

# WILSON CENTER DIGEST

*Summaries of recent papers, studies, and meetings at the Wilson Center*

## *"The American Planning Tradition: Culture and Policy."*

Wilson Center Press. Distributed by Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, Hampden Station,  
Baltimore, Md. 21211. 328 pp. \$59.95, hardcover; \$24.95, paper.

Editor: *Robert Fishman*

Today, the passionate talk among planners and social critics is of revitalized downtowns, suburban sprawl, edge cities, and the New Urbanism. But intense discussion about the future shape of the American city and its environs has been going on for a long time, notes Fishman, a historian at Rutgers University, Camden, New Jersey. He and 10 other specialists examine this tradition and related developments.

American "planning," Fishman says, dates from the early 19th century, when New York and rival port cities on the Eastern seaboard began forging transportation links to the interior beyond the Alleghenies. The canals and railroads they built ushered in such an urban boom that they turned to planning not only to foster growth but to avoid being destroyed by it. Major projects such as Frederick Law Olmsted's Central Park were launched.

Although Olmsted (1822–1903) "best embodies the strengths" of the planning tradition in the century after 1830, that tradition reached its height only in the decades after his death, Fishman says, when planners and others engaged in "a great debate over the future form of the nation."

On one side were the "metropolitanists," such as Chicago planner Daniel Burnham and the authors of the *Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs* (1929). They believed, writes Fishman, "that the basic urban form established in the 19th century would persist . . . even if 'the metropolitan area' grew to 20 million people and stretched 50 miles or more from its historic core." The gigantic city's economic and cultural focal point would continue to be its downtown. Most of the people would live and work in a surrounding "factory zone," with the residential suburbs beyond it "still a refuge for a relatively small elite." Beyond the suburbs was the "outer zone" of farms, forests, and parklands.

On the other side of the debate were the

"regionalists," such as social critic Lewis Mumford. For them, Brown University historian John L. Thomas notes, "true regional planning . . . began not arbitrarily with the city as a unit in itself, but naturally with the region viewed as a whole." The big city—crowded, inhuman, inefficient—would go the way of the dinosaur. As central cities shrank, the regionalists envisioned planned "New Towns" springing up throughout the region, with each set in an open, green environment and providing both homes and work for the inhabitants. The dispersed New Towns would be linked by regional networks of highways and electric power.

"[The] romantic regionalist hopes for a recasting of America flared in the early years of the New Deal," writes Thomas, "flickered as the nation geared for war, and were seemingly extinguished in the war's aftermath," as regional planning became much more "theoretical and technocratic." With the onset of the Great Depression, says Fishman, American planning "entered a period of prolonged crisis. . . . [Even] at its most pro-urban, the New Deal had a bittersweet message for the cities: The era of urban leadership in national planning was over."

Only in recent decades, after the failure of urban renewal and new appreciation for what author Jane Jacobs called the "close-grained diversity" of healthy cities, has the American planning tradition been revived, says Fishman. And both the metropolitan and the regionalist wings of the tradition have been revitalized, with the one "rethink[ing] and reaffirm[ing] the meaning and importance of cities," and the other, in response to sprawl, doing the same with regard to its "commitment to human settlements in harmony with nature." Today, the debates about the future shape of the city and its environs can be heard again at the annual meetings of the Congress for the New Urbanism.

*“China Environment Series, Issue 3, 1999–2000.”*

A report by the Working Group on Environment in U.S.-China Relations, sponsored by the Wilson Center’s Environmental Change and Security Project. Editor: *Jennifer L. Turner*

China’s impressive economic progress in recent decades has come at a cost: environmental degradation. The nation’s “rivers, reservoirs, and other water resources are largely fouled,” says Chris Nielsen, executive director of the China Project of the Harvard University Committee on Environment. “Its urban air is laden with harmful particulates, gases, and toxins.”

In China’s fast-growing cities, traffic congestion has gotten so bad that people traveling less than six miles often find walking or cycling faster than going by car or bus, says Robert E. Paaswell, director of the Region II University Transportation Center at City College in New York. With demand for popular cars such as the Red Flag Auto rising, Beijing is “investing heavily” in building

highways. But while motor vehicles (half of them trucks) increase by more than 15 percent a year, roads increase by only 12 percent.

Vehicular pollution has resulted in a “drastic” rise in respiratory ailments in Beijing and other Chinese cities, note He Kebin and Chang Cheng, a professor and a graduate student, respectively, in Tsinghua University’s Department of Environmental Science and Engineering.

“Policymakers in China have made great progress in setting standards for emissions and fuels,” they write. “However, in order to meet these standards, national and municipal governments will need to emphasize policies to strengthen infrastructure, expand public transport, and promote the development of clean vehicle technology.”

*“Who Murdered ‘Marigold’?—New Evidence on the Mysterious Failure of Poland’s Secret Initiative to Start U.S.-North Vietnamese Peace Talks, 1966.”*

Working Paper No. 27 of the Wilson Center’s Cold War International History Project.

Author: *James G. Hershberg*

One of the minor mysteries left over from the Vietnam War is the question of whether a genuine opportunity to open peace talks between Hanoi and Washington was lost in 1966 with the collapse of a Polish initiative code-named Operation Marigold. President Lyndon B. Johnson said North Vietnam simply was “not ready to talk to us,” but many critics insisted that U.S. bombing of Hanoi that December blew the chance for negotiations. James G. Hershberg, a historian at George Washington University, says that a recently obtained 128-page postmortem by Jerzy Michalowski, a close adviser to Poland’s then-foreign minister, along with other new evidence, suggests that Marigold was not a “sham.”

After a series of secret indirect contacts between the warring sides, brokered by Poland’s communist regime, Marigold reached a climax in December 1966, Hershberg says, “with a tentative apparent agreement on a 10-point program to end the war,” and a secret U.S.-North Vietnamese meet-

ing in Warsaw was scheduled for December 6. It appears, however, says Hershberg, that on that date—amid complaints about U.S. bombing and the American position on the tentative agreement—“senior Polish officials gave the Americans the clear impression that the conditions” for the meeting were not yet right, but that the Polish mediators would continue their efforts. Hanoi, meanwhile, sent an emissary, Nguyen Dinh Phuong, to Warsaw with instructions for the North Vietnamese ambassador. The two men, Phuong told Hershberg, waited in vain at their embassy on December 6 for a U.S. representative to show up. Hanoi, it seems, had neglected to tell Warsaw about Phuong’s mission.

The meeting never came off. It was at first delayed, then, after another round of U.S. bombing, canceled. Yet even if a meeting had been held, and talks continued, Hershberg doubts that “a rapid conclusion to the war could have been achieved, given the mindsets on both sides.”