

Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

Fairfield, John D. *The Mysteries of the Great City: The Politics of Urban Design, 1877–1937*. (Ohio State Urban Life and Urban Landscape Series). Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993. Pp. xi, 320, Illustrations. \$35 (US)

Blackford, Mansel G. *The Lost Dream: Businessmen and City Planning on the Pacific Coast, 1890–1920*. (Ohio State Urban Life and Urban Landscape Series). Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993. Pp. xiii. 189. Illustrations. \$58.50 (US)

Eric Mumford

Volume 23, Number 2, March 1995

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1016640ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016640ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (print)

1918-5138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Mumford, E. (1995). Review of [Fairfield, John D. *The Mysteries of the Great City: The Politics of Urban Design, 1877–1937*. (Ohio State Urban Life and Urban Landscape Series). Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993. Pp. xi, 320, Illustrations. \$35 (US) / Blackford, Mansel G. *The Lost Dream: Businessmen and City Planning on the Pacific Coast, 1890–1920*. (Ohio State Urban Life and Urban Landscape Series). Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993. Pp. xiii. 189. Illustrations. \$58.50 (US)]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 23(2), 57–58. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016640ar>

closely integrated with the statistical material. (As was done on pp.117-121, in the fascinating section on the organization of labour markets in pubs.) There also might have been more evidence for the patterns of popular demand after 1815, as this is a key element of the thesis. But despite these faults, the book is of obvious importance because it argues that factors familiar to a seventeenth century urban historian such as population growth and demography continued to have the most influence on labour in the nation's largest market well into the nineteenth century, which came to be changed, as Adam Smith predicted, more by increased competition than by industrialisation.

Craig Muldrew
Cambridge University

Fairfield, John D. *The Mysteries of the Great City: The Politics of Urban Design, 1877-1937*. (Ohio State Urban Life and Urban Landscape Series). Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993. Pp. xi, 320, Illustrations. \$35 (US).

Blackford, Mansel G. *The Lost Dream: Businessmen and City Planning on the Pacific Coast, 1890-1920*. (Ohio State Urban Life and Urban Landscape Series). Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993. Pp. xiii, 189. Illustrations. \$58.50 (US).

John D. Fairfield's *The Mysteries of the Great City* is an ambitious attempt to explore the development of American urban planning from Frederick Law Olmsted to the New Deal. Fairfield posits two "distinct traditions" in American urban reform, one based on "traditional republican and free labor values" exemplified by Olmsted and Henry George, the other a "realistic and pragmatic tradition" linked to the rise of corporate capitalism and best represented by Chicago School sociologist Robert E.

Park. Fairfield traces efforts to shape American urban development in light of these two "traditions," ranging widely over vast tracts of American social, political and urban history and synthesizing much previous scholarship. His book offers a useful overview of many of the major texts and issues of the early years of American urban planning, and could serve as an introduction to its intellectual history.

Yet in his effort to situate the development of American planning discourse within such diverse realities of urban development as suburbanization, labor struggles, tenement reform, zoning and the politics of transit, Fairfield telescopes so much detailed urban and planning history that the thread of his argument sometimes becomes difficult to follow. His rapid march through the major moments in the development of American planning suggests—despite his cogent criticisms of the elitist nature of what he calls the "realist tradition"—that he is still writing within the intellectual parameters of the planning profession itself. While he makes a sustained effort to discuss the actual economic and political forces shaping urban development, his book, like much of the literature it considers, conveys little of the physical and social presence of specific American cities and neighborhoods in this period, raising doubts about its subtitle, "The Politics of Urban Design."

In fact the book is more focused on the politics and social context of the planners themselves than on specific urban design outcomes, and its broad scope makes very different urban social and physical contexts seem to blur together. Only when Fairfield turns to the development of Park's Chicago School of Sociology and in the process gives us a place-specific account of the importance of the 1919 Chicago race riots in spurring interest in urban problems does he

fully convey a sense of the relationship between planning ideas and a particular urban social reality, but even here his focus quickly returns to planner-sociologists like Clarence Perry and their influential but abstract paradigm of the neighborhood unit. To continue to examine the specific interfaces between physical and social reality and the planners' ideas in the entire period covered by the book would of course mean either an exhaustingly encyclopedic study or a less ambitious historical scope, but either might have led to more new insights into the often familiar material.

There is no question that American planners have had a considerable influence on American urban development, but it is also evident that both "traditions" Fairfield identifies basically failed to achieve their ambitious goals. While Fairfield's book is a step towards better explaining the actual social, economic and political context of American planning, its very broad historical scope and continuing focus on the ideas of the planners themselves means that more difficult historical work is still needed to understand the complex and often tragic relationship between planners' intentions and the social and physical results that remain with us.

Mansel Blackford's *The Lost Dream*, on the other hand, aims to provide an account of the relationship between businessmen and efforts at city planning in San Francisco, Oakland, Los Angeles, Seattle and Portland, Oregon between 1890 and 1920. While the five cities under discussion are unquestionably similar in all being sited on the Pacific Coast, it is not clear that the five are best compared with each other. As Blackford himself says, these cities "were hardly unique" in expanding post-Civil War America; it might have been more illuminating, as Gunther Barth and others have done, to seek affinities in their develop-

ment with non-coastal cities like Denver. In fact it hardly matters, as the book is mainly a concise summary, based largely on contemporary newspaper accounts and previous scholarship, of the political context of five City Beautiful plans produced between 1906 and 1912: Daniel Burnham's Plan for San Francisco, Charles Mulford Robinson's (unfortunately consistently given as "Charles Mumford Robinson," suggesting lax editing) plans for Oakland and Los Angeles, Virgil Bogue's Plan for Seattle, and Edward Bennett's Plan for Portland.

In San Francisco, Blackford's focus is on why the destruction wrought by the 1906 earthquake did not lead to the execution of Burnham's plan; he emphasizes the importance of the paralysis brought on by conflict between labor and management. In Oakland, by contrast, he looks at why Robinson's limited and realistic plan was more fully implemented than more ambitious plans elsewhere. He then examines Robinson's plan for Los Angeles (1907), where Robinson proposed a new railroad station and a civic center "to dignify and emphasize the historic old Plaza," a remnant of the Spanish colonial origins of the city, and where he projected a new park and boulevard system on the Olmsted model. Little of this plan was executed as intended, and Blackford details once again how the construction of the Owens Valley aqueduct, the Federally-funded construction of the new artificial harbor at San Pedro, and the first large-scale implementation of land-use zoning set Los Angeles on its path of massive decentralized growth, a story already well told in Robert Fogelson's *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850-1930* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).

Blackford then turns to Seattle and yet another exercise in City Beautiful planning, Virgil Bogue's ambitious if rather ungainly plan of 1912, rejected by the

voters as too expensive. Once again he offers an overview of the political context of the plan, based on archival research and the use of contemporary newspaper accounts. His final chapter is devoted to the adoption of Burnham's associate Edward Bennett's 1911 plan for Portland, again with much of the account based on newspaper reports of the time. In each case he makes clear that much of the support for City Beautiful planning came from reform-minded businessmen. This is hardly a startling conclusion, but certainly one that may be of interest to planning advocates today.

Eric Mumford
School of Architecture
Washington University, St. Louis

Borneman, John. *Belonging in the Two Berlins: Kinship, Nation, State.* (Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology) New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992. Pp. 400. 5 figures, 1 plate. \$59.95 (US)

As a former resident of pre-unification East Berlin, I was intrigued by how Borneman employed ethnographic analysis and representations to correlate individual lifecourse reconstructions of the majority ethnic Germans with state narratives in East and West Berlin. The author rejects the view that everyday life is unpolitical and asks, in constituting his object of study, "how, with what mechanisms, did the two German states try to produce different subjects in the postwar Berlin, and what particular subjectivities have been constructed?" (30)

Borneman considers everyday activities and experiences central to the construction of kinship and belonging over the lifecourse of individuals and for the legitimacy of a state. State discourses and identity strategies, however, in seeking to assert control over the citizens in

the nation "set the ideational framework in which experiences are categorized and periodized" (32) and provide individual experiences coherence and identity. Using the concept of the experiential trope is an elegant manner of exploring the "slippage" between privileged state narratives and individual and generational response strategies, especially in the face of the tendency of people to make their narratives "fit" the state's as much as possible. Germany has had a historically tenuous relationship with the legitimacy of state narratives, exacerbated by experiences in twentieth century Weimar and Nazi Germany.

The author worked with three groups of informants during seven months of fieldwork in the GDR and thirteen in West Berlin: Generation I comprised older residents born between 1910 and 1935; Generation II were those of a similar age cohort as Borneman born between 1940 and 1955; and Generation III included those born after 1960. Borneman concentrated his own fieldwork on those of Generation II, after discovering previously conducted and published interviews and oral histories in both East and West with Generation I, and youth studies with Generation III. State narratives of kinship and belonging objectified in legal and political codes of the GDR reveal into two phases: 1) the *Aufbau* or construction from 1949 (the founding year for both states) to 1965/68; 2) sentimentalization from 1965 to 1989. The Federal Republic of Germany pursued in the same two periods strategies of restoration and desentimentalization.

Borneman discerns three different types of "emplotment" domains for the experiences in each country: aesthetic, ideational and teleological. For example, the aesthetically emplotted "romantic mode" of GDR policies "perceived its policies and citizenry in idealized form, as progressive, following a nearly sacred mis-