MAKERS AND BREAKERS

OLMSTED, MOSES, JACOBS SHAPE THE CITY

FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED (1822–1903)

1 August 1840: Arrives in New York at 18, from Connecticut, to clerk for a silk importer; lodges in Brooklyn Heights

2 1848–55: On 125 acres purchased for him by his father, builds Tosomock Farm into a successful nursery between stints traveling

3 February 16, 1853: Publishes first dispatch from the South in nascent *New York Times,* starting a series that transforms him into a staunch abolitionist, respected journalist, and influential public voice

4 Fall 1857–April 1858: Spending nights at architect Calvert Vaux's, collaborates on Greensward Plan for entry into the Central Park design competition

5 June 1859: Marries his brother's widow, Mary Olmsted, by Central Park's Great Hill and then moves into Central Park administration offices with her children

6 1861: Drills park employees at outbreak of Civil War before leaving to head the US Sanitary Commission, precursor to the Red Cross

7 1865: Returns from stormy tenure at a California gold mine and launches Olmsted, Vaux & Company, Landscape Architects; begins planning Brooklyn's Prospect Park

8 1866: Helps found *The Nation* magazine as part-owner and associate editor

9 Mid-1870s: Calls view of Lullwater through the Cleft Ridge Span in completed Prospect Park "one of the most superb and refined park scenes I ever saw"

10 1881: Leaves New York for Brookline, Massachusetts, to live out his days

ROBERT MOSES (1888–1981)

1 1897: Moves to the city from New Haven at 8; grows up in five-story brownstone surrounded by Rembrandts and maids

2 1901–3: Attends elite Ethical Culture School before transferring to even more elite Dwight School and Mohegan Lake Academy

3 1914: Begins work to reform city's corrupt civil service system at the Bureau of Municipal Research, epicenter of Progressivism, where he meets his wife, Mary Louise Sims

4 1918: Living in small apartment with no job, supported by his mother after being drummed out of city government, takes a position running commission to reorganize New York state government

5 1934: Takes helm as the first city parks commissioner, overseeing all boroughs; fires all employees of borough parks departments

6 July 21, 1936: Defying Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, demolishes ferry docks to make way for approaches to the Triborough Bridge; later builds his permanent office under its toll plaza

7 1936: Reportedly orders that Thomas Jefferson Pool, one of 11 massive pools funded by the New Deal, go unheated to discourage use by "coloreds"

8 December 11, 1946: Pulls together last-minute deal with money from the Rockefellers to build permanent UN headquarters

9 1950–53: From his apartment down the street from Gracie Mansion, exercises virtual control over city government, through daily consultations with "accidental" mayor Vincent Impellitteri

10 Early 1950s: Rents penthouse of Marguerite Hotel to watch excavation for Brooklyn-Queens Expressway

11 1952: Refuses alternate Cross-Bronx Expressway route through East Tremont; 1,530 apartments, home to over 5,000, are demolished

12 April 24, 1956: Orders park employees to destroy glen beloved to mothers and children of Upper West Side under cover of night

13 November 21, 1964: Leads 52-limousine motorcade on first crossing of Verrazano-Narrows Bridge; does not invite bridge workers to celebration

14 1963–65: Presides over transformation of Flushing Meadows for its second world's fair, which flounders in finances and attendance

15 1968: Still swims in Atlantic at age 79 near longtime Babylon, Long Island, home

JANE JACOBS (born Jane Butzner, 1916–2006)

1 1934: Arrives from Scranton, PA, at age 18, intent on breaking into journalism, and with her sister soon moves to the West Village, their "ideal neighborhood"

2 1943: Having dropped out of Columbia's University Extension, rejecting formal education, takes job as writer at the US State Department's Office of War Information; covers urban redevelopment and later faces questions on alleged communist sympathies

3 1944: Meets architect Robert Hyde Jacobs during a party at her apartment and marries him a month later

4 1947: Purchases a former candy store with her husband and begins renovating it into their longtime home

5 1958: While working as an editor at *Architectural Forum,* publishes "Downtown Is for People" in *Fortune,* establishing herself as a major critic of urban renewal

6 1958: Turns two sons and daughter loose with petitions in campaign to defeat Moses's plan for avenue bisecting Washington Square Park (Jacobs's daughter, Mary, appears at center in front of the park's arch on the opposite page)

7 1961: Frequents Lion's Head pub, hub for West Villagers' successful fight against urban renewal plan for neighborhood

8 1961: Working with editor Jason Epstein of Random House, publishes *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*

9 1962: Pickets in protest of planned demolition of Pennsylvania Station and then joins Joint Committee to Stop the Lower Manhattan Expressway (LOMEX) as its co-chair

10 December 6, 1967: Arrested for blocking entrance to a military induction center in protest of Vietnam War

11 April 10, 1968: Arrested for disrupting public meeting on LOMEX and charged with inciting a riot; LOMEX, by 1971, is officially killed

12 Summer 1968: Moves to Toronto to keep sons out of the draft

FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED

Realized plans (designed, redesigned, or proposed in part by Olmsted, alone or in partnership)

Unrealized plans

ROBERT MOSES

Realized plans (proposed by Moses or implemented by a Moses-directed agency)

Unrealized plans

16 MAKERS AND BREAKERS

Cities are accretions—of lives, structures, landscapes, histories, and plans. While marks of the millions who've touched New York over time can be identified within its layers, those wrought by three central figures in the making of the modern metropolis are nearly impossible to avoid. Frederick Law Olmsted was the "father of landscape architecture": he designed the city's greatest parks and the world's first parkways, pleasure grounds celebrated by the masses today. Robert Moses was the "master builder" of New York in the twentieth century: he drew a new city by sprinkling even more parks across the boroughs but also by erasing neighborhoods to make way for monumental highways, bridges, cultural centers, and housing projects. Jane Jacobs was Moses's nemesis: the celebrated writer and activist rallied fellow citizens to reject his wholesale and undemocratic reworking of their communities, helping to birth the preservation movement. This is a map of three lives and their remnants—the plans each giant made and thwarted; the places they birthed, destroyed, and saved; the New Yorks they dreamed of and brought into being. As Jonathan Tarleton's essay here reminds us, the line between a maker and breaker of the city can be a fine one. But whether through enduring ideas or those embedded in the city's very structure, the legacies and values of these three titanic urbanists continue to clash and combine in the ever-evolving framework organizing New Yorkers' lives.

CARTOGRAPHY: MOLLY ROY MAP APPEARS ON PAGES 132–133.

WAYS AND MEANS BY JONATHAN TARLETON

Walking among the original elms of Brooklyn's Eastern Parkway, I find it hard to conceive that this grand boulevard lined with benches and trees—one of Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux's many masterpieces—didn't always course through Brooklyn. Completed in 1874, the world's first parkway serves as a boundary between neighborhoods, a place to sit and stroll, and a concourse ferrying all kinds to the sylvan woods and meadows of Prospect Park—another much-loved Olmsted and Vaux creation. But of course this thoroughfare and the seemingly timeless patchwork of buildings along it weren't always here. Grand plans and speculative aims conspired to build them. And the prerequisite for these plans' fruition, as with all such designs in a place defined by density, was tearing down some of what came before.

The building of Eastern Parkway, like that of Olmsted and Vaux's Central Park before it, entailed what would a century later be known as slum clearance. Much of the proposed route for the parkway, running east toward Queens, was undeveloped. But Carrville, a thriving middle-class community established by free black families in what's now Crown Heights, stood in the way. Eastern Parkway didn't just tear down many of Carrville's homes; it paved over the only official burial ground open to black Brooklynites—a loss necessary to gain the new boulevard and pleasure ground lined with homes that Olmsted pitched for prosperous "city-bred country boys." Today, Carrville is remembered only for no longer existing, not for what it once was.

This kind of destruction is rarely associated with "the father of landscape architecture," who also midwifed modern regional planning and suburban design. Olmsted's name calls to mind the urbane wilderness of his best-known masterpiece. He's the genius who forged Central Park—its Ramble of wooded paths encased in the city's grandeur—from a part of Manhattan that engineer Egbert Viele described as "a pestilential spot, where rank vegetation and miasmatic odors taint every breath of air." Which is why, perhaps, the site was also home to Seneca Village, another refuge for free black New Yorkers. As with Eastern Parkway, Olmsted and Vaux's first slum clearance project wasn't admired exclusively for the park it brought to life; its removal of the black community provided another cause for celebration among city elites.

The name most New Yorkers would associate with such demolition of low-income, minority neighborhoods in the name of a greater good is Robert Moses: the planner-cum-power broker and so-called master builder of the city who, for a key stretch of decades in the mid-twentieth century, simultaneously held twelve appointed positions in city and state government, among them parks commissioner, chairman of the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority, and, perhaps most fittingly, a sui generis omnibus designation as "construction coordinator of the City of New York." For over forty years, he wielded a not-so-invisible power over New York's ruling establishment, bending mayors, the press, and Wall Street to his vision. Thirteen bridges, 416 miles of parkways, 658 playgrounds, and 150,000 housing units are attributed to Moses's monomaniacal, arrogant leadership—and that's a partial accounting. The synonymy of Moses and large-scale displacement of the city's marginalized is appropriate: under slum clearance and related urban renewal programs, he flattened 300 acres of city land and displaced, by one estimate, at least half a million people. He was fond of saying, "To make an omelet you need to break a few eggs." Break many he did.

Olmsted and Moses are typically regarded as antitheses—the maker and the breaker of ideal urban life. But there's also a lineage connecting the two. Commonalities of privilege, manipulation, and deft administration infuse their realized visions—just as their crucial differences, and contrasting regard for "the public" and individuals' lives, shape their divergent legacies.

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Olmsted was born in Connecticut in 1822. As a restless youth living off his father's largesse, he had trial runs as a clerk, sailor, and surveyor before taking up scientific farming on a Staten Island plot bought by Dad. After a pair of walks around Europe piqued his eye for park design and supplied fodder for early writings, Olmsted launched the journalism career that first made his name.

Devoted to social reform, Olmsted reported from the antebellum South for the city paper that became the *New York Times*. Exhibiting an unusually nuanced account of slavery's effects on society, he turned from a gradualist on the "slavery question" to a committed abolitionist, whose dispatches, according to some accounts, swayed Britain from entering the Civil War on the side of the Confederacy.

Olmsted soon parlayed his growing notoriety as a journalist into work as an editor, playing a role in the founding of *Putnam's Magazine,* long defunct, and *The Nation,* still at it after 150 years. Those labors, though, didn't pay the bills. So Olmsted took on the role of Central Park superintendent, overseeing the clearance of land to make way for whatever as-yet-undesigned park took shape. He soon joined with Calvert Vaux, an old acquain-

Triborough Bridge span over Hell Gate, connecting Queens to Randall's Island. Courtesy Library of Congress.

Triborough Bridge exchange plaza on Randall's Island. Courtesy Library of Congress.

tance and an ascendant architect, to create his own vision for the park, which not only came to pass, but revolutionized urban park-making everywhere.

Bringing their design to fruition was fraught with challenges both technical and bureaucratic. In 1859 Central Park comptroller Andrew Green—the man who would one day unify five boroughs into one city—was put in charge of bringing down the project's costs. Olmsted, full of fervent belief in his cause and chafing at the comptroller's "cross-examination" over each expense, submitted his resignation. The Central Park Commission, though, asked him to stay on. He did, in exchange for increased power and a general acquiescence to the Olmsted mode of unilateral leadership that prompted a friend to describe him as a "little monarch."

Moses's similarly overbearing self-confidence grew with each degree, first from top prep schools and then from Yale, Oxford, and Columbia. Recognized for his academic prowess in the realm of public policy, Moses dedicated himself to civil service reform. Right out of school, he sought and won a job with the city's Progressive establishment, for which he was able to forgo payment thanks to a doting mother. The young Moses preached a staunch adherence to a meritocracy that could dismantle the patronage and corruption epitomized by New York's Tammany Hall political machine. But after Moses's entrée into city politics evaporated alongside such reforms' possibility, a pragmatic thirst for power overrode his idealism.

Moses climbed the political ladder alongside a Tammany politician and in 1924 became president of the State Council on Parks. In that position, he greatly expanded parkland across New York, and then used his resulting popularity, in an early deployment of his trademark tantrum, to threaten Governor Franklin Delano Roosevelt with his resignation unless cuts to his budget request were reversed. Roosevelt gave in, as many other governors and mayors would after him. When Mayor Robert F. Wagner, for one, took office in 1954, he was intent on constraining Moses's power. But his attempt to block the master builder's advance, by halting his reappointment to the City Planning Commission, crumbled in much the same way Roosevelt's had when Moses marched into Wagner's office with a completed appointment form and dared the mayor to forget who held power in the relationship. Wagner signed.

Moses was an authoritarian at heart; the tag *monarch* would certainly have fit if *master builder* had been taken. His career is littered with the productive suggestions of colleagues and peers tossed by the wayside because they weren't his own. In a tragic inversion of his namesake's exodus, Moses parted a human sea to make way for a flood of cars into the heart of New York's northernmost borough along his Cross Bronx Expressway. Rather than swing a one-mile stretch of the route a few blocks south to save 1,530 apartments, home to 5,000 people, he carved up the dense and thriving community of Tremont with his "scythe of progress." All people or parties who stood in his way could count on being ridiculed and smeared as "commies," "radicals," or—his favorite slur—a mere "bunch of mothers."

But however alike Olmsted and Moses may have been in bearing and approach, their regard for the publics they structured—with steel and trees, concrete and streams—did diverge sharply.

Olmsted's humanist commitment to the well-being of the individual is evinced, at each turn, in the exceptional design of his parks. The public's love for his creations, generation after generation, proves their success. In Prospect Park, the Long Meadow—a study in expansive, grassy views crafted to heal the greenery-starved urban dweller—leads one gently toward the Ravine, Brooklyn's only extant forest and a ready provider of quiet solitude along dirt paths in the city's heart. Olmsted made spaces not only with an abstract public in mind, but for actual people. While his strict, often paternalistic views on what kind of behavior belonged in his parks tended toward those espoused by his privileged class (no baseball allowed), they were commons open to all, in theory and in practice.

Moses did not share such a progressive view of all New Yorkers' "right to the city." He was, among other things, a well-documented racist. Apologists characterize Moses as a man of his age. But any reverence for his unrivaled brilliance in getting things done is skewed without acknowledging his projects' human costs. In Moses's New York, neighborhoods supposedly blighted enough to necessitate their wholesale demolition were often those with black or Latino residents: "urban renewal" grew synonymous with "Negro removal." Though Moses built 658 playgrounds, far fewer were placed in neighborhoods most in need of investment than in wealthier zones. The community benefits of his monumental West Side Project, which expanded Riverside Park over a buried, busy commercial freight line and brought a new parkway to the Hudson shore, stopped at Harlem's start.

Certain of Moses's public pools—the ones in or near black neighborhoods—were, by some accounts, kept colder than comfortable for swimmers. Covenants barred blacks from the massive Stuyvesant Town housing development he made possible. Disinvestment in public transportation, relied upon by poor New Yorkers, was official policy. "Dirty" and "colored" individuals were steered away from the best parks. Through it all, systemic segregation, instituted from on high by one of the most powerful nonelected public officials in U.S. history, is as enduring a legacy as his great Verrazano-Narrows Bridge.

Moses did not reserve his contempt exclusively for New Yorkers of color. "He doesn't love the people," his friend Frances Perkins told Moses's legendary biographer Robert

Caro in an interview for his opus *The Power Broker.* "He loves the public, but not as people. . . . It's a great amorphous mass to him; it needs to be bathed, it needs to be aired, it needs recreation." Even some of Moses's grander successes at the Bronx's Orchard Beach and in his New Deal pools exhibit a monumental scale that speaks to his view of the public as a mass, rather than a collection of individuals needful of quiet or beauty.

Moses painted the city by numbers—dollars, units, blocks, jobs, and cars, preferably ones traveling the lattice crust of highways he baked into the city. Individuals didn't serve as beneficiaries or co-creators of Moses's vision, only as boundaries. The most famous of these, Jane Jacobs, proved remarkably successful in that role, and many others. The writer and activist employed grassroots organizing to block Moses's plans to extend Fifth Avenue through Washington Square Park, demolish part of the West Village in the name of urban renewal, and ram an eight-lane elevated highway across Manhattan. The human costs of such projects, to Jacobs, were paramount; to Moses, the cost to the "city as system" was of primary concern.

Such was the pique he felt at any and all opposition that his ideal neighborhood might be the one that arose along his Cross Bronx Expressway in the 1980s. The city covered the windows of adjacent, abandoned apartment buildings with decals of potted plants and Venetian blinds, a Potemkin village without complaints, or people, to consider.

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For a pivotal block of years in the 1960s and after, Jacobs played Moses's foil in the streets and in her books, refuting his theories of city-making with examples and inspiration drawn from her beloved Manhattan neighborhood. The West Village served as the observational lab for *The Death and Life of Great American Cities,* the enduring classic that began her influential investigations on the intersections of design, economics, and urban social life. Where Moses found aging, dense structures filled with an undesirable mix of families, businesses, and industry, Jacobs saw communities built by neighbors invested in their streets and one another.

Resident uprisings against Moses's plans, fanned by Jacobs and her fellow community activists, preserved the charm of many Lower Manhattan neighborhoods. But Moses-style destruction and Jacobs's drive to protect extant neighborhoods and their built environments are another pair of curious cousins. When "preservation" is perverted by the privileged into not-in-my-backyard politics, it can breed exclusions just as pernicious as displacement. The city's designation of many blocks and buildings in Jacobs's West Village as historic landmarks, in conjunction with altered zoning, spared the area out-of-context high-rises. But it also starved the neighborhood of more middle- and low-income units, which might have stopped, or at least stalled, the neighborhoods' contemporary gutting by the wealthy.

Jacobs, for her part, was not averse to new housing in the neighborhood, nor unaware of the perils of rising unaffordability. She pushed for the development of the subsidized West Village Houses, an idea born from the community, after Moses's urban renewal plan was defeated. But the development ended up a small, dull, low-rise Band-Aid—an insufficient counterweight to the prevailing winds of gentrification. Elsewhere, the public housing and middle-income co-ops, built alongside luxury towers and cultural complexes on Moses's "renewal" sites, stand as islands of affordability in ever-gentrifying seas. Those units, though born out of destruction and displacement, do function as Moses intended: they provide housing to New Yorkers who, without them, would have long ago been swept from town by affluence into unglamorous Jersey or the growing ranks of the suburban poor.

History's plans, like the long-term results and effects of designs for the city, are unpredictable. But while the less desirable results of Jacobs's vision are not always visible, Moses's shortcomings are embedded in the concrete that New Yorkers traverse every day. His love for the car is felt not just in the shadows of overpasses or dizzy footbridges over his highways, but on their edges. Along parts of the Cross Bronx Expressway, agglomerations of driving schools, auto shops, and car washes thrive, and for good reason—this is a realm made more for chassis and tires than for people.

To Moses's champions, he's a visionary who brought unprecedented investment into the city, updated its infrastructure for the future, and gave parks to its people—all of this is true. But he only earned the moniker *master builder* because he was a master bureaucrat who broke the public contract with loathing for both the laws and the people he was supposed to serve. Moses's New York is one based on a doctrine of rationality and efficiency, where communities are fungible and a scale model is a reliable stand-in for the messy intricacy of life as lived. Olmsted's New York may have also been created by destroying presents and pasts to sculpt parkways and parks. But what separates his vision from Moses's, and joins him to Jacobs, is that the inhabitants of his parks, like the residents of her West Village, were also meant to determine the ultimate shape of their surroundings through use. The New Yorks of Olmsted and Jacobs are still fraught with unforeseen consequences and collateral damage; but moored by humanist ideals, they're also far kinder.

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I often tread the pavers of Olmsted's Eastern Parkway—sometimes on my way to the Long Meadow, Botanic Garden, or library. On a June Sunday afternoon, I sat on a bench across from the First Baptist Church of Crown Heights as a jazz quartet jammed out front in the open air. This is the kind of pleasant happenstance that I can no longer separate from the setting, or its designer. The ghost of Olmsted sits beneath those pavers along with his legacy's quiet contradictions—the buried histories, like that of forgotten Carrville here—which for most never infringe on the splendor of New York's cherished public spaces.

Olmsted's realms are scattered throughout the city, but Moses haunts almost everywhere. He hovers over the ball courts crafted from leftover land next to the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, over his triumphant Triborough Bridge and the cool waters of Astoria Pool, over the abandoned beachside blocks of the Rockaways and the gleaming marble and glamour of Lincoln Center—beautiful places all, but spaces in which you feel like just another cell in the arteries of the city, an expendable element that will eventually go its way and leave scant hints of its existence. And there's little chance of escape from Moses's New York. Leaving the city one summer weekend to hike in the Ramapo Mountains, I met him in the dull whir of traffic on his Palisades Interstate Parkway. There in wild New Jersey, I stepped over a brook strewn with litter to follow the trail across the highway.

Specters of what was also inhabit the irony-rich West Village. The same old buildings and crooked streets with which Jacobs fell in love still define its air. But much of what she championed here—the street culture of looking after your neighbor, the complex ecosystem of businesses supporting one another, the diversity of uses and people—has been devoured by aspirants of a *Sex and the City* ideal made at home by speculative capital. Jacobs's former home at 555 Hudson Street, a candy store she and her husband renovated into their home of twenty-one years, now houses Next Step Realty—a firm that touts "complimentary transportation in our luxury SUVs" and its own "docu-series," bringing the stories of moneyed house hunters to the masses on ABC Family. Storefronts sit empty, not because of a lack of demand, but because the rent is too high for anything but the most expensive boutiques or national chains. Like the neighborhood's deviance from Manhattan's grid, here where West 4th is allowed to intersect West 10th, the place most synonymous with Jacobs's vision meets the locus of its starkest erosion. The grip that even the city's giants can exert on its shape and psyche is tenuous.