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Trees Nestled Among Skyscrapers: Frederick Law Olmsted and the Creation of Central Park

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HIS499 Department of History Senior Seminar
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Fall 2012

An aerial shot of New York City affords its viewers the sight of an unmistakable skyline bedecked with glittering lights, crowded with lofty skyscrapers and checkered by perfectly parallel and perpendicular streets that appear choked with bright yellow taxis and the blur of a peopled mass. Amidst all of this, however, is a prospect that seems both strangely out of place and yet completely natural: a perfectly rectangular stretch of green with patches of blue and winding strips of brown in the center of the island known as Central Park. Its 800 acres has grown up with the city, developing into a cherished place for people to come and work, play or even sleep under its trees. Its beauty attracts many visitors each year and yet perhaps few would guess the degree to which the ostensibly natural grounds were the painstaking fruits of two men's labor. It would be one in particular, however, whose beliefs about the landscape and society at large would inform the park's purpose. When Frederick Law Olmsted helped to design this space, he undertook the task with a strong concern for the proper character of America's democracy as well as its people.

In the remarkable degree of scholarship that has been written on Frederick Law Olmsted since a resurgence of interest in his life during the early 1970s, there have been a number of varying interpretations regarding the social attitudes with which he approached his first major project, New York's Central Park. Following a classic pendulum pattern, study has vacillated between emphasizing his democratic vision for the park to placing more of a focus upon his esteem for gentility. In the former, scholars such as biographer Laura Wood Roper described Olmsted's idea of Central Park as a place for Americans of all classes to come and enjoy natural beauty together; the park's open access reflected Olmsted's interest in the park's service to all city-dwellers.[1] In the latter, however, historians such as Geoffrey Blodgett objected to this

[1] Laura Wood Roper. *FLO: A Biography of Frederick Law Olmsted.* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1973).

flattering view and instead drew attention to Olmsted's sympathy for aristocratic notions of refinement, with the park acting as a civilizing institution for the betterment of the working classes.[2] These views were eventually somewhat reconciled by later scholars such as Susanna Zetzel, who portrayed Olmsted as one with democratic convictions, qualified by his regard for gentlemanly manners.[3] This more balanced approach has recently been overtaken somewhat with another wave of more positive scholarship, linked with historians such as Witold Rybczynski and Elizabeth Barlow Rogers who accept Olmsted as a man of his time but have chosen to cast his intentions in a sympathetic light, writing in a general tone of celebration rather than critique.[4] For many of these men and women, the papers of Frederick Law Olmsted have been an invaluable resource and the compilation of his letters and writings has been a major catalyst for ongoing scholarly discussion of Olmsted's life, philosophy and work.[5]

Albert Fein, *Frederick Law Olmsted and the American Environmental Tradition, (*New York: George Braziller, 1972).

[2] Robert Lewis, "Frontier and Civilization in the Thought of Frederick Law Olmsted," *American Quarterly* 29 (1977): 385-403.
Geoffrey Blodgett, "Frederick Law Olmsted: Landscape Architecture as Conservative Reform," *The Journal of American History* 62 (1976): 868-889.

[3] Susanna Zetzel's article, "The Garden in the Machine: The Construction of Nature in Olmsted's Central Park" (found in *Prospects* 14 (1989): 291-339) is a fascinating look at the various contradictions that characterize both Central Park and the beliefs that contributed to its design. Zetzel examines the middle ground that Olmsted navigated between nature and artificiality, 19th century genteel reformers and the Jeffersonian agrarian tradition as well as the civilized style of Andrew Jackson Downing and Henry David Thoreau's enthusiasm for the ruggedness of the wilderness. My own paper follows more in the spirit of her work than that of other sources that I have read. For another more balanced look at the competing impulses in Olmsted's goals, see Charles Beveridge, Paul Rocheleau and David Larkin's *Frederick Law Olmsted: Designing the American Landscape* (New York: Universe Publishing, 1998).

[4] Witold Rybczynski, "Why We Need Olmsted Again," *The Wilson Quarterly* 23 (1999): 15-21.
Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, *Landscape Design: A Cultural and Architectural History*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001).

[5] See *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted Vols. 1-7*. The Frederick Law Olmsted Papers project began in the early 1970's and published its first volume in 1977. The project has made Olmsted's papers available in book form and therefore accessible outside of the Library of Congress, where they are still housed in the Manuscript Division. Several of the scholars involved in recent Olmsted scholarship, such as Charles Beveridge and David Schulyer, have worked on the project, and others, such as Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, the first administrator of Central Park since Olmsted himself, have acted as outside sources of assistance. The project is in the midst of preparing its eighth volume for publication and plans to have a total of twelve volumes, providing coverage for the whole of Olmsted's career. On their

One significant reason that the resolution of these two conflicting impulses has proven so elusive is that Olmsted's social sensibilities were a complex blend of compassion, conscientiousness and exhortation. His life experience instilled in him a sense of sympathy for those in the working class and for the great potential for misery that this condition could engender. Alongside of this, however, was Olmsted's undeniable regard for refinement and having an appreciation for taste and cleanliness. The creation of Central Park brought all of these values to the fore as Olmsted set out to establish a public space whose beauty and orderliness may have appeared to appeal to the upper classes, but which would actually be open for all city dwellers to enjoy. His vision for the park was, therefore, not necessarily either democratic or aristocratic, but republican in spirit, incorporating accessibility with education, physical refreshment with social uplift and participation of all with the oversight of the few. It was an endeavor wholly resonant with the pulse of 19th century America.[6]

Frederick Law Olmsted was born in 1822. The first several decades of his life appeared as a series of aimless endeavors, yet in reality each provided him with a collection of skills and attitudes that would shape his vision of New York's Central Park. Olmsted's concern for the disadvantaged, his appreciation of gentility and administrative ability, as well as his reverence for nature all emerge from his early life experiences. Olmsted was raised in Connecticut and his New England upbringing was to greatly impact the value that he placed upon community ties and neighborly connection as well as the significance of education and the capacity of all to learn. He was the firstborn of John and Charlotte Olmsted and had only one other full-blooded

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website is information about the people involved as well as the timetable of the project (http://www.olmsted.org/flo).

[6] Throughout this paper, I will be using the term "republican" and "classical republican" in reference to the classical republicanism that had a significant presence in America during the era of the Early Republic. This ideology is predicated upon the expectation that citizens will be politically active and therefore places an emphasis upon civic virtue as a result of political and moral education.

sibling, also named John, before his mother died in 1826. The two became close throughout their youth as well as into adulthood and through his brother's later tenure at Yale University Frederick gained several significant acquaintances who would impact his views of city life, social reform as well as of the transcendental power of nature.[7]

Despite the early death of his mother, Olmsted had a secure home and steady relationships with not only his siblings, but his father as well. John Olmsted Sr. enjoyed financial success as a merchant in Hartford and his son grew up in a home that regularly included such objects of luxury as mahogany chairs, a piano and a generous collection of books.[8] Frederick Law Olmsted would come to depend upon the family's continuing monetary prosperity as he searched for a steady life's pursuit.[9] This consistent financial security exposed Olmsted to the taste, manners and refinement of the genteel classes that he would so come to admire.

Despite the stability that his family provided him, a sense of uncertainty would continue to characterize the early part of Olmsted's life. This manifested itself not only in the amount of time that it took before he discovered a definite vocation, but also in his childhood tendency to wander about the villages outside of Hartford, exploring the countryside and enjoying the outdoors.[10] Olmsted also experienced a tumultuous series of attempts at formal education. His early school experiences were usually physically and mentally jarring as the young boy experienced strikingly violent disciplinary techniques, which many of his teachers, most of them clergymen, practiced. Compared to these later experiences, Olmsted's earlier time with the more mild mannered Reverend Whittemore and the opportunities for wandering and learning around

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[7] Roper, *FLO*, 5-12.
[8] Roper, *FLO*, 12-13.
[9] Charles Capen McLaughlin. "The Environment: Olmsted's Odyssey," *The Wilson Quarterly* 6 (1982): 80.
[10] Elizabeth Stevenson. *ParkMaker: A Life of Frederick Law Olmsted*. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1977), 1.

the small farm where he then lived, were an idyllic interlude between home life and formal schooling.[11] It is significant to note that Olmsted experienced very little formal education and yet would devote much of his life to designing public institutions that he hoped would have an educative effect upon those who visited them. It is a testament not only to his own unhappy school experiences but also to his belief in the superiority of nature's influence over the power of human instruction that landscape was to be the medium by which this effect would take place.

At the end of this scattered schooling lay Olmsted's expected entrance to Yale College, a prospect that his unfortunate exposure to sumac poisoning at the age of fourteen, blighted; the encounter rendered him almost blind for a time, making intensive academic study an impossibility in the near future. As a result, Olmsted once more began an education through private tutoring, this time however, concerning the study of civil engineering instead of books and religion. While time with his previous tutors had done little to affirm his personal piety, Olmsted's childhood experiences with independent reading had been extensive and constructive. The curiosity that characterized his time in the outdoors also carried over into his literary habits, as he explored the libraries of family members and friends. His uncle Jonathan Law was a friend of the poet John Greenleaf Whittier and had an abundance of books (as well as several garden beds) to share with the young Olmsted. The collections of his grandmother as well as of his own father also provided him with ample reading material ranging from biographies of British poets to the nature of landscape and scenery.[12]

John Olmsted Sr. also provided other forms of education for his children apart from private religious instruction, exposing his two eldest especially to cultured experiences such as musical gatherings and lectures given by prominent intellectuals of the day. In addition, the two

[11] Roper, *FLO*, 9.
[12] Roper, *FLO*, 10-11.

boys developed skills such as language, drawing and horsemanship.[13] Significantly, John Olmsted Sr. found great delight in beautiful scenery and brought his family on trips across New England in search of picturesque landscapes and the beauty of God's creation, further bolstering Olmsted's already eclectic education. Although Olmsted never truly owned this spirituality, his father's love and appreciation of natural beauty powerfully impacted him in a way that later greatly informed his work as one who would make a living from bringing this beauty of the countryside to urban spaces.[14]

It is therefore, perhaps not surprising that travel would become a significant part of Olmsted's life and work, for despite the uncertainty that surrounded his future prospects, Olmsted's intellectual enthusiasm, emotional fervor and natural curiosity would continue to drive the courses that he would pursue before coming to his ultimate career. He would find little satisfaction in his early adulthood, as he experimented in a variety of trades but his experiences did provide him with skills that would serve him well in the creation of Central Park. Studying civil engineering taught him to survey land and gave him the opportunity to practice drawing hypothetical cities. A brief period working in a Manhattan dry goods business served to familiarize Olmsted with the stresses of city life, while an unhappy voyage at sea under a tyrannical captain gave him a sense of sympathy and concern for those in positions of subordination. Both would inform the consideration that Olmsted would later show to downtrodden urban dwellers in his planning of Central Park.[15]

As he recuperated from seafaring, Olmsted spent time with his brother John at Yale. The people with whom he interacted profoundly shaped Olmsted's ideas regarding science and even

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[13] Roper, *FLO*, 11.
[14] Lee Hall. *Olmsted's America: An "Unpractical Man" and His Vision of Civilization*. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995), 14-15.
[15] Stevenson, *Parkmaker*, 12-13
Hall, *An "Unpractical Man,"* 18.

nature. One Professor Silliman gave lectures on science at the college, which stimulated Olmsted's interest in scientific knowledge and its practical application.[16] His more abstract notions regarding rural scenery, nature and even the limited character of his education were encouraged and uplifted by Elizabeth Baldwin, a young woman with whom Olmsted had a relationship that appeared to be characterized, on his part, more by admiration and awe than romance. She was a key voice in Olmsted's life, especially as he grappled with the informality of his schooling and whether or not he was able to truly become a "cultured man." She affirmed his ability to rise above his scattered education and encouraged his reading of authors such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, John Ruskin and Thomas Carlyle.[17] These men significantly impacted Olmsted, deepening his understanding of nature and shaping his views of education, morality and the spirit of social reform. Ruskin and Carlyle, both Europeans and known as "prophets" of the 19th century because of their critical writings, would provoke Olmsted to ponder nature's educative effects, the moral underpinnings of art as well as action as a result of duty.[18] When combined with his identity as an American and a New Englander, these exhortations to action would contribute to Olmsted's developing sense of responsibility for others, a belief that undergirded the republican spirit that his later projects, including Central Park, would embody.

It was during this time that Olmsted turned to agriculture as a profession. He was resolved, however, not to simply commit himself to being a farmer, but rather a scientific farmer. This decision united his affinity with yeomanry with his desire for the public good, given the vast importance of agriculture to the nation and the possibility of improving it through scientific

[16] Stevenson, *Parkmaker*, 27-29.
[17] Roper, *FLO,* 40.
[18] Encyclopedia Britannica online has two very brief introductory articles on both Carlyle and Ruskin that provide a basic understanding for the general context of their works and a significant amount of both men's writings can be found through Project Gutenberg. For an article on John Ruskin's views of education, which I found to be especially pertinent in my research, see Dr. Sara Atwood's article "John Ruskin on Education" at < http://www.infed.org/thinkers/john_ruskin.htm#cite>.

exploration, and illustrated the effect of his upbringing in the independent farming community of New England.[19] Even this venture, however, was to have an uncertain beginning, with Olmsted moving between three different farms before finally settling upon a plot of land on Staten Island in 1848. Prior to this, he had spent time with other farmers in order to study the ways in which other agriculturists worked their own land. Olmsted owed this part of his life not only to these models, but also to his father who had once more been willing and able to finance each of his endeavors. Although some poorly given financial advice rendered Olmsted unable to make much money from his farm, he demonstrated success in other ways, from gaining recognition for his crops at regional agricultural fairs to demonstrating a range of administrative abilities that he used to direct the laborers that worked for him, skills that would again prove invaluable in his later work with Central Park.[20]

With the domestic help of his Aunt Maria, Olmsted transformed his farm into a pleasant, well ordered home and it was not long before he also set about making improvements to the exterior parts of his land, changing locations of various buildings and reworking some natural elements by planting trees and creating a pond. During this project, he made use of the skill and eye that he had been developing in his time studying civil engineering in addition to the work of neighboring farmers.[21] Olmsted also continued to read widely, including the *Horticulturist*, a publication written by the popular American landscape designer Andrew Jackson Downing. Downing asserted that landscape design could act as a vehicle of social reform and improvement, an idea that Olmsted would adapt and later implement in his own landscaping endeavors.[22]

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[19] Hall, *An "Unpractical Man,"* 24.
[20] Charles Capen McLaughlin, introduction to *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, Vol. One: The Formative Years, 1822-1852*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977), 7.
[21] Stevenson, *Parkmaker*, 44-45.
[22] McLaughlin, *Papers of FLO Vol. Three* Introduction, 4.

Despite his growing appreciation of solitude, Olmsted was, gladly, not alone during this time of busyness and his brother John and their mutual friend Charles Loring Brace often visited him at his farm. Charley, as he was known to the Olmsted brothers, was a colleague from Yale, preparing for a life of Christian service, while John pursued a degree in medicine. Throughout their friendship, the three of them found within each other intellectual stimulation and provocation as they discussed subjects from the morality of slavery to the truth of the Christian faith. One of the ways in which Charley was especially influential for both brothers was the way in which he exposed the two of them to the ugly underside of urban life. Later the founder of the Children's Aid Society, he came to realize his call to work on the behalf of children on the streets of New York and became instrumental in illustrating for the Olmsted brothers the hardship and poverty that existed within the city.[23]

It was with these two men that Olmsted embarked upon his next journey abroad in the spring of 1850. John's health had always been tenuous and his family hoped that a trip to England would help his tuberculosis. Charley, on the other hand, was interested in gaining knowledge for his work concerning European methods of care for the less fortunate, including prisoners and children. The two planned a walking tour through England and Olmsted made a concerted effort to ensure that he would not be left behind.[24] The trip would later prove to be significant for Olmsted's career as well and he kept a detailed account of his experiences there that he would later turn into a book called *Walks and Talks of an American Farmer in England*.

His trip to England was to be the one of several excursions that would shape Olmsted's views of civilization, cities and the landscape. As a member of a family with English heritage, the visit was powerful on multiple levels for the young farmer. He took copious notes of the

[23] Stevenson, *Parkmaker,* 48.
[24] Stevenson, *Parkmaker,* 50-51.

manners that he encountered, the agricultural practices that he witnessed as well as the beauty that he saw. While the English countryside nearly overpowered his natural sensibilities with its expansive greenery and lush landscape, Olmsted was also struck by the poverty that he observed, especially in the city of Liverpool. The aristocratic tradition that still remained a part of English society offended the democratic convictions that he held, which recognized the natural rights that each human being enjoyed. In an echo of his wide reading, Olmsted adhered to the notion that it was the obligation of those fortunate enough to be among the upper strata of society to take on the responsibility and the duty of restoring the lower classes to not only liberty "but the capacity for liberty, for exercising the duties of liberty" through improvement. Too often, the elite unjustly left the impoverished classes to wallow in their brutal circumstances instead of attempting to assist their escape.[25] Olmsted also admired with concern the beautiful grounds of English estates as he became troubled by the knowledge that such beauty excluded the very class of people that made it possible.[26] The lack of attention and education given to the English working class constituted the more distressing parts of his journey and continued to fuel Olmsted's sense of social responsibility.

Despite these disturbances, Olmsted described with joy the beauty that he encountered and the observations that he made helped to hone a discerning eye of the natural landscape. Apart from the pastoral scenery of seemingly limitless stretches of grass that he wrote of in raptures, Olmsted also noted the beauty found in English parks. He was especially taken with the one recently built at Birkenhead, a space that he breathlessly called a "People's Garden." His writings describe an agreeably designed, well-adapted space, built in accordance with "science,

[25] Roper, *FLO*, 69.
[26] Hall, *An "Unpractical Man,"* 34.

taste and [an] enterprising spirit" that the public owned and all classes enjoyed.[27] Here it was that Olmsted found the reconciliation between aesthetic splendor and social conscientiousness. He was enormously pleased not only by the design of the park, but also by its accessibility and the benefit that it could bring to the wide range of visitors that it would attract.[28]

Walks and Talks was published in 1852 and proved to be the beginning of a literary career. In 1852, Olmsted accepted the task of traveling the American South on behalf of the newly established *New York Daily Times* and compiling his observations for publication in the newspaper's column.[29] This journey too would be influential for Olmsted's later career, crystallizing many of his beliefs about proper American character and gentility, especially as it pertained to American democracy and the free labor ideal that the North emphasized.[30]

In his descriptions of the South, Olmsted did not demonstrate either preconceived affection or distaste and again displayed his keen eye for detail through his extensive observations. Although his accounts were to be simply about general southern society, much of his correspondence invariably turned to slavery. In Olmsted's mind, after observing the lack of social amenities, community endeavors as well as the sorry state of homes and other buildings that he found, slavery was morally wrong and economically harmful. It was a system detrimental to both blacks and whites, a hindrance to either race's attempt to achieve a state of civilization, as well as utterly disastrous for the land.[31] Olmsted saw in the slave states a need for

[27] Frederick Law Olmsted, *Walks and Talks of an American Farmer in England* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967), 55.
[28] Hall, *An "Unpractical Man,"* 35.
[29] McLaughlin, *Papers of FLO Vol. One* Introduction,12-13.
[30] Beveridge, *Designing the American Landscape,"* 21.
[31] Roper, *FLO*, 89.

the free labor system and attributed the region's want of general prosperity and mediums of culture such as schools and lecture societies, to the type of labor upon which it depended.[32]

Even among the southern aristocracy, Olmsted saw little evidence of cultivated understanding or refinement, and the absence of beneficial institutions, he believed, prevented what little did exist from ever reaching the poorer classes. A significant departure from this overall unflattering picture that Olmsted painted of the South came as a result of a conversation with another of John's Yale colleagues, Samuel Perkins Allison, whom he met on a second trip to the South in 1853. By this time, Olmsted had long expressed admiration for gentility and it was this appreciation of gentlemanly behavior that disturbed his esteem for the free labor ideal. He and Allison engaged in a debate about the merits of both slave and free labor systems. Olmsted staunchly believed that the latter was the superior structure, but was forced to concede that though the northern system allowed for the "general elevation of all classes," it produced few who could be rightly given the title of "gentleman." Improving the desirability of the free labor system became a key component of Olmsted's beliefs regarding American society. Without providing the people at large with institutions of cultural uplift and contact with the refined, the general populace would never be able to attain that capacity for taste and degree of gentility that Olmsted valued so highly.[33] Throughout his southern journey, he grappled with the admirable qualities of generosity and courtesy that he found in southern gentlemen along with their deficiencies in what he saw as northern qualities of morality and industry. The former could not excuse the latter and, as in England, Olmsted expressed his wish to see the refinement of gentlemen united with the freedom of the plebeian.[34] Not only did Olmsted adhere to a

[32] Stevenson, *Parkmaker*, 78.
[33] Beveridge, *Designing the American Landscape*, 21.
[34] Beveridge, *Designing the American Landscape*, 17.

republican sense of social responsibility, but he also believed in the balance that republicanism found between improvement and sovereignty and cultivating virtue and facilitating liberty.

Olmsted would find a glimmer of what he was searching for on his second trip to the South, at the end of which both he and his brother John traveled through Texas. A series of German settlements that the two of them encountered near San Antonio, "living independently by their own labor, relishing the social and political freedom they had vainly sought at home [and] enjoying the intellectual pleasures accessible to well-cultivated minds even at the edge of the wilderness"[35] embodied everything that Olmsted believed about civilization: cleanliness, intellectual curiosity, culture, domesticity and hard work, many of the traits which had surrounded him growing up.[36] The Germans affirmed his hope that such virtues could be cultivated among the non-elite and that free labor, not the slavery that was so tied to southern aristocracy, could provide the environment in which this could be accomplished.

Olmsted would became active in the Free Soil movement, putting into action what his works about his experiences in the South expressed. It was his writing, however, that proved most profitable to him and in 1855, Olmsted was asked to become a partner in the New York Publishing Firm, Dix and Edwards, a position that granted him a salary, experience and widening spheres of influence. Olmsted met various authors from Ralph Waldo Emerson to Harriet Beecher Stowe and was given greater opportunities to travel abroad in Europe on behalf of *Putnam's Monthly*, one of the firm's magazines. Unfortunately, this period of enthusiasm was cut short when Dix and Edwards went bankrupt in 1857.[37]

It was to be a difficult year. John, who had undertaken charge of his brother's farm while Olmsted worked in Manhattan, died of tuberculosis, leaving behind his wife Mary and three

[35] Roper, *FLO*, 97.
[36] Hall, *An "Unpractical Man,"* 46.
[37] McLaughlin, *Papers of FLO Vol. One* Introduction, 16-17.

children. The farm was not doing well and, although he continued to write, Olmsted was once again without a steady source of income. It was perhaps because of this financial strain that he took advantage of an unexpected opportunity and applied for the position of the superintendence overseeing construction on a new park for New York City.[38]

Both Olmsted and the idea of Central Park had histories that began long before their intersection. The call for a city park on the burgeoning Manhattan peninsula had been gaining support in recent years as voices such as that of poet William Cullen Bryant and landscape designer Andrew Jackson Downing spoke in favor of establishing some kind of pastoral retreat in the midst of the rapidly growing metropolis.[39] Olmsted entered a climate of ideas and propositions that, like his own notions of park use, incorporated elements of egalitarian and elitist thought. The project quickly numbered many members of New York's upper classes amongst its advocates. They especially lamented the absence of a "large park for walking and driving" such as was to be found in abundance in the countries of Europe. The want of viable recreation was not the only reason for the growing agitation, however. Also in play were factors such as the desire to improve real estate values in the neighborhoods surrounding the park; the central location that was eventually decided upon, though it was extolled as a highly democratic symbol, would also be at the upper part of Manhattan, near the more fashionable neighborhoods of the city and would bolster the status of the homes already present along its edges.[40] Reform-minded citizens based their arguments upon the health benefits that a park would bring to the general public, while many also painted the park as a means for quelling the social disorder that

[38] Stevenson, *Parkmaker*, 151-153.
[39] Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 15.
[40] Rosenzweig and Blackmar's *The Park and the People* includes several sections that detail the various motivations that led to the creation of Central Park. See the first and second chapters especially.

the city's economic inequality and exploding population produced.[41] For many, the park project would also provide the opportunity to show New York City off to its best advantage, especially in comparison to the grand cities of England and France. The conversation that Olmsted entered, therefore, contained great potential for his contribution. For the park's supporters, however, the enormity of the money involved necessitated the park appealing to a range of interests in order for the people of the city to consider it a viable project.[42]

The original park site was a tract of land along the water on the East Side of the city called Jones Wood, which comprised the estate property of several wealthy families. Although this was for a while the determined location, it was not long before calls emerged for the park to be rather placed in the center of the island. Amongst a variety of other political considerations, advocates depicted the central location as less select about the distribution of its advantages and as more accessible to all parts of the city.[43] Pragmatism ultimately won the day and the refusal of the Jones Wood families to sell the land coupled with the increasing coalition of support for the central site, ensured that the latter location would triumph.[44]

With the site determined and the land obtained, work on the park began in 1854. Politics wrought change, however, and in 1857, a Republican legislature appointed a new park commission, which commenced its search for a like-minded superintendent to complete the administration and take leadership of the park's labor force.[45] It was into this tumult that Frederick Law Olmsted entered and began his association with New York's Central Park. All of the administrative skill and energy that he possessed became invaluable in this initial endeavor.

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[41] Rosenzweig and Blackmar, *The Park and the People*, 24-25.
[42] Rosenzweig and Blackmar, *The Park and the People*, 18.
[43] McLaughlin, *Papers of FLO Vol. Three* Introduction, 13-14.
[44] Rosenzweig and Blackmar, *The Park and the People*, 50.
[45] McLaughlin, *Papers of FLO Vol. Three* Introduction, 14.

Yet, despite his success in management, Olmsted's role would very soon change with the announcement of a competition that would determine the nature of the park's design.

It is important to note the inaccuracy of ascribing Central Park's design to Olmsted alone. In the years since the park was built, the name of Calvert Vaux has receded from partner of Frederick Law Olmsted to near obscurity. It was Vaux, however, who asked Olmsted to enter the competition with him and together, using Olmsted's practical knowledge of parks in addition to Vaux's design expertise, they created a winning entry. They called it "Greensward," after the broad swaths of pastoral greenery that they saw as the mainstay of their plan.

It is perhaps highly ironic that Olmsted, a self-deprecated "unpractical man" should later supplant Vaux, protégé of Andrew Jackson Downing, both in his career as well as in the national memory. Yet it was Olmsted whom the Park Commission named architect in chief of the park project in 1858. Both men's visions for Central Park, however, stemmed from similar ideas about natural beauty, nature's impact on humans as well as the needs of New York citizens and all city dwellers for a place of respite from urban life. Olmsted later described the park as a matter "of great importance as the first real park made in this country—a democratic development of the highest significance and on the success of which…much of the progress of art and esthetic culture in this country is dependent."[46] It is here, then that the tension emerges between the Olmsted who recognized the democratic potential for the park and the Olmsted who saw it as a medium of improvement for the masses. In order to navigate this tension, it is crucial to understand specifically Olmsted's beliefs about parks as well as his beliefs about people, for it is the fusion of these two views that reveals Olmsted's vision as republican in spirit, a balance between his concurrent democratic convictions and elitist attitudes.

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[46] Frederick Law Olmsted, "Letter to Parke Godwin" in *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, Vol. Three: Creating Central Park, 1857-1861*, ed. Charles Capen McLaughlin (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1983), 201.

It perhaps says something about the strength of Olmsted's opinion about parks that he was asked in 1875 to write a definition for the word in *The American Cyclopaedia: A Popular Dictionary of General Knowledge*. From his first exposure to European parks in England, Olmsted began to formulate a careful understanding of what a park was meant to be. His early love of natural beauty never waned and, having been influenced by the writings of English landscape artists such as Humphrey Repton and Lancelot "Capability" Brown, Olmsted felt most drawn to the pastoral style of landscape: broad, unbroken sheets of turf that led the eye to the horizon with no end in sight. This was especially essential to urban parks for it was in this that "the antithesis of the confined spaces of the town is most marked."[47]

It would perhaps be considered logical that Olmsted's love for natural beauty and the life of a yeoman would cause him to adopt an attitude of hostility towards the urbanization that was steadily spreading and overtaking the rural majority of the country. Olmsted, however, in spite of his self-given title, was indeed a man of practicality; he discerned the shift that the country was undergoing and had matured in an environment that recognized the value and services that the city could provide. Cities had the ability to facilitate the implementation of technology such as sewer systems and the telegraph as well as a greater division of labor, which in turn would allow for greater specialization and an extension of the arts and sciences to greater segments of the population, especially as education continued to progress.[48] What concerned him was not the growing presence of towns, but the impact that large urban areas could have upon those who lived within them. As he would say ten years later, "the further progress of civilization is to

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[47] Frederick Law Olmsted, "Park" in *The American Cyclopaedia:A Popular Dictionary of General Knowledge*, ed. George Ripley and Charles A. Dana, *Frederick Law Olmsted: Essential Texts*, ed. Robert Twombly (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2010), 258.
[48] Frederick Law Olmsted, "Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns," *Frederick Law Olmsted: Essential Texts*, ed. Robert Twombly (New York: W.W. Norton & CO., 2010), 207.
Beveridge, *Designing the American Landscape*, 46.

depend mainly upon the influences by which men's minds and characters will be affected while living in large towns."[49] For Olmsted, the city was to be the new American landscape and the future of American society was now inextricably linked with its proper development.

Despite his understanding of the potential good of city expansion, Olmsted also believed that the problems that accompanied urban growth could jeopardize it. From his trips both abroad and at home, as well as the accounts given to him by Charley Brace, Olmsted grew to be painfully aware of the issues of overcrowding, poor ventilation and disease that afflicted urban areas, especially among the lower classes. He had hope that the power of science might help to alleviate some of these evils but he also believed that public parks had the power to make a difference by providing a space for city dwellers to experience the refreshment of clean air and natural greenery. In an 1859 report, Olmsted noted that the primary motive of his and Vaux's plan was "to provide the best practicable means of healthful recreation for the inhabitants of the city, of all classes. It should present an aspect of spaciousness and tranquility with variety and intricacy of arrangement, thereby affording the most agreeable contrast to the confinement, bustle and monotonous street-division of the city."[50] This concern for public health resonates with Olmsted's observations in England of the "enlightened regard for health and decency" that he found in the provisions made for the poor at the park in Birkenhead. He had a republican sense of responsibility for the distressed and believed that it was the duty of a democratic society to commit itself to social wellbeing by making provision for its fellow citizens.[51] It was a sentiment rooted in his religious principles. Although his spirituality was tied to the experience of nature, Olmsted's religion was bound up in Thomas Carlyle's assertion that "conviction…is

[49] Olmsted, "Public Parks and Enlargment of Towns," 215.
[50] Frederick Law Olmsted, "Report to the Park Commission: Greensward," in *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, Vol. Three: Creating Central Park, 1857-1861,* ed. Charles Capen McLaughlin (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1983), 212.
[51] Fein, *The American Environmental Tradition,* 24.

worthless till it converts itself into conduct."[52] As a result of this, Olmsted would continue to champion the park as a retreat for those in the city unable to afford a retreat to the country in an effort to escape the physical strain of urban life.[53]

It was in attempting to create this sense of escape, this "planting out" of the city that Olmsted and Vaux especially made use of the pastoral landscape. Long stretches of scenery would provide park visitors with a soothing experience of gradual revelation, as new vistas of natural beauty opened and shifted from one scene to the next. Certain parts of the park, particularly an area known as the Ramble, also incorporated elements of the picturesque, a rougher form of landscape that made use of the interplay between light and shadow as well as more rugged terrain to evoke a sense of mystery and awe. Most of the park, however, was intended to have a calming effect and Olmsted and Vaux's plan paid particular attention to facilitating strolling on foot, riding on horseback or driving by carriage. Each form of mobility was separated by path, while all transverse roads were sunken below these paths to ensure the greatest possible removal from anything harsh or unsettling.[54] Hospitality was to characterize the softly undulating fields and shaded groves in which wandering would be welcomed through the "openness" and "simplicity" of the landscape.[55] Olmsted's vision of calming scenery was above all based upon unity of composition. "A park," he said, "is a work of art, designed to produce certain effects upon the mind of men. There should be nothing in it, absolutely nothing…which does not represent study, design, a sagacious consideration and application of

[52] Beveridge, *Designing the American Landscape,* 14.
[53] Frederick Law Olmsted, "Parks, Parkways and Pleasure Grounds" in *Engineering Magazine* (9), *Frederick Law Olmsted: Essential Texts,* ed. Robert Twombly (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2010), 313.
[54] Rogers, *Landscape Design,* 340.
[55] Frederick Law Olmsted, "Address to the Prospect Park Scientific Association," *Frederick Law Olmsted: Essential Texts,* ed. Robert Twombly (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2010), 198-199.

known laws of cause and effect with reference to that end."[56] He strenuously opposed the addition of anything, even statues and monuments, which would detract from the sum effect of the landscape whole. The park experience was to be total and immersive while the harmony of scenic elements within it would maximize its curative effect.

For Olmsted, however, the physical hardship that many urban citizens experienced was not as alarming as the simultaneous psychological oppression. For, "civilized men, while they are gaining ground against certain acute forms of disease, are growing more and more subject to other and more insidious enemies to their health and happiness, and against these the remedy and preventative cannot be found in medicine or in athletic recreations but only in sunlight and such forms of gentle exercise as are calculated to equalize the circulation and relieve the brain."[57] He was concerned about the artificiality of urban life, manifested with especial clarity by the grid plan that governed the layout of New York streets. The natural beauty of parks would make an appeal to the most "elementary human impulses" and remove its visitors from the restrictions that living in the city placed upon them.[58] For Olmsted, contact with the natural was an experience of serenity and release and therefore the perfect antidote for those wearied by their daily lives in an intensely artificial environment, from wealthy merchants to tired mothers.

One of the most troubling manifestations of this psychological stress, Olmsted believed, was social estrangement. In one of his later addresses, he described the superficiality with which urban dwellers interacted with each other. People passed one another along the street without any sense of connection or interest and instead considered others in a "hardened" way with a sense of brief suspicion and lack of sympathy.[59] Having grown up in an intimate New England

[56] Beveridge, *Designing the American Landscape*, 51.
[57] Beveridge, *Designing the American Landscape*, 38.
[58] Olmsted, "Address to Prospect Park," 194.
[59] Olmsted, "Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns," 216.

society, Olmsted had a significant appreciation for the sense of neighborliness that characterized close-knit communities and desired to somehow restore the communicativeness that he perceived the country had lost.[60] Such a goal explains Olmsted's plans to include within the park various forums in which people could interact with one another, for, in addition to enjoyment of scenery, Central Park would also provide space for visitors to enjoy one another. Olmsted believed in two general modes of recreation: exertive and receptive, but it was to the latter that he was to give prominence in park space. Exertive recreation suggested vigorous activity, such as that found in athletics, and although Olmsted would later make allowances for some presence of sports within the park, he would discourage such forms of exercise in favor of more serene exertion to agree with the soothing effect that he planned for the general park experience.

Receptive recreation Olmsted divided into two subcategories: gregarious and neighborly. The former he likened to the kind of interaction that he witnessed along the Champs Elysee in Paris, where people congregated together and were seen by one another in a general expression of mutual goodwill. This more impersonal form of sociability contrasted with neighborly interaction, which took place between people with greater knowledge of one another in more intimate gatherings. Olmsted ensured that Central Park had a place for both, as he sought to counteract the "demoralization" and "strife" that often accompanied urban residence.[61] Accordingly, the plan included a long promenade as part of a mall lined with American elms in which large numbers of visitors could gather, while the more secluded walks and hills were meant to entertain smaller groups. It was in the congregation of park attendees that Olmsted saw with joy "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

[60] Fein, *American Environmental Tradition*, 21.
[61] Olmsted, "Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns," 223-231.

individual adding by his mere presence to the pleasure of all others." The "prevailing expression" was one of "good nature and lightheartedness" and Olmsted hoped that the mingling of the city's people would bring about greater understanding between the classes as well as provide models for the less refined to emulate in taste and behavior.[62] The ultimate end of the park's physical and social refreshment was, therefore, to function as an elevating agent, uplifting those who came from feelings of wearying strain to a sense of inner tranquility and outward benevolence. Such a goal fulfilled Olmsted's understanding of the common people's need for education in proper social and moral habits, a belief rooted in classical republican thought.

In order to best effect its soothing, uplifting influence on all its visitors, the park would need to be simple to navigate as well as to access. Olmsted wrote in 1868 that a park's purpose was "to make gracefully beautiful in combination with a purpose to make interesting and inviting, or hospitable [places by offering] a succession of simple, natural pleasures as a result of easy movements."[63] The park was an open one and although there were gates, fences were considered inappropriate. In contrast to the grounds in Europe, there was no formal closing at night. A park, as Olmsted defined it, was a space of natural beauty so cultivated as to bring about an immersive experience for its visitor in order to stimulate sentiments of serenity and social solidarity, all as a result of easy movement and discovery of landscape. Natural grace was to be a conduit for visitors' enjoyment of the park grounds. In order to experience these "simple natural pleasures," however, people had to be able to reach the park and Olmsted expressed his concern for ease of access on several occasions during his tenure as architect in chief, even

[62] Olmsted, "Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns," 225-226.
[63] Olmsted, "Address to Prospect Park," 196.

writing to Mayor Fernando Wood in 1860 to request that steamboats be provided to help people reach the park via river.[64]

It is clear from reading Olmsted's writings on public parks that he saw the projects on which he worked as a matter that concerned people from all classes and that Central Park would benefit the general public, not merely the elite and their horse drawn carriages. Yet, despite his convictions regarding each class's worth, he still felt a sense of distinction between them, a distinction based upon the degree of taste and propriety that its members possessed. These class differences dictated greater responsibility on the part of the upper toward the lower. While Olmsted's views of parks illustrate the sense of concern that pervaded his park planning, it is his views of people in society that demonstrate the sense of obligation and authority that also characterized his approach to the Central Park.

Perhaps as a result of the material ease that characterized his upbringing, Olmsted obtained early an appreciation of gentility and the refinement and taste that was native to a gentlemanly character. The goal of American society, in Olmsted's mind, was to a large degree a matter of creating a more unanimous civilization. In true nineteenth century optimism, Olmsted advocated for the advancement of American progress to serve as an example to the rest of the world that the new democratic nation could produce a flourishing culture.[65] Included in this notion of civilization was self-cultivation, dissemination of the arts and a sense of social order. Creating a homogeneous culture meant the assimilation of all into these core virtues and this, when coupled with his New England background, created in Olmsted a strong belief in the

[64] Frederick Law Olmsted, "Letter to Mayor Fernando Wood," in *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, Vol. Three: Creating Central Park, 1857-1861*, ed. Charles Capen McLaughlin (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1983), 249.
[65] Fein, *American Environmental Tradition*, 19.

power of education.[66] Parks became not merely oases in the middle of urbanity, but also instruments of both reform and cultural uplift; Central Park, then, would be a way for New Yorkers of all classes to attain that degree of cultivation and refinement that Olmsted and other reformers saw as the true manifestation of a civilized society.

Many of these ideas about civic reform and the spread of civilization Olmsted gleaned from his readings. One of the key voices in his life was Andrew Jackson Downing and in 1860, he suggested, surprisingly so in view of his aversion to park monuments, erecting a memorial for Downing with an inscription that described sentiments largely echoing his own. "This broad ground of popular refinement must be taken up in republican America, for… it is republican in its very idea and tendency. It takes up popular education where the common school and ballot-box leave it, and raises up the working man to the same level of enjoyment with the man of leisure and accomplishment." Olmsted's vision for New York's park followed this similar line of reasoning; it would provide its working class visitors especially, with the opportunity for experiencing an education that would elevate their character to the point of equality with those of gentility.[67]

In spite of the elitism suggested by these ideas, Olmsted's view of social class was rooted in his sense of natural equality. Most Americans were not at a point of refinement or cultivation in their person, but, as with the Germans of San Antonio, this did not prevent them from being able to achieve this state of civilization, especially, Olmsted believed, if provided with the proper guidance. Despite his firm opinions, Olmsted was not a man of force or impracticality. In his landscape work, he understood well the need to work within the bounds that nature dictated and

[66] Lewis, "Frontier and Civilization," 397-399.
[67] Frederick Law Olmsted, "Circular Proposing Memorial to Andrew Jackson Downing," in *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, Vol. Three: Creating Central Park, 1857-1861*, ed. Charles Capen McLaughlin (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1983), 251.

that certain techniques or scenes were not appropriate in a given environment.[68] With regard to individuals, however, his confidence in the potential for improvement was boundless and he believed his work to be invaluable to the effort, having "a manifestly civilizing effect" on those who came into contact with them.[69] Through facilitating a sort of leisurely education, Central Park would indeed become an institution linked with the progression of culture in America.

One of the key ways that the park would achieve this educative effect would be through the forms of social interaction that Olmsted advocated. In addition to increasing a sense of identity with others, gregarious recreation especially would facilitate the mingling of the classes that Olmsted observed with such enthusiasm in his description of the park's promenade.[70] Social order would be improved as what some deemed "dangerous classes" would be brought into the sphere of those in the upper strata of society in a way that would lessen class conflict. The unity that Olmsted strove for in his landscape design, therefore, was a reflection of the social harmony that he desired for the country as a whole. Especially in a city as varied as New York, Central Park could serve as a medium of acculturation by disseminating culture and manners in an effort to join people together into a refined and ordered whole.[71]

Even with his concern for the inclusion of a forum for gregarious interaction, Olmsted did not hide his worry that such an ostensibly artificial element such as Central Park's linear avenue would disrupt the unity of the overall design and he took pains to note that it would be considered subservient to the rest of the park.[72] For him, the most significant manner of

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[68] Rybczynski, "Why We Need Olmsted Again," 19.
[69] S.B. Sutton, introduction to *Civilizing American Cities: A Selection of Frederick Law Olmsted's Writings on City Landscapes*, ed. S.B. Sutton, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), 13.
[70] Beveridge, *Designing the American Landscape*, 50.
[71] Fein, *The American Environmental Tradition*, 19.
[72] Frederick Law Olmsted, "Description of a Plan for the Improvement of the Central Park: 'Greensward'" in *Landscape into Cityscape: Frederick Law Olmsted's Plans for a Greater New York City*, ed. Albert Fein (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 74.

education was still to be found in the experience of the park itself. Just as republicanism balanced improvement of the populace with preserving its sovereignty, Olmsted rejected forceful instruction in favor of the more subtle influence of natural scenery.[73] When a landscape had true unity of composition, the viewer began to feel its "persistent influence…a charm perhaps of such power as to appreciably affect the development of [his] character and shape the course of life."[74] By immersing themselves in the pastoral scenery of the park, visitors would come to experience freely the enchantment of the landscape and the soothing influence that it could exert. After its opening, Olmsted noted with approval the ways in which Central Park provided beneficial recreation for the working class, to the point where less worthy areas of amusement, such as bars and "grog shops," began to lose its Sunday business to the park.[75] Habits could be improved and inclinations uplifted by virtue of park attendance and exposure to natural scenery.

Central Park was therefore, a republican venture, not only in its efforts to uplift all members of society but also as it used the leadership of a few in order to do so. As with the national government, Olmsted valued the oversight that a smaller number of capable, experienced men could provide in leading the rest of the citizenry. It was perhaps because of the high value that he placed upon competence that Olmsted became so exasperated with the inefficiencies and intransigence of the Park Commission with which he worked.[76] He still believed, however, that the leadership of a contingency of honorable and proficient men could best express the commitment of a quality democratic society to the wellbeing of its citizens.

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[73] Zetzel, *The Garden in the Machine*, 320-323.
[74] Frederick Law Olmsted, "Landscape Gardening" in *Johnson's New Universal Cyclopaedia: A Scientific and Popular Treasury of Useful Knowledge* (1877), *Frederick Law Olmsted: Essential Texts*, ed. Robert Twombly (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2010), 158.
[75] Olmsted, "Public Parks and Enlargement of Towns," 247.
[76] Frederick Law Olmsted, "Letter of Resignation," in *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, Vol. Three: Creating Central Park, 1857-1861*, ed. Charles Capen McLaughlin (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1983), 297-319.

This extended to parks as well, as the task of managing would "best rest with a small body of cultivated men, public-spirited…who should…be regarded as a board of trustees, and who, as such, should make it their first duty to hand down unharmed… the treasure of scenery which the city has placed in their care."[77] It was the obligation of the cultivated and the capable to undertake the role of leaders and guides of the park experience.

Olmsted implemented this principle directly in Central Park by establishing a small force of Park Keepers whose task it was to keep the park running smoothly. These "guardians of order, decency and personal safety" were to function as caretakers and as a quasi police force. Perhaps the most significant of the keepers' tasks was to ensure that the park was put to its proper use. They were to be vigilant of any signs of rowdy behavior that might spoil the park experience for other visitors, as well as to prevent destruction of the park grounds. This included defacing benches or structures as well as walking on the grass. The keepers themselves were held to a very high standard of cleanliness and propriety, operating as they did under the expectation of wearing an untrammeled uniform as well as avoiding any chatter with visitors unless already spoken to.[78] Olmsted expected his men to be knowledgeable of the park as well and to be capable of directing visitors where they wished to go.[79] In this manner, they too fulfilled an educative function within the park and were responsible for guiding the public in their appreciation of the park grounds.

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[77] Frederick Law Olmsted, "Parks, Parkways and Pleasure Grounds," in *Frederick Law Olmsted: Essential Texts*, ed. Robert Twombly (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2010), 314.
[78] Frederick Law Olmsted, "Notice of Park Regulations" in *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, Vol. Three: Creating Central Park, 1857-1861*, ed. Charles Capen McLaughlin (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1983), 279.
[79] Frederick Law Olmsted, "Notice to Park Keepers" in *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, Vol. Three: Creating Central Park, 1857-1861*, ed. Charles Capen McLaughlin (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1983), 279-80.

Central Park would not be officially completed until 1873, but was open for visitors almost a decade before. It was an instant success. Visitors flocked to the park by the thousands, strolling along its paths and ice-skating on its pond. Articles in *Harper's Monthly* extolled the park as a marvelous benefit to the city at large and a "resort where thousands…of people, weary with the noise and the dust and tumult of the city street, come to rest and be refreshed."[80] Other writers noted the presence of a "democratic crowd" regularly milling around the mall, as gentlemen with their carriages, nurses with their children and families with their picnic baskets found their way to the park. Olmsted's desire for a "democratic institution" seemed realized, as one writer described the park as "a royal work, undertaken and achieved by the Democracy," revealing, he writes, the people's willingness to set aside their sovereignty for the sake of establishing a great public work and acting as a testimony to the viability and potential of popular government.[81]

What perhaps pleased and surprised people the most was the degree of order that the park commanded. Olmsted's desire to ensure social tranquility and educate the citizenry on the proper use of parks appeared to materialize, as he noted later that "no one who has closely observed the conduct of the people who visit the Park, can doubt that it exercises a distinctly harmonizing and refining influence upon the most unfortunate and most lawless classes of the city—an influence favorable to courtesy, self-control, and temperance."[82] The Park Keepers were active in their duties of ensuring that people showed proper decorum toward the park features and Olmsted made careful record of the number of arrests made each year, most of

[80] Helen S. Conant, "A Ramble in Central Park," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 59 (1879): 692.
[81] "Cities and Parks with Special Reference to the New York Central Park," *Atlantic Monthly* 42 (1861), 422.
[82] Olmsted, "Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns," 247.

which were in violation of commission ordinances or for disorderly conduct.[83] Journalist visitors to the park noted the delightful neatness that seemed to characterize everything from the paths to the shrubbery. Popular publications were in agreement with Olmsted's assessment that the park had to be maintained in part by ensuring that the ignorant who visited it were enlightened as to the proper use of such a pleasure ground. Yet the presence of the working class did not prove the disaster that many elite in the city had originally feared. Olmsted boasted in an 1860 letter that Central Park effectively refuted the "fallacy of cowardly conservatism," the notion that any sort of public institution would be spoiled by the coarse behavior of those in the lower class.[84] He would later declare that the same men concerned about allowing their families to safely walk in the park soon became some of the grounds' most assiduous visitors.[85] The park was, in the minds of many of the leisurely classes, an ingenious "civilizing and humanizing influence" and functioned as a convenient and pleasurable improver of both health and spirits.[86]

The results of the park's completion were not exhaustively positive, however, and did not entirely fulfill the park's original vision. Olmsted's apparently manic desire for unity of composition and purposeful positioning frustrated those who wished to add more grandiose civic institutions such as museums and concert halls to the park, while his emphasis upon receptive recreation exasperated members of the community who wanted greater forums for athletic exercise. Because the primary goal of the park was to provide exposure to well articulated natural scenery and a sensation of moral and psychological uplift, Olmsted argued, overly

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[83] Frederick Law Olmsted, "Incidents Report" in *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, Vol. Three: Creating Central Park, 1857-1861*, ed. Charles Capen McLaughlin (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1983), 253.
[84] Frederick Law Olmsted, "Letter to James T. Fields" in *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, Vol. Three: Creating Central Park, 1857-1861*, ed. Charles Capen McLaughlin (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1983), 270.
[85] Olmsted, "Public Parks and Enlargement of Towns," 243.
[86] A.H. Guernsey, "The Central Park of New York," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 33 (1866): 708.

exertive activities would be out of place.[87] Scholars have noted that this was one particular part of Central Park's design that struck against the working class specifically, as despite the appeal of strolling to the general public, Olmsted could not understand nor make allowances for the desire of many working class men especially, for more rigorous and rambunctious forms of exercise.[88] It is one of numerous reasons that Central Park was, in its initial years, much more attended by the elite and those of moderate wealth rather than the working class, as newspapers' excited declarations of democratic crowds clashed with prominent portrayals of the wealthy and absence of the poor on maps and pictures made of the park's grounds.[89] The park was, in the words of one journalist, "in harmony with the luxury of the rich" and the disparity in numbers between weekly upper and lower class visitors affirms this assessment.[90] Because of the work hours of those in the working class, Sundays saw the greatest numbers of them, but on the weekdays, carriages rather than pedestrians filled the park's paths. Finances also played a role as, despite the park's "democratic" central location, many families could not afford an outing to the park apart from special occasions and the relatively few holidays provided for workers were days of noticeably higher numbers of working class visitors.[91]

Although Central Park did not initially fulfill its cross class ideals, the reasons for this did not stem so much from Olmsted's desire to actively discriminate against a particular class of people as much as from his unyielding vision of what the park should be.[92] His plan for America's "People's Garden" was very much inclusive. Its inclusiveness was qualified, however, by the firm definitions of proper manners of park enjoyment that he and the Park

[87] Olmsted, "Public Parks and Enlargement of Towns," 260.
[88] Blodgett, "Conservative Reform," 881.
[89] "Central Park, N.Y." (1860), Library of Congress Digital Collection.
[90] "Cities and Parks," 423.
[91] Rosenzweig and Blackmar, *The Park and the People*, 232-233.
[92] Zetzel, "The Garden in the Machine," 301.

Keeper force maintained. Olmsted's view of Central Park resonated with the classical republican tradition in its emphasis upon education, civic duty as well as the necessity of expertise in leadership and therefore, took on both the democratic inclusivity and the aristocratic elitism that this ideology embodies. Ultimately, it would be the stringent expectations of his vision that precluded its fulfillment, ignoring as it did many of the needs and preferences of those whom he, ironically, hoped that it would help the most.

Olmsted's career as a landscape architect began in earnest with New York's Central Park. The rest of Olmsted's projects would echo the similar ideals of unity, uplift and refreshment that his first project pursued, though as with the popular government that Olmsted sought to defend, his works would adapt to the changing needs around them. In Central Park, the grass was finally opened to pedestrian traffic, more buildings were constructed and game fields were eventually added to the undulating grounds. Olmsted's attitudes toward his first work reflected a man of strong aesthetic and complex social sensibilities. His vision remained, however, rooted in the classical republican notions of duty, education and leadership, the duty of the prosperous to assist the poor, the capacity for all to be educated in accordance with a specific set of ideals, and the obligation of those with understanding to lead those without. His works would also remain and Central Park would continue to draw multitudes of people under its shade. From its conception, it looked forward to the day when its rectangular stretch of green would be surrounded by a metropolis of millions, wherein urban dwellers, afflicted with the same weariness of nineteenth century New Yorkers, would seek out a "rural interlude" in the center of their city. If Olmsted were to have any influence, they would depart the better for their experience.

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