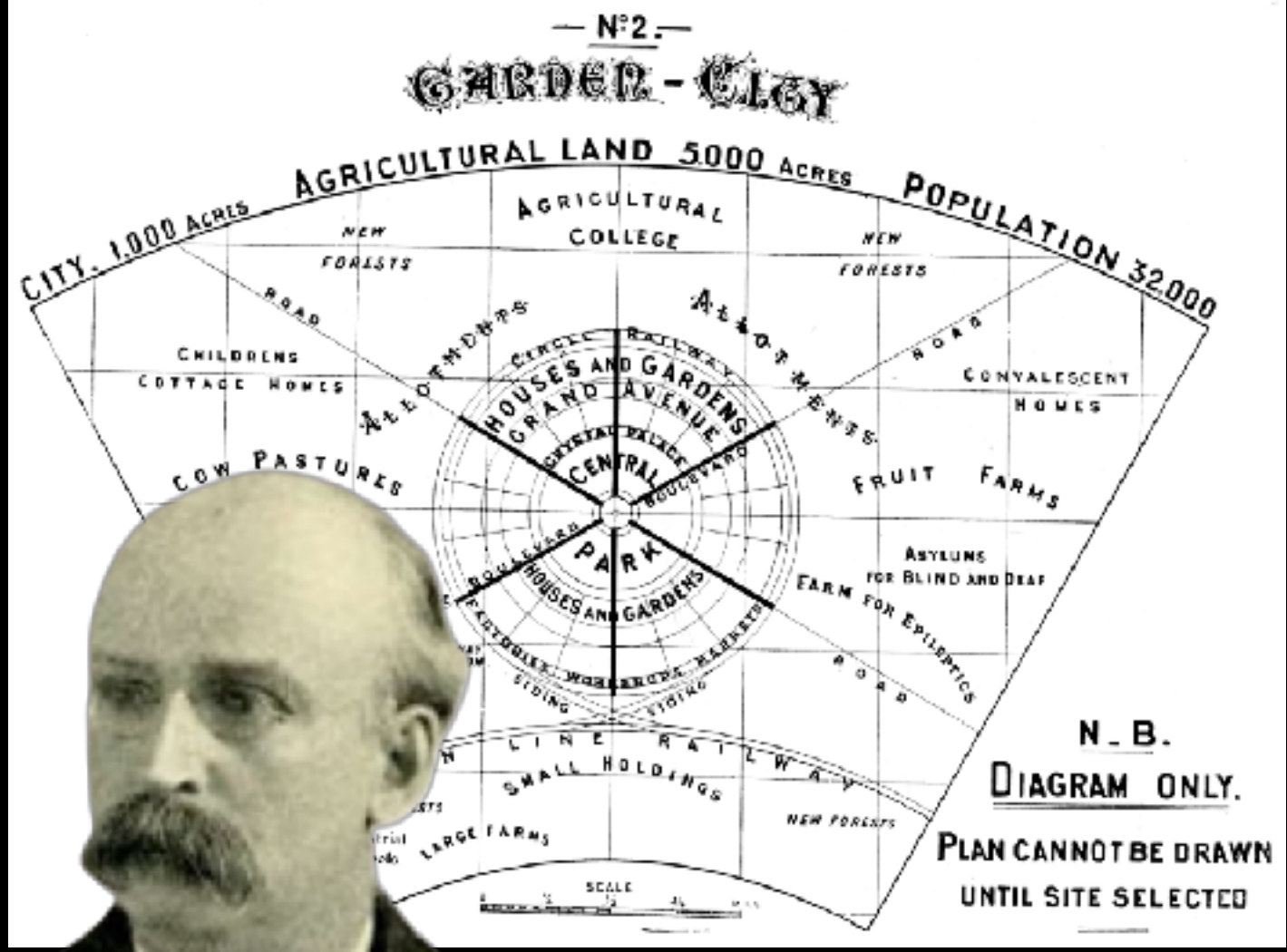
1933: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology launched its own city planning curriculum within the MIT School of Architecture and Planning, initially approached through an architectural and interdisciplinary lens.

Emergence of Planning and Utopianism

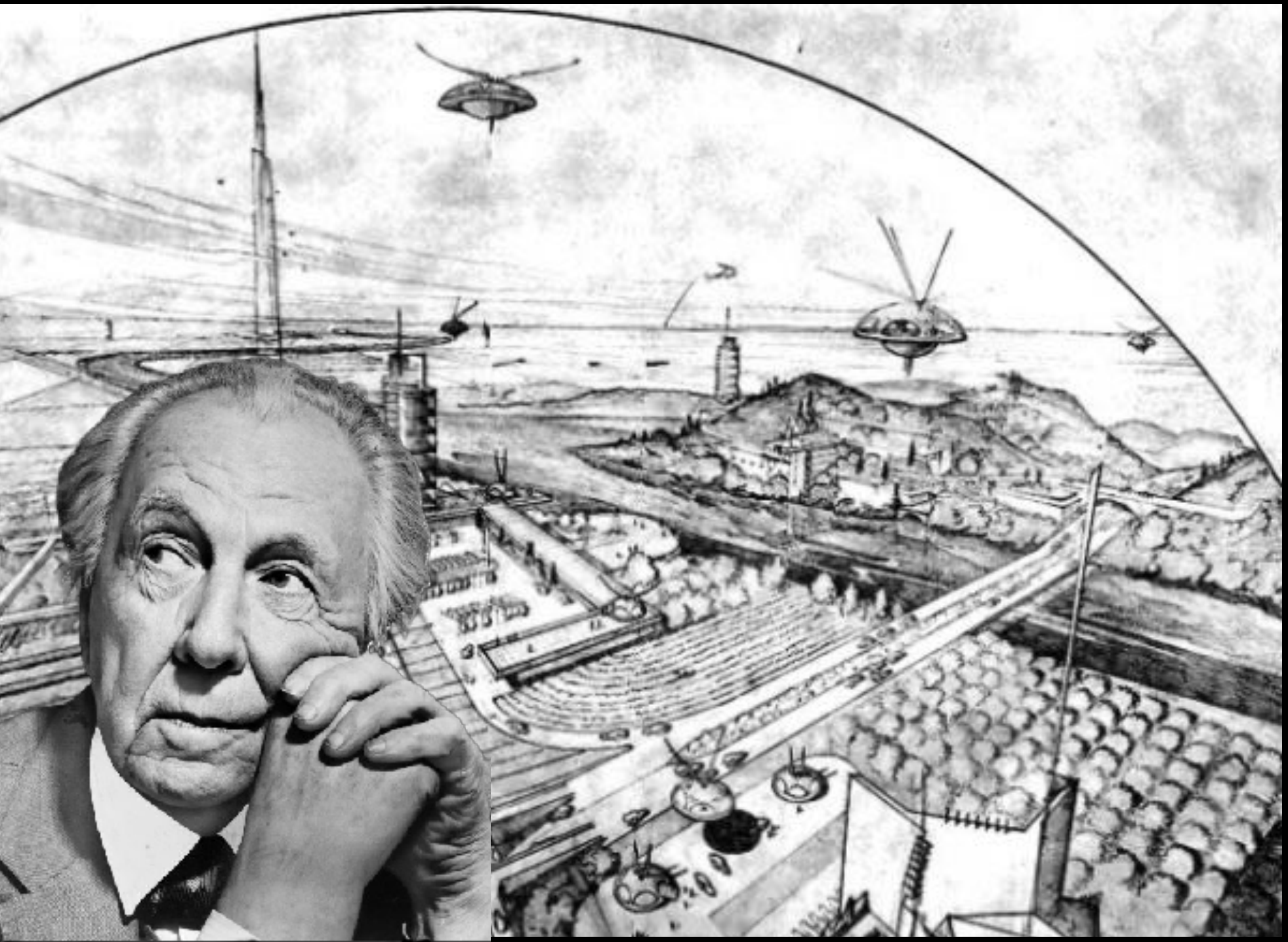
- Garden City Movement
- Radiant City Vision
- Broadacre City Model
- Critiques of Utopian Models

Ebeneezer Howard
Garden City





LeCorbusier
Radiant City



Frank Lloyd Wright
Broadacre City

Clarence Stein
Radburn New Jersey and the RPAA

A

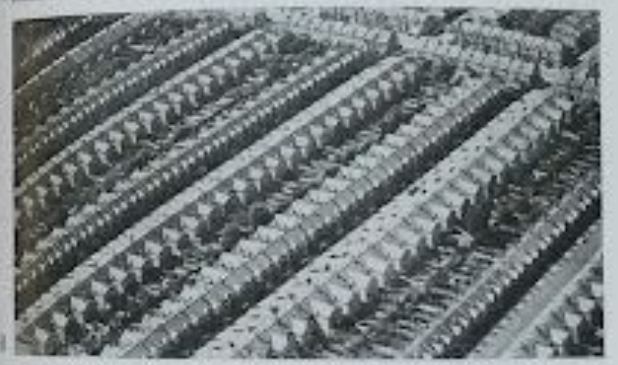
B, C

D

EARLY ANTECEDENTS OF MODERN HOUSING

A. Naarden, typical late-medieval Dutch town-planning. B. The Fuggerei, built in Augsburg in 1519. C. One of several planned cul-de-sac streets from seventeenth-century Lübeck. D. Nyboder, a Copenhagen housing scheme from 1631. (*Photos: A, ELM; B, Stadtbild Bildstelle.*)

A



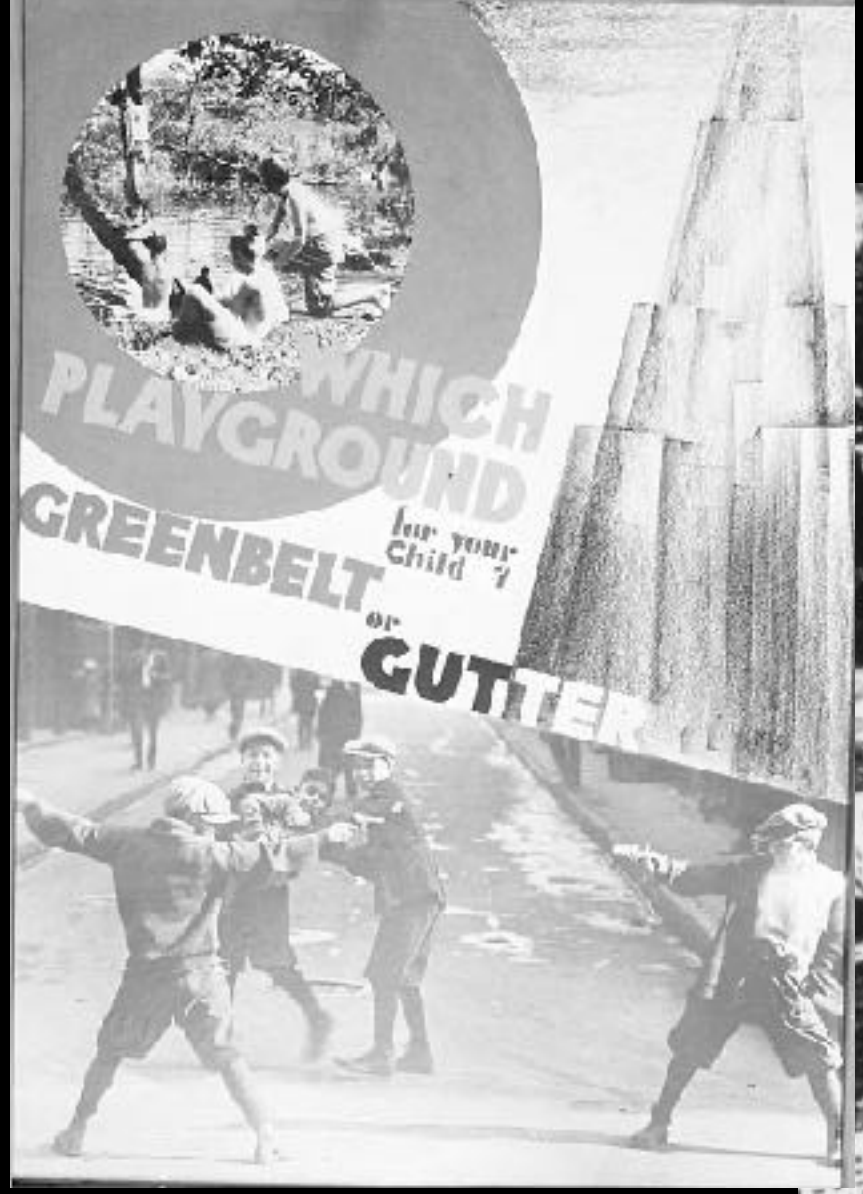
B

C

ENGLAND: BLACK, GRAY, AND GREEN

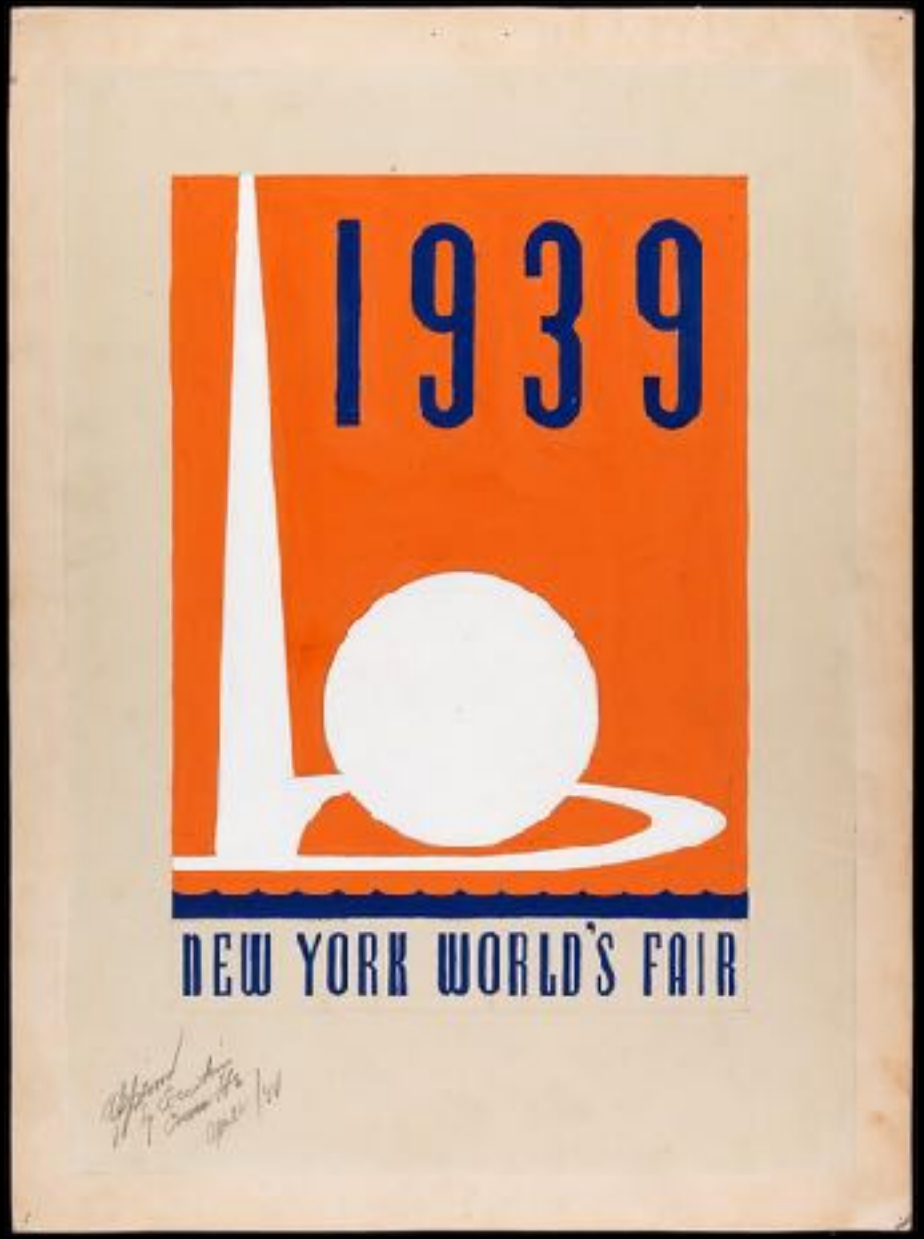
A. Industrial slum at Preston, late nineteenth cen[tury]. B. 'By-Law' slum in London, around 1900; this type [has a] density of 50 houses per acre. C. Post-war munici[pal] housing, 12 per acre. (*Photos: A and C, Aerofilms; B,*

Catherine Bauer
Modern Housing
1934



Resettlement Administration | Greenbelt, MD | 1935

The City | 1939



New York’s World Fair | 1939

Robert Moses
Jane Jacobs
Urban Renewal

Modern Trends and Ethical Foundations

- New Federalism
- Rationalization of Planning
- Core Planning Values
- Impact on Urban Challenges / Urban Challenges Impacts on planning

Rational Planning

A structured process of decision-making that seeks to maximize the achievement of desired goals (ends) by careful consideration of potential consequences of available alternatives (means)

Rationality focuses on the quality of decision the subordination of action to knowledge and of knowledge to values

The planner is an expert capable of designing for and coping with complex urban conditions by using specialized Knowledge, techniques and technologies in supp ort of well-structured decision processes.

Rational Planning

University of Chicago Program of Education and Research in Planning, 1947 - 1955

Rexford Tugwell

A vision of science contributing to guide societal choices and to curb the irrational decisions of politicians

Conceived of society as a complex organism and planning as a central brain and nervous system coordinating it s functions for the betterment of the whole (planning as the “fourth power”)

Martin Meyerson and Edward Banfield

Authors of Politics, Planning and the Public Interest

Introduced the rational planning process in the context of a study of public housing in Chicago

Rational Planning

Other Rational Planning Theorists

Davidoff & Reiner, 1963 "A Choice Theory of Planning"
Planning consists of sequential tasks:
Value Formation: widen & publicize choices concerning future conditions or goals
Means Identification: Identify and evaluate a universe of means
Effectuation: implement and monitor

Andreas Faludi, 1973
A Reader in Planning Theory
Normative procedural theory of planning

Urban Models

1925: Concentric Zone Theory - Burgess

1939: Sector Theory - Homer Hoyt

1945: Multiple Nuclei Model - Harris and Ullman

1962 Penn-Jersey Transportation Study urban growth simulation model

1968 Pittsburg Community Redevelopment Model

Why is there an increasing emphasis on rationality beginning in the 1950s?

Optimism in the power of science to resolve social problems

Depression and WWII experience with planning

Increasing emphasis on social and economic aspects of planning as well as the physical aspects of urban problem