

Spring 2019

# Robert Moses and the Real Estate City: A Reexamination of the Legacy of New York's Master Builder

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## Recommended Citation

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ROBERT MOSES AND THE REAL ESTATE CITY: A REEXAMINATION OF THE LEGACY  
OF NEW YORK'S MASTER BUILDER

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Center for Urban and Global Studies

Trinity College

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by

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May 2019

## **Introduction**

Throughout the four centuries New York City has existed, there has not been a more controversial figure than Robert Moses. Beginning in the 1930s, Moses used billions in public money to completely reshape the city's built environment, road network, and public space. Over a period of almost three decades, the city's Park Commissioner and "master builder" bulldozed not only his opposition but also large swaths of the city's built environment, pushing through numerous projects which would change the landscape of New York City forever. By the middle of the 1960s, Moses's career was over, and he left office with a sullied reputation that has not recovered even today. Nonetheless, his influence on New York is still evident in the modern day in the form of his infrastructure projects, urban renewal schemes, and parks.

The development of New York City has taken a variety of different forms since Moses fell from power in the mid-twentieth century. Over a decade of deindustrialization, suburbanization, and fiscal crisis left the city center in disarray by the end of the 1970s and into the mid-1980s. Beginning in the 1990s, the modern development path of New York began to take shape as the government began to collaborate with private real estate developers, reshaping the urban landscape and ushering in a new era of prosperity. In the twenty-first century, real estate has become the driving force of the city economy, as public-private partnerships preside over small- and large-scale urban development projects both in Manhattan as well as the outer boroughs.

This trend of real estate development, while in many ways different from development in the Moses era, provides the historical context for reexamining his legacy and impact on the city. In fact, the current large-scale development projects going on in New York City suggest that it is

necessary to reconsider the legacy of Robert Moses. This framework of this paper will analyze the history of New York's development both before and after Moses, as well as in the present day and into the future. In doing so, this essay seeks to provide a comprehensive examination of Moses's legacy, updated in terms of contemporary New York.

In terms of research questions, there are a few that this paper will attempt to answer. First and foremost, perhaps, is the question of how to reconcile the career and legacy of Moses with the recent real estate development practices in New York City. Moreover, this paper will seek to answer questions about why Moses has endured such a negative legacy since the last years of his career up until the twenty-first century, and why this legacy still seems to dominate the public perception of him in New York today. In conjunction with this question, this paper will aim to answer questions regarding the legacy of Moses's most famous opponent, Jane Jacobs, particularly regarding how her legacy has only benefitted from the negative perception surrounding Moses. Beyond questions of legacy, this paper will attempt to answer questions about what exactly modern development practices in contemporary New York City entail, how they differ from the city's development in the past, and how they will continue to evolve. While the answers to these questions inevitably have a great impact on the legacy of Robert Moses, they should also provide valuable insight in terms of the city's history and its potential future.

There has been a substantial amount of literature about New York City's development throughout history, Moses's legacy and impact on New York, and modern real estate practices in the city. In terms of the city's development prior to the Moses era, this paper will draw on *The Unfinished City*, written by Thomas Bender in 2002. This book recounts the development of New York City in its earliest stages in the early 19th century as the city began to expand northward

from its original locus in Downtown Manhattan, a time that saw the adoption of the grid plan that has shaped the city's built environment to this day as well as the incorporation of the outer boroughs towards the end of the century. Regarding the career and legacy of Robert Moses, Robert Caro's seminal 1975 work, *The Power Broker*, is perhaps the most influential piece of literature in terms of understanding Moses's negative reputation in New York City, detailing exactly what made Moses so controversial and largely reviled by the end of his career as well as in the following decades.

In order to properly consider Moses's ongoing legacy, it is imperative to look at development practices in the five decades since his fall from power. John Logan (1987) was one of the first to identify the importance of real estate in terms of shaping urban areas. Saskia Sassen (1991) identified New York as one of three "global cities," outlining the city's connections to the global economy and examining the resulting development practices in the mid- and late-twentieth century. Similarly, authors like Sharon Zukin (2009), Kim Moody (2007), and Richard Florida (2017) outline broader development trends that have shaped New York City throughout its history all the way up to the present day. While Florida's work is more general in focus, Zukin and Moody take a more narrow view, isolating these trends and their effects on New York in particular. More specifically, Julian Brash (2011) examines the twenty-first century real estate and urban planning practices under Mayor Bloomberg that provided the platform for the city's contemporary urban landscape.

In a similar vein, Scott Larson (2013) looks at planning practices in New York City. However, his work also includes a focus on how these practices relate to the vision and legacy of Robert Moses and his most famous opponent, Jane Jacobs. Subsequently, Larson's book provides

a literary platform for a reexamination of Moses's legacy in light of modern New York, particularly in terms of real estate development. A few years before Larson, however, Hilary Botein and Kenneth T. Jackson (2007) compiled a series of essays that look at Moses's enduring impact on the city, with photos and accounts that detail the state of his projects in the twenty-first century. Combined, these two works provide a basis for reconsidering the legacy of Robert Moses. Both of these books paint Moses in a more positive light relative to his extremely negative legacy throughout the final decades of the twentieth century and indeed over the first years of the twenty-first century as well.

The aim of this paper is similar in that it will attempt to recognize the positive impact Moses has had on the city. As urban development projects have become larger in scale driven by public-private partnerships, it seems that a Moses-like era of development has once again dawned in New York City. The growing importance of real estate and urban renewal practices such as gentrification and mega-projects suggest that Moses's vision still has a large influence on development in New York. Consequently, the main purpose of this essay is to argue for a reexamination of his legacy as a figure in the history of New York. Additionally, this paper contends that the end result of this analysis points to a more positive legacy for Robert Moses. Although Moses's legacy is subject to change in the future just as it has in light of the modern city, at this moment in time it is necessary to renew recognition for his visionary career and positive impact on New York City.

In order to provide a comprehensive understanding of Moses's legacy and his impact on New York City, this paper will outline a history of New York's development before, during, and after the Moses years. The first chapter will establish this historical framework, first examining

the city's development in the years before Moses came to power, dating all the way back to the early nineteenth century. Moving along the historical timeline, this chapter will also examine the forty-four years of Moses's career. Subsequently, the first chapter will also examine Moses's fall from power and his tarnished legacy at the end of his career. In doing so, the first chapter will establish a comprehensive historical picture of both how and why Moses came to power and fell from grace so precipitously.

Chapter Two will continue this historical analysis. However, this chapter primarily looks at the years following Moses's career, primarily in terms of development practices in New York. The chapter includes a historical examination of the development trends in the city after Moses left office, considering suburban flight and gentrification as major forces that completely altered the landscape of the city and thus were instrumental in shaping development. More specifically, the chapter will look at the development practices during the Bloomberg years at the start of the twenty-first century, when real estate really started to become the main driver of the city economy, altering the physical as well as economic landscape of New York. This chapter will include two case studies in the form of Hudson Yards and Long Island City to examine twenty-first century real estate development patterns in the city, as mega-projects have made a comeback over thirty years on from Moses's demise. Finally, the chapter will seek to reconcile these larger development trends as well as the two case studies in the context of Moses's legacy and impact on New York. This reconciliation will be central to a clear picture of a reexamined legacy for Robert Moses.

Chapter Three, however, will conclude the paper with a look to the development of New York City in the future and how this development could further shift the tide of opinion

regarding Robert Moses. The continued urban expansion and gentrification of the city, particularly in the outer boroughs, along with the growing threat of climate change, poses new challenges for Moses's legacy. The chapter will consider how the future of New York City could warrant a revisiting of this legacy further down the line, particularly in terms of Moses's attitude and work with mass transit during his career in relation to the threat of climate change and the city's efforts to adapt. While this paper's central argument is that Moses work and vision should be viewed more positively in light of present-day New York, this chapter suggests that this legacy could shift again in the future in light of climate change.

The paper will conclude with a summary of the main arguments. Moreover, it will seek to suggest the areas for further research in this subject, primarily in terms of the relationship between Moses's career, mass transit, and climate change. As climate change threatens many of the waterfront and coastal areas throughout the city, areas which have been central to modern development practices, it remains to be seen what will the city will do to adapt to this threat. As such, this paper will conclude with the point that Moses's legacy remains up in the air as the city moves towards a new period in its development.



## **Chapter One: The Early Development of New York and the Era of Robert Moses**

Though there may be some bigger and more spectacular cities in the world today, New York City stands alone in many ways. Many of the differences between New York and other leading cities owe to the career and work of Robert Moses. However, New York City existed long before Robert Moses came to power in the early twentieth century; Dutch settlers arrived on Manhattan Island in the early seventeenth century, discovering a relatively unoccupied area of land with numerous advantages for trade. In the years since, New York has undergone several periods in terms of its development. This chapter will look at these stages beginning with the early years of New York and continuing through the career of Robert Moses. By examining these different stages, this chapter aims to provide clear historical picture of how Robert Moses changed New York City as well as how his legacy shifted towards the end of his career.

Over three hundred years before Robert Moses came to power, New York City occupied only the area now known as Lower Manhattan. Beyond the area of Wall Street, large expanses of forests and farmland encompassed the entirety of Manhattan Island. At the time of its founding in 1624, it would have been near impossible to envision a Manhattan filled with buildings and the sprawling, five-borough metropolis that Moses shaped via his bridges and parkways. Thomas Bender argues that the geography of the city somewhat predetermined this path, at least in terms of Manhattan. Bender writes that, “The narrative of Manhattan’s development has been shaped by geography. The long, narrow island directed growth north; farms were relentlessly replaced by houses and businesses.”<sup>1</sup> This residential and commercial growth represents the first stage of development in New York City.

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<sup>1</sup> Bender, Thomas. *The Unfinished City: New York and the Metropolitan Idea*. (New York: Univ. Press, 2007), 3.

However, this stage of development lasted over 200 years as it was not truly until the beginning of the nineteenth century when it began to take shape. The driving force behind the first real development in New York City was the famous grid plan of 1811. In this plan, a group of city commissioners envisioned a Manhattan filled with over two thousand rectangular blocks, stretching northward all the way to 155th street. Although the degree of northward expansion invited ridicule from many, these men envisioned a future for the city's development that was eventually realized following the construction of the Eerie Canal.<sup>2</sup> The canal made New York's deep-water port—its main trade advantage—a gate to a long waterway that extended up through New York State to Lake Eerie, cementing the city as the leading trading port in the New World.

Moreover, the Eerie Canal facilitated the northward expansion of New York City from Lower Manhattan, as the area became increasingly busy and industry began to take up more space. Gradually, this industry began to transform the landscape of the city, transforming the land uses of entire streets. Bender notes that near the end of the 1820s, Wall Street became the first street in New York to fall before commerce, which had rendered the street unsuitable for residence.<sup>3</sup> The conversion of Wall Street was the first sign of New York undergoing the process of becoming a center of industry, one which separated work and residence and sorted neighborhoods out by class.<sup>4</sup> As the Industrial Revolution progressed, this process would only intensify.

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<sup>2</sup> Bender, *The Unfinished City*, 5.

<sup>3</sup> Bender, *The Unfinished City*, 7.

<sup>4</sup> Moody, Kim. *From Welfare State to Real Estate: Regime Change in New York City, 1974 to the Present*. (New York: New Press 2007), 2.

The transformation of New York City into an industrial center had stark consequences for residential life. The new trade industries brought with them a myriad of low-paying jobs, and as a result working-class people and immigrants increasingly flocked to the city to find employment. The problem, however, lay in the need for housing these immigrants and low-wage workers. Tenements began to emerge in great numbers, particularly on the Lower East Side as Bleecker Street declined after 1850, creating a pattern of residence that would house New York's working poor for over a century until Robert Moses and his bulldozers arrived.<sup>5</sup> Past the midpoint of the nineteenth century, New York had cemented its status as an industrial city and increasingly began to attract migrants from all over the world who formed the low-wage workforce that populated these tenements.

The final three decades of the nineteenth century saw further transformation of New York City's landscape, changes which would forever alter the city's development. The aforementioned migration meant that by 1910, the population of Manhattan alone reached 2,300,000, one and a half times its population as of 1870.<sup>6</sup> Most significant, however, was the incorporation of Greater New York in 1898. New York's geography changed dramatically as Manhattan and the Bronx united with Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island to form the modern City of New York, expanding the city's industry as well as its physical size and its population, which for the city as a whole reached almost 5,000,000 by 1910.<sup>7</sup> The incorporation of these three boroughs into New York City at the turn of the century was instrumental in shaping the development that was to come as the twentieth century began.

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<sup>5</sup> Bender, *The Unfinished City*, 10.

<sup>6</sup> Moody, *From Welfare State to Real Estate*, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Moody, *From Welfare State to Real Estate*, 3.

In fact, it could be argued that 1898 marked the end of the first stage of New York's development and ushered in a new period, one in which Robert Moses came to power and drastically altered the city's landscape. However, it is essential to examine the city's development in the twentieth century prior to the Moses era. Bender points out that by the turn of the century, much of the undeveloped land in Manhattan had largely filled up with primarily residential development, reaching to the island's horizontal limits.<sup>8</sup> Coupled with the incorporation of the outer boroughs, this development resulted in a need for expansion beyond these horizontal limits. By the turn of the century, railroads and bridges extended to the outer boroughs via an arterial traffic flow, which was accepted as the starting point for urban planning in New York.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the idea of an arterial traffic flow that connected Manhattan with the rest of the boroughs was central to the planning practices of Robert Moses, the city's most important urban planner.

However, Moses did not truly arrive on the scene as a planner for over two decades, and thus there were larger forces at play which shaped the city's development at the start of the twentieth century. The emergence of the skyscraper and the city's skyline coincided with the incorporation of Greater New York in 1898, as the metropolitan region became increasingly connected and the metropolis grew upward and outward.<sup>10</sup> However, these increased connections did not breed hope for the outer boroughs to rival Lower Manhattan as the city's commercial center. For example, although Brooklyn was comparable to Manhattan in both size and population, it didn't envision passing it as a commercial center, but rather hoped to be part of a metropolis. Similarly, the real estate interests behind the Brooklyn Bridge project hoped for

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<sup>8</sup> Bender, *The Unfinished City*, 20.

<sup>9</sup> Bender, *The Unfinished City*, 23.

<sup>10</sup> Bender, *The Unfinished City*, 83.

residential growth rather than commercial growth in the borough.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, Manhattan further cemented its place as the city's business center.

With Manhattan's status as the center of the city confirmed despite the incorporation of Greater New York, the emphasis of urban planning in the city at the outset of the twentieth century was overwhelmingly skewed towards the city center. This trend culminated in New York's first Regional Plan, whose planners placed a great emphasis on Manhattan:

“The transformation of Manhattan into a financial/administrative center at the cost of manufacturing was a central hope of the regional planners. The plan ranked central city land uses in terms of rents, giving priority thereby to office buildings, luxury housing, and luxury retail stores. The planners sought, on the other hand, to eliminate or decentralize less lucrative land uses, such as loft manufacturing, middle- and lower-class housing, and ordinary retail shopping.”<sup>12</sup>

The plan was the first comprehensive urban plan developed in New York City, and thus it would have numerous consequences for the city's development in the following years. Unsurprisingly, a main result of the plan was that Manhattan only grew as a commercial hub, as new, taller office and luxury residential buildings began to reshape the skyline. To be sure, the group behind the first Regional Plan had achieved their goals.

During the seven years it took for the Regional Plan to progress from inception to completion in 1929, the man who would become New York's most important planner was making his mark further out from the city, on Long Island. The election of Al Smith as Governor of New York in 1922 gave an ambitious young reformer named Robert Moses a friend in politics that he could use to implement a few of the many ideas that had been mulling in his mind for over a decade since he first entered public service after graduating from Yale.<sup>13</sup> Although Moses

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<sup>11</sup> Bender, *The Unfinished City*, 22.

<sup>12</sup> Bender, *The Unfinished City*, 26.

<sup>13</sup> Caro, Robert. *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), 139.

insisted there was nothing he wanted for the first two years of his service under Smith, one day he finally told the Governor that what he wanted was parks.<sup>14</sup> Though Smith had no way of knowing it, Moses would eventually use these parks to gain unprecedented power in New York.

Coupled with the large growth in population in New York from 1910 to 1920, the lack of parks in the city meant that it became increasingly overcrowded. In that decade, the population of New York grew by almost 1,000,000, mostly outside of Manhattan, with red-brick buildings replacing the vacant meadows, farmlands, and large swaths of land that were essential for parks.<sup>15</sup> Brooklyn and Queens were cramped with 2,500,000 people, beyond which on Long Island lived only 250,000 people, with one person to every four acres and thus a bevy of open space that was becoming increasingly scarce in the city.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, a larger trend was gripping America: the number of automobile-owning families in the country grew from 7,000,000 to 23,000,000 in just four years from 1919 to 1923, finally making the countryside accessible to the urban masses of America.<sup>17</sup> Moses was seemingly aware of all of these factors, and thus he set out to implement his ideas for great state parks that were easily accessible to the automobile-owning masses of New York City.

The story of Jones Beach State Park, Moses' first and perhaps most famous public work, reveals a great deal about his vision and his approach. In 1923, the only public beach on the South Shore of Long Island was the expensive Long Beach, and thus New Yorkers desiring a swim who couldn't afford these prices continuously drove along the shore from village to village

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<sup>14</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 142.

<sup>15</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 143.

<sup>16</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 145.

<sup>17</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 144.

until they reached the empty potato fields of Suffolk County, well over fifty miles from the city.<sup>18</sup>

Moses recognized this problem and envisioned a public park on a beach closer to the city.

However, Moses biographer Robert Caro notes that “The South Shore, the edge of the meadow that had been transformed into the Great South Bay, offered gentle waves and sandy beaches. But the bay was the haunt of the baymen, a closemouthed, independent breed.”<sup>19</sup> It was these baymen that formed the first major opposition group against Robert Moses. As will become evident, however, even the most ardent opposition was not enough to deter Moses from his vision.

Despite opposition from the baymen, Moses set about planning his state park on the beaches of the South Shore, finding a particular site on Jones Beach that possessed both the size and the location that his vision required. The five tracts of woods that lined this beach totaled 3,500 acres—3,500 acres of unused land sitting only eleven miles from the city line, and within thirty miles from Manhattan.<sup>20</sup> Moses had found his state park site; however, getting the masses of New York City out to it presented another problem. After many nights studying maps of Long Island, he suddenly noticed that a straight line could be drawn through the water supply properties off Merrick Road; therefore, a road could also be built along that straight line without having to purchase or condemn a substantial amount of land for the right-of-way.<sup>21</sup> This road would come to represent the first building block in the vast parkway network that Moses would build in Long Island and around New York City.

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<sup>18</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 155.

<sup>19</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 147.

<sup>20</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 159.

<sup>21</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 161.

Moses' work on his parks and this parkway network as well as a connected network of bridges and roads dominated the first two decades of his career. The sheer size of this network reflects the scope of Moses' vision for New York—the fact that these roads and bridges only formed the first half of this vision and of his career in turn reflect the expansive nature of Moses' work. In the introduction to his book, Robert Caro notes that Moses built 416 miles of parkways throughout his career, stretching out from the center of the city in long ribbons of concrete closed to commercial traffic and bordered by lawns and trees.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, by the end of his career Moses had increased the acreage of state parks in New York State by over 3,000,000, giving the state 45 percent of the entire combined acreage of state parks throughout the country.<sup>23</sup> The numbers speak for themselves—Robert Moses built more roads and parks than any other man in American history during his career.

However, this career did not truly take off until the eve of the 1930s, as the completion of Jones Beach in the summer of 1929 represented a turning point in Moses' career. During the 1920s, Moses had overwhelmingly focused his work on Long Island and in areas outside New York City; by the end of 1926, the beaches of Long Island that were previously reserved for the rich were dotted with wooden bathhouses open to the masses.<sup>24</sup> Also in that year, however, Moses began to turn his focus toward New York City when it became apparent that city officials were stalling on building a road network that could serve the Long Island parkways he had

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<sup>22</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 8.

<sup>23</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 10.

<sup>24</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 220.



already built.<sup>25</sup> Despite the fame of Jones Beach and the scope of Moses' work on Long Island, his New York City projects beginning in the 1930s would come to define his career.

Moses' work on Long Island in the 1920s had given him his first taste of fame and power, a taste which would grow insatiably for the remainder of his career. After a fourteen-year period in which the number of automobiles in New York City grew by over 650,000 while the government failed to build a single mile of arterial highway, the city was strangling on its traffic by 1932.<sup>26</sup> Of course, also during this time, Robert Moses rose through the ranks of public service in New York, and by 1934 he was in charge of the seven separate government agencies concerned with parks and major roads in the New York metropolitan area.<sup>27</sup> With such unprecedented power, coupled with his rising reputation, Moses was largely able to build what he wanted where he wanted it throughout the 1930s, perhaps the most prolific period of his career

Of course, his power and reputation only went so far when it came to actually completing projects; Moses needed enormous amounts of public money if he wanted to see his vision through. Whether he was aware of it or not, Moses' longtime adversary President Roosevelt laid the foundation for Moses to impose his vision on New York City by implementing the New Deal in 1933. The new federal program granted Moses access to an unprecedented amount of public money which he used to complete his network of bridges and parkways and thereby connect

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<sup>25</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 339.

<sup>26</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 329.

<sup>27</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 362.

Manhattan and Long Island to Westchester, the Bronx, and the mainland of the United States.<sup>28</sup>

By May of 1934, only a few months after Governor Lehman appointed him as the first Park Commissioner in New York history, Moses had completed 1700 of his 1800 promised park renovations in New York.<sup>29</sup> However, these were merely improvements on parks that already existed—parks that by themselves were insufficient to handle the increased population, particularly in New York City. Moses needed to build new parks in the city itself in order to truly solve this problem, and money was not enough to do so; for this, Moses required land—the supply of which was rapidly dwindling, in turn driving up the price.

However, Moses—as he almost always did throughout his career—came up with ingenious solutions for obtaining the land he required. First, he turned his attention to land already owned by a city department, ordering personal inspections of every parcel to determine if they were being used properly and finding hundreds of acres that were idle in terms of development.<sup>30</sup> Having learned over a decade before about “unappropriated state lands,” Moses sent men to Albany to look up these parcels, where they found several in areas of Brooklyn that were now slums. As the city couldn’t afford to buy them and appropriation was not part of the New Deal money at Moses’ disposal, he was able to push through bills that simply turned this land over to the city government.<sup>31</sup> By 1935, he had turned most of these parcels into parks and playgrounds for the city’s residents, drawing waves of praise from city newspapers as well as the

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<sup>28</sup> Gutman, Marta. “Equipping the Public Realm: Rethinking Robert Moses and Recreation.” In *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York*, ed. Hilary Ballon and Kenneth T. Jackson. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 87.

<sup>29</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 372.

<sup>30</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 375.

<sup>31</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 376.

public.<sup>32</sup> All told, by the end of the 1930s Moses had built 255 new playgrounds in New York City.<sup>33</sup> Moses had solved not only the issue of a lack of parks in New York City but also the problem of a scarcity of land on which to build them.

Moreover, Moses gave the city residents who did not own cars access to open-air swimming by building public pools in many of these parks. These enormous pools turned swimming into a grand public spectacle, with the largest pools allowing thousands of people to swim at one time.<sup>34</sup> Although residents in certain neighborhoods opposed these large pools, upon their opening in 1936 Moses was universally celebrated for putting the needs of the city's ordinary people first through spectacular public architecture and recreation.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, by the mid-1930s, there was no denying that the city's first Park Commissioner had made his mark.

At the same time as he was building hundreds of parks and pools, however, Moses was masterminding two of his most ambitious projects that would make a bigger, more permanent mark on New York City. These were the Triborough Bridge and the so-called "West Side Improvement." The former was a project of heroic proportions, a bridge network that would enable residents of northern Manhattan to reach Queens simply by traveling crosstown and over the bridge; one that would enable residents of the Bronx, Westchester, and New Jersey to reach Long Island without ever even sniffing Midtown Manhattan.<sup>36</sup> The cost of this bridge complex was staggering; the amount promised for its construction as of 1934 was close to the combined

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<sup>32</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 378-379.

<sup>33</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 255.

<sup>34</sup> Gutman, "Equipping the Public Realm," 80.

<sup>35</sup> Gutman, "Equipping the Public Realm," 81.

<sup>36</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 388.

cost of the numerous projects Moses had built on Long Island during the previous decade.<sup>37</sup> By almost any measure, the Triborough Bridge was the biggest undertaking of Robert Moses' career to date.

That was, however, until Moses began to develop plans for the West Side Improvement.

Robert Caro's description clearly illustrates the enormity of the project:

“[It] included not only the completion of the long-stalled, five-mile elevated express highway from the southern tip of Manhattan Island to Seventy-second Street; but also the design and construction of the extension of that highway six and a half miles north to the northern tip of Manhattan Island; the transformation of six and a half miles of muddy wasteland into a park that would make beautiful the city's western waterfront; the throwing of a 'Henry Hudson Bridge' across the Harlem River that separated Manhattan from the Bronx; the continuation of the highway through the Bronx to the city line and, beyond the line, to the Saw Mill River Parkway, so that the city would have at last a true outlet to the north.” (525-526)

I quote extensively here simply because there is no better way to display the sheer size of the West Side Improvement. The plan provided an uninterrupted road network from the city's business center in Lower Manhattan not only to the Bronx, but also well beyond the city line to Westchester and New England. It required adding 132 acres of land to Manhattan Island as well as a staggering sum of public money that would reach at least \$180,000,000 and likely close to \$218,000,000.<sup>38</sup> Caro notes that Robert Moses himself was the man who arranged the vast majority of this financing: “The catalyst that brought the West Side Improvement to fruition wasn't Washington's largesse but Moses' genius for turning a dream into a reality, for accomplishment, for Getting It Done.”<sup>39</sup> When the last link in the West Side Improvement was completed in in 1937, Moses had executed a project which forever transformed New York City's Hudson River waterfront.

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<sup>37</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 387.

<sup>38</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 556-557.

<sup>39</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 540.

By the end of the 1930s, Moses had not only reshaped New York City with his parks but also with the two largest and perhaps most significant infrastructure projects of his career. By the end of the decade, there were more miles of highway at grade in the New York metropolitan area than in the next five largest American cities combined.<sup>40</sup> In the span of just over a decade, Moses had completely revamped the road network on Long Island and in New York City as well. But he was nowhere near done. Having already transformed Manhattan's shoreline through the West Side Improvement, he still wanted to transform the shorelines of Brooklyn and Staten Island by building parkways, a vision that would eventually be realized.<sup>41</sup> Caro notes that, beginning in the early 1940s, Moses destroyed the New York City Tunnel Authority, ensuring that for the remaining twenty-five years of his career no motorist would be able to use a modern bridge or tunnel without paying his authorities tribute.<sup>42</sup> Thus, Moses in the 1940s possessed huge reserves of both power and money with which he could complete his vision for a connected network of bridges, highways, parkways, and tunnels in the New York City metropolitan area.

As he did throughout his career, Robert Moses did not waste the opportunity these endowments presented. By 1945, Moses was planning more miles of superhighways in New York City than in all other cities of the world combined.<sup>43</sup> Caro notes that these roads were like no other roads in the history of the world, as "these were roads through a city."<sup>44</sup> Even for the sections of these superhighways that traversed through relatively unoccupied areas of the city,

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<sup>40</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 572.

<sup>41</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 619.

<sup>42</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 695.

<sup>43</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 839.

<sup>44</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 837.

there were always apartment houses, private homes, and factories that blocked their paths; for the vast majority of these roads, Moses had to hack his way through these brick-and-mortar jungles.<sup>45</sup> Nonetheless, these physical obstacles seemingly did nothing to deter his plans or his vision, likely due to the state of his reputation at the time as well as the amount of power and money he had at his disposal.

While Moses was beginning to put these highway plans in motion, urban renewal was gaining influence in the United States—particularly following the conclusion of World War II. Caro writes that, “Before the war—during the entire Depression—the federal government had financed a total of 200,000 low-income apartments. Within the first four years after the war, the federal government authorized the financing of 810,000 low-income apartments.”<sup>46</sup> The passing of the Title I Housing Act in 1949 followed this stage and ushered in a period of unprecedented public spending on urban renewal projects as federal subsidies became available to private real estate developers in return for building low-income urban housing.<sup>47</sup> Robert Moses would take advantage of this program more than any other public figure, drawing on this new source of funds to establish public-private partnerships which in turn reshaped much of New York City’s built environment.

Even before Title I was officially passed, however, Moses had begun consolidating power in the realm of urban renewal. Moses persuaded Mayor William O’Dwyer to appoint him chairman of the Mayor’s Slum Clearance Committee, and this post gave him absolute control

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<sup>45</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 843.

<sup>46</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 704.

<sup>47</sup> Ballon, Hilary. “Robert Moses and Urban Renewal: The Title I Program.” In *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York*, ed. Hilary Ballon and Kenneth T. Jackson. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 94.

over urban renewal in New York, which was by far the largest program in America.<sup>48</sup> This program allowed Moses to partner with bankers, who essentially ran the Housing Authority for him by selecting who got the construction contracts for his projects, while he determined where and when these projects would be built.<sup>49</sup> This public-private relationship that now seems commonplace in the modern day was central to Moses' urban renewal work. However, it was this work—combined with his highway projects of the 1940s—that would eventually cast the first rays of negative light on Robert Moses, a light which would only continue to grow brighter until he finally fell from power in the 1960s.

It was likely the manner in which Moses went about implementing his urban renewal and highway ideas that made not only the media but the public begin to question his methods. Moses became notorious for bulldozing entire neighborhoods that the city government had designated as “slums” in order to replace them with new buildings or to build his new superhighways, all the while proclaiming that you “cannot make an omelet without breaking a few eggs” as a way to justify his destruction of the built environment.<sup>50</sup> However, this justification was not enough in the eyes of an increasing number of Moses' critics. Moreover, Moses' urban renewal programs were overwhelmingly affecting black and Puerto Rican residents, a population that was not able to find other homes due to their poverty as well as racial discrimination.<sup>51</sup> Consequently, some

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<sup>48</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 707.

<sup>49</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 726-727.

<sup>50</sup> Jackson, Kenneth T. “Robert Moses and the Rise of New York: *The Power Broker* in Perspective.” In *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York*, ed. Hilary Ballon and Kenneth T. Jackson. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 69.

<sup>51</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 968.

people began to notice how Moses' bulldozers were cementing divisions of race and class in New York City, and they began to challenge the positive perception of his work.

Among this group of people were the editors of the New York newspapers, once the bedrock for Robert Moses' glowing reputation and positive public perception. For the first time, Robert Moses became associated with scandal through his Title I projects. One example was in the fight for a parking lot at Tavern-on-the-Green in Central Park; it was this battle that signified the end of the thirty-year Moses Boom in public opinion, as outrage over the project amongst the press was echoed by the public.<sup>52</sup> Caro argues that the Manhattantown slum clearance project was perhaps the most impactful scandal of his career: "Not only had Robert Moses' committee approved an associate of racketeers as a slum clearance sponsor, it had done so although Moses' key colleague on the committee had known he was an associate of racketeers."<sup>53</sup> Whether or not Moses knew this himself is missing the point; reporters had uncovered that this man who supposedly scorned politicians was in charge of a program that allowed not only racketeers but the top echelon of New York's politicians to gain enormous profits.<sup>54</sup> These reporters had destroyed the legend of Robert Moses as public servant who worked for the people and against the politicians.

In keeping with his behavior throughout his entire career, however, Moses did attempt to fight back against the rising tide of negative attention in the press. Of course, this was a battle in which Moses' status as a public official left him doomed from the start, with the press itself representing the battleground and therefore possessing the ability to dictate the public portrayal

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<sup>52</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 995-996.

<sup>53</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 1044.

<sup>54</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 1047.



of Moses' attacks.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, the most effective way for the press to combat Moses' attacks and justify their negative stories on him was to dig even deeper, giving them a vested interest in destroying his image when once they had a significant interest in preserving it.<sup>56</sup> Unsurprisingly, the press' coverage of Moses and his projects turned increasingly negative, and with it the tide of public opinion—the key to Moses' power—ebbed as well.

A prominent but perhaps lesser-known critic who reflects this change in public opinion was urban activist Charles Abrams, who challenged Moses' ideas on urban renewal. With Moses having successfully brokered the clearance and redevelopment of Stuyvesant Town and with the full force of federal endorsement behind him in the form of public money, he was ready to expand the scope of his urban renewal projects.<sup>57</sup> Abrams' ideas on urban renewal and slum clearances were antithetical to those of Moses, and thus he started becoming an outspoken critic of the so-called "master-builder." Paul Walker argues that while Moses embodied abstract solutions to poverty via the idea that bureaucratic categorization of housing structures would improve the lives of individuals in a certain slum, Abrams considered the built environment an insurmountable obstacle for this individual autonomy, and thus argued for a less visible approach.<sup>58</sup> This clear chasm in opinion manifested itself in Abrams' outright public opposition towards Moses.

Within the rhetoric of this opposition lie numerous examples of the ideas that would come to dominate public opinion, in turn greatly altering the public attitude towards Robert

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<sup>55</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 1052.

<sup>56</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 1053.

<sup>57</sup> Walker, Paul. "Charles Abrams vs. Robert Moses: Contested Rhetorics of Urban Housing." *Rhetoric Review* 31, no. 3 (June 08, 2012): 289.

<sup>58</sup> Walker, "Charles Abrams vs. Robert Moses," 292.

Moses. Abrams noted several problems with slum clearance, noting that often it merely moved people to slums on less valuable land, with only the developers of the new building benefitting from non-poor tenants and increased rents.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, Abrams pointed out that even if the developers allowed a slum dweller into the new, subsidized building, the increased rent-to-income ratio would leave a family worse off than before.<sup>60</sup> However, Abrams' lack of power and institutional authority meant that his discourse remained marginal, not only in terms of the political and economic interests of city leaders but also in the realm of policy.<sup>61</sup> Other critics, however, possessed similar ideas yet more influence than Abrams, and they would use these ideas to challenge Robert Moses more effectively.

The most famous of these critics is the author Jane Jacobs, a woman whose writings and direct opposition to Moses have cemented her name in the history of great urban thinkers. Jacobs' texts argued for a different way of thinking about planning and governing cities that was antithetical to Moses' focus on getting things done, using his projects as his "text."<sup>62</sup> Similar to Charles Abrams, Jacobs advocated for dense, walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods and was skeptical of the positive impact Moses attributed to parks, which she argued could add to a neighborhood's "dullness, danger, and emptiness."<sup>63</sup> In short, "Moses was an avatar of the early 20th-century vision that the only salvation of cities was the large-scale destruction of their existing features, and Jacobs the exemplar of another, which maintained that the future of cities

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<sup>59</sup> Walker, "Charles Abrams vs. Robert Moses," 299.

<sup>60</sup> Walker, "Charles Abrams vs. Robert Moses," 299.

<sup>61</sup> Walker, "Charles Abrams vs. Robert Moses," 306.

<sup>62</sup> Larson, Scott. *Building like Moses with Jacobs in Mind: Contemporary Planning in New York City*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 4.

<sup>63</sup> Walker, "Charles Abrams vs. Robert Moses," 304.

reseted on preserving exactly those qualities.”<sup>64</sup> It is from these two opposing positions in the arena of urban theory where Robert Moses and Jane Jacobs began their struggle with one another, a struggle that would come to define their legacies.

However, despite their starkly disparate views and ideas, Moses and Jane Jacobs didn’t truly come into direct conflict with one another until the late 1950s and early 1960s. It was at this time when Moses was working on the most controversial project of his career:

“The Lower Manhattan Expressway was an effort to tie up the loose ends of local roadways by extending Interstate 78 – all 10 lanes of it – from the Holland Tunnel to the Manhattan and Williamsburg Bridges. The obstacle was the streetscape of SoHo and Little Italy, and the great variety of uses within that the city found dispensable.”<sup>65</sup>

This was not the first time Moses had proposed a superhighway that would ram straight through the city’s built environment; in 1960—the same year the city approved his plans for the Lower Manhattan Expressway—Moses had completed a one-mile stretch of the Cross-Bronx Expressway that smashed through the immigrant neighborhood of East Tremont in the Bronx, razing apartment buildings and displacing hundreds of residents.<sup>66</sup> While this project hardly received any attention in the media and in the eyes of the public, the Lower Manhattan Expressway proposed demolishing not an immigrant enclave in the Bronx but a historic center of New York City. It is no wonder the project caused perhaps the most public fight of Robert Moses’ career, one that remains central not only to his legacy but the legacy of Jane Jacobs as well.

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<sup>64</sup> Paletta, Anthony. “Story of Cities #32: Jane Jacobs vs. Robert Moses.” *The Guardian*, April 28, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/apr/28/story-cities-32-new-york-jane-jacobs-robert-moses>.

<sup>65</sup> Paletta, “Jane Jacobs vs. Robert Moses”

<sup>66</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 893.

However, it was not Moses alone with whom Jacobs was fighting. The Housing and Redevelopment Board was conducting a study that intended to classify a large area of Greenwich Village as “blighted,” opening it up to large-scale redevelopment and prompting Jacobs to revamp her efforts to halt the flattening of her neighborhood as co-chair of a Committee to Save the West Village.<sup>67</sup> The expressway had support from the city, the Regional Plan Association, and business groups as well as construction workers’ associations—yet the efforts of this committee forced Mayor Robert Wagner to halt the condemnation proceedings in 1962, only to announce renewed support for a slightly altered plan in 1965.<sup>68</sup> Nonetheless, thanks to the efforts of Jacobs and the diverse local coalition that she established, public opinion prevailed and Mayor John Lindsay declared the project scrapped in 1968.<sup>69</sup> The defeat was the most high-profile and damaging of Moses’ long career; more importantly, it was the final sign that after over forty years, Robert Moses had lost power.

However, Moses had already begun to lose his power at the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s. With his reputation in the eyes of the public smeared by the Title I scandals and many city newspapers calling for the mayor to cut his power, Moses knew that funding for his urban renewal projects would likely be cut as well. As a result, he accepted a position as the President for the 1964-1965 New York World’s Fair in 1959, leaving his post as Chairman of the Mayor’s Committee on Slum Clearance.<sup>70</sup> However, Caro notes that at this time Moses still controlled one city authority and three state authorities; he had anchored himself in a

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<sup>67</sup> Paletta, “Jane Jacobs vs. Robert Moses”

<sup>68</sup> Paletta, “Jane Jacobs vs. Robert Moses”

<sup>69</sup> Paletta, “Jane Jacobs vs. Robert Moses”

<sup>70</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 1061.

position that was so secure that only he himself could truly take his power away.<sup>71</sup> Nonetheless, as Moses began to age well past the retirement limit for public officials, Governor Nelson Rockefeller continually granted him only one-year extensions until Moses threatened to resign all of his state posts—a resignation which Rockefeller, unlike all Governors before him, accepted.<sup>72</sup> In doing so, Rockefeller stripped Moses of his power as Park Commissioner as well as his public authority money; in essence, Rockefeller had fired Robert Moses.<sup>73</sup> While many other Governors had dreaded doing exactly what Rockefeller had done, public opinion on Moses had shifted so drastically that this act drew none of the consequences previous Governors feared.

The World's Fair, therefore, represented an opportunity for a saving grace for Robert Moses. Not only could the Fair help rehabilitate his reputation in the eyes of New Yorkers and the New York press, the national coverage of the event could provide fame across the country and across the globe as well.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, the site of the Fair—Flushing Meadows—had occupied Moses' imagination for decades in dreams for a great park there at the geographical center of New York City, a truly “Central” Park for the city's population as it steadily began to move eastward.<sup>75</sup> The dream for Flushing and a corridor with three other parks along it was the key attraction to the Fair presidency for Moses.<sup>76</sup> Although he had lost the power of his state authorities as well as his power as Park Commissioner, the Fair represented a chance to gain some power back and improve his image in the eyes of the public.

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<sup>71</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 1066.

<sup>72</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 1076.

<sup>73</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 1080.

<sup>74</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 1062.

<sup>75</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 1083.

<sup>76</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 1086.

Unfortunately for Moses, the Fair would only harm him in terms of his power and his reputation. Though it should in theory have rehabilitated this reputation and even expanded it, the Fair ultimately destroyed it.<sup>77</sup> There are many explanations for why the Fair failed, but in reality the manner in which Robert Moses ran it was the driving force behind its lack of success. Moses, with park dreams in his head, ordered the temporary exhibition structures to be built to the cheapest possible specifications, given that they would only stand for two years.<sup>78</sup> The result was a hodgepodge of two hundred pavilions varying in size and shape, a lack of a theme and sense of unity that was perhaps the Fair's greatest weakness.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, despite Moses knowing that for the Fair to be successful he would need the help of the press in order to promote it to the public, once he was in the same room he could not hide his contempt for the people who had ruined his reputation and reverted to his customary verbal attacks.<sup>80</sup> The press responded to Moses by looking into his claims regarding who would be sponsoring exhibits at the Fair, finding many that he lied about or others that had pulled out, further damaging his image.<sup>81</sup> Of course, by damaging the image of Moses, the President of the Fair, the press would likely damage its success as well.

The degree to which the Fair was unsuccessful was staggering nonetheless. In order to recoup its expenses, the Fair had to average 220,000 visitors per day, yet attendance on the opening day was 49,642; while there were crowds of 170,000 each day during the first weekend,

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<sup>77</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 1091.

<sup>78</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 1092.

<sup>79</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 1093.

<sup>80</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 1096.

<sup>81</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 1098.

attendance averaged only around 45,000 during the following week.<sup>82</sup> Consequently, the money earned by the Fair was not only not enough to make the profits Moses had predicted but it even fell well short of the amount required for the Fair to pay its bills. Moses had already spent \$30,000,000 before opening day and around \$30,000,000 more by the end of the summer of 1964; he expected the fair to earn \$90,000,000 during that period, but in reality it perhaps earned \$35,000,000.<sup>83</sup> Though reporters had for months been reporting these financial difficulties, Moses continually attacked them; by January of 1965, however, the truth was out to the public.<sup>84</sup> The Fair was a spectacular failure, and along with it fell Robert Moses and the remaining pieces reputation.

Three years later, the empire of Robert Moses finally fell. In 1966, Mayor John Lindsay had introduced a bill that would merge the Triborough with the Transit Authority, creating a centralized transportation authority and making the surpluses of the two authorities available for subway operation.<sup>85</sup> Though Lindsay's bill was not able to pass without Moses' approval due to covenants in the bonds held by the Triborough and Transit authorities which required them to remain autonomous entities, the Mayor promised Moses that he would remain in power, a promise which he would end up breaking.<sup>86</sup> With the merger, "the age of Robert Moses was over. Begun on April 23, 1924, it had ended on March 1, 1968. After forty-four years of power, the power was gone at last."<sup>87</sup> Disappearing along with this power was the greatest builder New

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<sup>82</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 1102.

<sup>83</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 1104.

<sup>84</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 1106.

<sup>85</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 1119.

<sup>86</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 1140.

<sup>87</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 1144.

York and perhaps the world had ever known, a man who had imposed his will on the city and forever altered its landscape.

And yet, in the years following Robert Moses' fall from power, his legacy and the public perception of his work turned increasingly negative. Mayor Lindsay would consistently use his name in speeches in order to promote new policies and initiatives he saw as antithetical to Moses' ideas and vision.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, the man who for decades was all over the newspapers was only mentioned in these same papers in a derogatory context, as a man who was responsible for mistakes in highways and housing.<sup>89</sup> Robert Caro's biography on Moses ends with perhaps the most pertinent question regarding this negative turn towards the legacy of Robert Moses and his impact on New York City:

“Down in the audience [for Moses' address at the dedication of the Excedra in Flushing Meadows], the ministers of the empire of Moses glanced at one another and nodded their heads. RM was right as usual, they whispered. Couldn't people see what he had done? Why weren't they grateful?”<sup>90</sup>

Robert Moses had built more for New York City than any other public official had built for any city ever before, yet the public's attitude towards him at the end of his career was not only ungrateful but even downright scornful.

To be sure, this attitude largely persisted long after his career was over, and in turn it has tarnished the legacy of Robert Moses for decades. Writing forty years after the publication of his book in 1974, Caro himself said that there were ample answers to the question of gratitude that concludes his book, noting Moses' racism and work with mass transit as well as the manner in

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<sup>88</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 1158.

<sup>89</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 1161-1162.

<sup>90</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 1162.



which his urban renewal project displaced hundreds of thousands of residents.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, although Caro's book represents a sort of monument to Moses' achievements, through it runs a subtle but overarching thesis that suggests that Moses destroyed the city, leaving New York in the state of desperation that it was in at the time Caro published his book.<sup>92</sup> By the time Robert Moses died in 1981, he was largely reviled as a figure in New York's history.<sup>93</sup> Almost forty years later, this attitude towards Robert Moses and his legacy has largely persisted.

Although he made several mistakes throughout his career, Moses's legacy as a destroyer of New York City owes much more to a broader shift in the public attitude towards urban planning as a whole. It is here where Jane Jacobs played perhaps her largest role in shaping the legacy of Robert Moses. Jacobs published her own seminal work in 1961, arguing against modern planning strategies that favored tall towers surrounded by empty parks, wide streets built for auto traffic rather than pedestrians, and large-scale new development that destroyed the authentic human contacts within a city.<sup>94</sup> This book raised an alarm against the arrogance of state power, a power personified by Robert Moses.<sup>95</sup> Many other Moses critics adopted the ideas that Jacobs presented in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, and thus she was instrumental in helping shift the tide of public opinion against him destroying his legacy at the end of his career.

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<sup>91</sup> Caro, Robert. "The Power Broker, 40 Years Later." *The New York Times*, December 10, 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/14/books/review/the-power-broker-40-years-later.html>.

<sup>92</sup> Jackson, "Robert Moses and the Rise of New York," 68.

<sup>93</sup> Paletta, "Jane Jacobs vs. Robert Moses"

<sup>94</sup> Zukin, Sharon. *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places*. (New York: Oxford University Press 2011), 12.

<sup>95</sup> Zukin, *Naked City*, 13.

Consequently, Moses' defeats in the late 1950s and in the 1960s took on a meaning that went beyond his loss of power. Each defeat signaled a triumph of the ideas Jacobs championed over the vision and ideas of Robert Moses, with planned development in New York shifting as voters changed the approval process for large-scale development projects to require more public input following his fall from power.<sup>96</sup> Indeed, the public viewed Jane Jacobs as the patron saint of the grassroots movement against bureaucratic acts that brought on what she called "the great blight of dullness."<sup>97</sup> It is evident how such a perception could improve her legacy while simultaneously harming that of Robert Moses, who stood for the opposite of Jacobs' ideals in the form of top-down, large-scale urban planning. When Jacobs died in 2006, twenty-five years after Moses passed away with his reputation in tatters, both the press and the public venerated her career and ideas.<sup>98</sup> However, it was more than Jacobs' ideas that endowed her with such a positive legacy; New York underwent severe changes during the period between Moses' fall from power in the late 1960s and Jacobs' death in 2006, shifting the perception on both figures.

The next chapter of this paper will detail these changes, mainly in terms of suburban flight, gentrification, and the large-scale real estate development projects that have made a return in the twenty-first century. More specifically, the chapter will examine real estate practices in New York City over the decades since Moses left power. In doing so, it will aim to provide valuable insight into how changing development trends have affected the legacies of both Robert Moses and Jane Jacobs. Moreover, in light of the large-scale redevelopment projects in the

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<sup>96</sup> Zukin, *Naked City*, 15.

<sup>97</sup> Zukin, Sharon. "Jane Jacobs (1916-2006)." *Architectural Review*, October 26, 2011. <https://www.architectural-review.com/rethink/reputations-pen-portraits/-/jane-jacobs-1916-2006/8621634.article?search=https://www.architectural-review.com/searcharticles?keywords=Jane+jacobs+sharon+zukin>.

<sup>98</sup> Paletta, "Jane Jacobs vs. Robert Moses"

Bloomberg Years and the first quarter of the twenty-first century, the next chapter will present the bulk of this paper's main argument for a more positive reconsideration of the legacy and career of Robert Moses.

## **Chapter Two: Changing Development and a Changing Legacy**

Fifty-four years after Robert Moses fell from power, New York is almost beyond recognition. Over a decade of suburbanization, white flight, and urban decay followed the fall of Robert Moses, with the city falling into fiscal crisis in the mid-1970s and continuing to decay until the “back-to-the-city” movement began in the 1980s. From the 1990s until the present day, gentrification has held a tight grip on New York City, transforming entire neighborhoods and ushering in a new era in terms of development patterns, one defined by large-scale redevelopment via public-private partnerships. These continued shifts in urban development in New York since Moses left power are vital to an understanding of his enduring legacy. This chapter will examine these changes in the city’s development; in doing so, it will argue for a reexamination of the legacy of Robert Moses and for recognition of the positive impact his career has had on New York City.

Less than a decade after Governor Rockefeller finally stripped Moses of his last sliver of power, New York City was in disarray. A massive wave of industrial exodus occurred in the late 1960s and 1970s, as bankers and real estate developers began to drive goods-making industries further away from the city in order to redevelop the land they occupied for more valuable uses.<sup>99</sup> Along with these industries left thousands of decent-paying jobs—with these jobs went the tax revenues of a once-stable working class and the businesses that employed it.<sup>100</sup> By the mid-1970s, New York was exporting sixty-eight percent of the value it produced to the rest of the world as it cemented its central place within the global economy, exacerbating the decline of its

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<sup>99</sup> Moody, Kim. *From Welfare State to Real Estate: Regime Change in New York City, 1974 to the Present*. (New York: Univ. Press, 2007), 3.

<sup>100</sup> Moody, *From Welfare State to Real Estate*, 12.

industrial base in favor of producer services, finance, and communications.<sup>101</sup> This economic shift was central to New York City's decline.

With the changes to the city's economy came changes in its population as well. Suburban flight dating all the way back to the 1950s moved affluent whites out of the central city, with a large influx of black and Puerto Rican migrants—as well as Asians, South Americans, and Carribeans during the 1970s—taking their place.<sup>102</sup> In 1940, ninety-four percent of New York City was white; by 1985, the population of whites in the city had dwindled to just forty-nine percent.<sup>103</sup> As whites were more likely to be wealthy, particularly relative to the poor immigrants that replaced them, white flight had a profound impact on New York City's budget as it lost the tax revenues from hundreds of thousands of affluent residents. Half a million people left New York City in the period from 1970 to 1975, helping to cause a recession that not only halted the migration of immigrants but also increased the outflow of these middle- and higher-income white residents.<sup>104</sup> This sharp loss in population was a massive blow to city revenues; New York City was on the brink of collapse by 1975, only seven years after Robert Moses has fallen from power.

Consequently, it would appear that Moses himself is to blame for New York City's decline. However, ascribing the city's disarray in the mid-1970s to Moses' works and career overlooks the broader trends that were shaping the country at the time. John Logan and Harvey Molotch note that by 1970, suburban residential population in the United States was greater than

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<sup>101</sup> Moody, *From Welfare State to Real Estate*, 11-12.

<sup>102</sup> Sassen, Saskia. *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991), 259.

<sup>103</sup> Sassen, *The Global City*, 259.

<sup>104</sup> Moody, *From Welfare State to Real Estate*, 57.

the population of central cities, with blue-collar workers as well as affluent whites more likely to live in the suburbs.<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, in the period from 1963 to 1977, the country's twenty-five largest metropolitan areas saw their total employment in manufacturing drop by 700,000 in the central cities while it grew by more than 1,100,000 in the suburban area; employment, like residence, had therefore become suburban as well.<sup>106</sup> As a result, it is evident that the same phenomena that brought about New York City's decline were gripping large cities across the country, perhaps absolving Robert Moses from some of the blame for the state of the city in the 1970s.

However, it is also evident that the highways and roads Moses built contributed to New York's decline by encouraging more suburbanization. Logan & Molotch argue that advances in transportation such as the automobile and airplanes drew the country's focus away from the downtown area, as freeways and airports gave larger parts of the urban region access to transportation.<sup>107</sup> Of course, Robert Moses built more for the automobile in the form of highways and roads than any other man in American history, connecting large swaths of the New York metropolitan region with the city's central business district more than ever before. Moreover, it is likely that Moses' highways and roads accelerated the movement of corporate headquarters from the central city to the surrounding suburbs, where they still had access to the major business centers as well as the surrounding transportation infrastructure.<sup>108</sup> As a result, it seems logical to

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<sup>105</sup> Logan, John and Harvey Molotch. *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place*. (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1987), 180.

<sup>106</sup> Logan and Molotch, *Urban Fortunes*, 183-184.

<sup>107</sup> Logan and Molotch, *Urban Fortunes*, 184.

<sup>108</sup> Logan and Molotoch, *Urban Fortunes*, 259-260.

ascribe Moses a large portion of the blame for the manner in which his projects drew more and more people out of the city.

To be sure, Moses' highways, parkways, and bridges provided easier access to New York's surrounding suburbs, facilitating as well as accelerating the movement of people and businesses out of the central city. However, these infrastructure projects were not the main driving force behind the city's decline. As the city continued to lose tax revenues as a result of the migration of both people and businesses to the surrounding suburbs, its government decided to usher in a prolific period of new office construction in the downtown central business district in an attempt to lure them back. This new construction pushed up the price of land and rents in the area while the real estate itself was tax-exempt due to government subsidies provided by the city.<sup>109</sup> These subsidies were central to the sharp decrease in the city's tax revenue as its government increased the proportion of real estate that was tax-exempt to forty percent in the mid-1970s.<sup>110</sup> By 1975, New York City was mired in a fiscal crisis; only a federal loan of \$2,300,000,000 prevented the city from defaulting on its short-term debt, which would have resulted in massive losses for hundreds of banks across the country.<sup>111</sup> The decision to subsidize new construction in the downtown area cut the city's revenues even further; therefore, it is evident that a large portion of the responsibility for the fiscal crisis of the 1970s lies with the New York City government.

If the city government was responsible for the dire state of New York in this decade, however, it was also instrumental in reversing the city's decline during the 1980s and beyond.

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<sup>109</sup> Moody, *From Welfare State to Real Estate*, 13.

<sup>110</sup> Moody, *From Welfare State to Real Estate*, 59.

<sup>111</sup> Moody, *From Welfare State to Real Estate*, 41.

1978 saw the election of Mayor Ed Koch, who would usher in a new period in New York City's development; in its first four years, the Koch administration increased the city's developmental spending by over fourteen percent.<sup>112</sup> While this spending increased the market value of the city's real estate, the Koch administration continued to grant extensive tax breaks to private real estate developers; 421a abatements for new residential construction and J-51 abatements for condo construction combined to cost over \$250,000,000 per year by 1983, while real property taxes had declined by nineteen percent since 1975.<sup>113</sup> While these abatements were detrimental to the city's budget, they also encouraged gentrification, a process central to new development trends that would revitalize New York City.

Kim Moody points out the impact of these tax breaks in her discussion of New York City after the fiscal crisis of the 1970s. She argues that gentrification was not a natural process dictated by artists and hippies seeking affordable housing, but rather the new tax-incentive programs in the city beginning in the 1970s—and accelerating in the 1980s—aggressively aided gentrification.<sup>114</sup> Of course, there were other policies that exacerbated the process; the city government would also turn to zoning to stimulate development in an area, earning huge profits for the real estate and business elite of the city.<sup>115</sup> These zoning choices also directed where gentrification occurred, and the process began to spread outward from the areas that were the nearest to New York's corporate center in Lower Manhattan.

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<sup>112</sup> Moody, *From Welfare State to Real Estate*, 69.

<sup>113</sup> Moody, *From Welfare State to Real Estate*, 70.

<sup>114</sup> Moody, *From Welfare State to Real Estate*, 78.

<sup>115</sup> Logan and Molotch, *Urban Fortunes*, 156.



As gentrification began to take hold in the outer boroughs, the city once again became an attractive place to live. Sharon Zukin notes that by the 1980s communities of artists stretched through the historic neighborhoods of Lower Manhattan; by the 1990s these communities had reached across the East River to Brooklyn and Queens, confirming the appeal of the neighborhoods they occupied relative to the homogeneous suburbs and corporate center.<sup>116</sup> At the same time, the city government began to crack down on crime and homelessness via a “zero tolerance” policy, clearing the way for gentrification and development in previously dangerous working-class neighborhoods.<sup>117</sup> These policies brought people back to the city in droves: New York’s population grew by 685,714 from 1989 to 2000, two-thirds of which was in Brooklyn or Queens.<sup>118</sup> The era of suburbanization and urban decay was evidently over by the end of the twentieth century, despite the existence of Robert Moses’ infrastructure projects.

Though New York did become a safer and more desirable place to live during the last two decades of the century, there were also economic changes that helped bring people back to the city. Saskia Sassen notes that New York City’s shift to a service economy after the deindustrialization of the mid-twentieth century brought with it a transformation of class structure via large-scale developments and high-priced shopping districts.<sup>119</sup> These developments were clearly geared towards attracting affluent residents, and in this sense they achieved their goal; the new high-income professionals of the service economy preferred urban living, and their

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<sup>116</sup> Zukin, Sharon. *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 16.

<sup>117</sup> Moody, *From Welfare State to Real Estate*, 140.

<sup>118</sup> Moody, *From Welfare State to Real Estate*, 111.

<sup>119</sup> Sassen, *The Global City*, 261.

arrival accelerated gentrification in large areas of New York.<sup>120</sup> Sassen argues that this trend was a central fact of gentrification in the city, particularly as in neighborhoods such as SoHo and Park Slope—poor and middle-income neighborhoods which came to contain highly priced commercial and residential buildings.<sup>121</sup> These new developments transformed entire neighborhoods and large areas of the city.

The arrival of large-scale redevelopment via gentrification in New York City towards the end of the twentieth century bears a clear resemblance to the wholesale urban renewal projects of Robert Moses. This time, however, it was not low-income housing that took the place of poor neighborhoods but high-end luxury residential and office buildings. While these developments took hold gradually, block-by-block and building-by-building, John Logan notes that the effect of gentrification were just as complete as in wholesale urban renewal.<sup>122</sup> Therefore, while in a certain sense gentrification owed much to the street-level perspective of Jane Jacobs, often the process had a larger effect that was similar to the impact of Robert Moses' urban renewal projects.

The return of wealthy people to New York City towards the turn helped to accelerate gentrification, exacerbating social and economic inequalities. Richard Florida argues that both gentrification and inequality are direct results of what he refers to as the “recolonization of the city by the affluent and the advantaged.”<sup>123</sup> Florida explains this argument by noting how the return of this class of people to the city pushes the remaining people into disadvantaged areas of

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<sup>120</sup> Sassen, *The Global City*, 263.

<sup>121</sup> Sassen, *The Global City*, 266.

<sup>122</sup> Logan and Molotch, *Urban Fortunes*, 115.

<sup>123</sup> Florida, Richard. *The New Urban Crisis*. (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 4.

the city or further out into the suburbs.<sup>124</sup> This is mainly a result of the increased home prices that the returning wealthy class brings back into the city, as these home prices make it impossible for the less advantaged to afford to stay in the neighborhood. Moody notes how this struggle for space played out by the Koch era in the 1980s, with a zero-sum character that trapped lower-income working-class families by reducing low-cost available housing and pushing up the prices of existing and future housing.<sup>125</sup> This struggle continued throughout the last two decades of the twentieth century and well into the twenty-first century.

Such struggle reveals that the effects of gentrification on the city as a whole at the end of the twentieth century were remarkably similar to some of the negative consequences of Moses' work which ended up derailing his career and tarnishing his legacy. Just as Moses' slum-clearance projects cut into the already limited housing options for slum residents, gentrification removed thousands of low- and middle-income housing units. The last five years of the twentieth century included the construction of over fifty thousand units of housing, virtually none of these affordable, which increasingly pushed affordable housing off the market along with the spread of gentrification.<sup>126</sup> Unsurprisingly, this trend had a disproportionate effect on the city's working-class and poor residents, many of whom became homeless.<sup>127</sup> Consequently, it is clear how gentrification reinforced inequalities within New York City as the returning affluent class reassumed certain spaces and pushed out those who could not afford the increased competition for these areas.

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<sup>124</sup> Florida, *The New Urban Crisis*, 9.

<sup>125</sup> Moody, *From Welfare State to Real Estate*, 75.

<sup>126</sup> Moody, *From Welfare State to Real Estate*, 150.

<sup>127</sup> Moody, *From Welfare State to Real Estate*, 76.

This competition for space had another dimension in terms of creating income inequality that was based on geography. The gap between the business elite who were moving closer to Manhattan and the working class whom their return was pushing out towards the outer boroughs grew rapidly in the last decade of the twentieth century, as high-paying professional and managerial jobs came to represent eighty percent of Manhattan's employment compared to just over thirty-five percent for the city as a whole.<sup>128</sup> At the same time, a third stage of gentrification was occurring in which the process became highly integrated with urban planning, as opposed to the sporadic gentrification from 1950 to 1980 and the gentrification that was intertwined with the economic restructuring of the 1980s.<sup>129</sup> It is this last phase that had the greatest impact in terms of brewing inequality within New York City as the government now planned where gentrification was to occur in the same vein as how Robert Moses dictated where he would build his urban renewal projects.

Of course, this type of planned gentrification created huge profits for real estate developers not only in the city but also in foreign countries as well. Sharon Zukin notes that looser restrictions on foreign investment meant that beginning in the late 1980s, foreign money began to flow "like Perrier" into New York's real estate market.<sup>130</sup> Rezoning became the city government's preferred tool of redevelopment towards the turn of the century, allowing the type of development that private investors saw as the most profitable by up-zoning to taller buildings on the wide avenues and waterfront while down-zoning to low-rise buildings on the side

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<sup>128</sup> Moody, *From Welfare State to Real Estate*, 106.

<sup>129</sup> Smith, Neil. "New Globalism, New Urbanism: Gentrification as a Global Urban Strategy." In *The Globalizing Cities Reader*, ed. Xuefei Ren and Roger Keil. (London: Routledge, 2018), 254.

<sup>130</sup> Zukin, *Naked City*, 23.

streets.<sup>131</sup> Thus, the city government increasingly worked in conjunction with private developers from all over the globe by rezoning and gentrifying the areas where these developers saw the highest potential for profit.

The similarities between this collaboration and the public-private relationships that Robert Moses fostered through his urban renewal projects are quite striking. Just as Moses worked with private developers to select underused and undervalued land as sites for housing projects, the city government was collaborating with developers to find similar land as sites for rezoning and subsequent gentrification. The existence of these similarities leaves a certain paradox, as the reaction to gentrification from the press and the public bureaucracy at the turn of the century was not anywhere close to their continued bashing of Robert Moses and his urban renewal projects. John Logan and Harvey Molotch provide a possible explanation to this contradiction; they argue that whereas many considered the arrival of poor, predominantly black residents in a “good neighborhood” to be a tragic example of urban decline, the arrival of affluent whites into a previously poor or black neighborhood was grounds for celebration due to the potential for higher rents.<sup>132</sup> Indeed, it seems that unlike with Robert Moses’ urban renewal projects, the profits and economic benefits associated with gentrification at the turn of the century helped to shield its negative effects from public scrutiny.

Moreover, it is possible that the public and the press ignored these effects due to other, more positive consequences of gentrification. Logan and Molotch note that much historic preservation occurs with gentrification, as the city and private developers often combine to

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<sup>131</sup> Zukin, *Naked City*, 23-24.

<sup>132</sup> Logan and Molotch, *Urban Fortunes*, 115.

provide whole neighborhoods with special benefits in order to create a particular charming ambience as well as the increased rents and fiscal benefits that follow.<sup>133</sup> Sharon Zukin notes how this mix of old and new buildings was one of the hallmarks of Jane Jacobs' vision, yet Jacobs did not acknowledge how gentrification could create a particular ambience and commodity that few longtime residents or business owners could afford.<sup>134</sup> This explanation is useful in resolving the paradox of gentrification's many urban-renewal-like consequences and the lack of negative attention from the press, as the vision of Jane Jacobs had won out over the ideals of Robert Moses in the arena of public opinion. Though many elements of Moses' ideas and career were certainly present in gentrification, a large part of the process centered around Jacobs' vision of historic preservation and mixed-use neighborhoods.

As gentrification would progress into the twenty-first century, however, the process would move further away from the ideas of Jane Jacobs and closer to the large-scale planning of Robert Moses. Of course, a seismic event within the first two years of this century forever altered New York City's skyline and development path. In terms of real estate, the destruction of New York's World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 destroyed six office towers, eliminating over 13,000,000 square feet of office space and damaging 17,000,000 more.<sup>135</sup> However, perhaps an even more seismic event in terms of New York's development took place only two and a half months later as Mayor Michael Bloomberg took office in January of 2002. As 9/11 destroyed a large part of the city's built environment and forced companies to leave Lower Manhattan, Bloomberg would seek not only to rehabilitate the city's image and its spirit but also to reshape

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<sup>133</sup> Logan and Molotch, *Urban Fortunes*, 177.

<sup>134</sup> Zukin, *Naked City*, 243.

<sup>135</sup> Moody, *From Welfare State to Real Estate*, 165.

its built environment on a scale paralleled only by the build-big era of Robert Moses.<sup>136</sup> The administration would achieve this goal and much more.

The first plans that the Bloomberg administration set in motion were primarily about rebranding the city. In the decade or so before Bloomberg took office, New York City lost tens of thousands of office jobs as companies began moving back-office operations and some high-end employees across the Hudson River to places such as Jersey City and Hoboken.<sup>137</sup> Bloomberg and his administration were well aware that the city's high real estate and land prices as well as the cost of providing public service meant that it could not compete with New Jersey purely on the basis of cost.<sup>138</sup> Consequently, the administration began to adopt a branding-inspired development strategy, one that reimagined New York City as a "value-adding product, an input into the postindustrial production process itself."<sup>139</sup> As 9/11 had destroyed much of the city's prime office space and had scared many companies away, this development strategy was crucial in bringing back both office development as well as jobs, despite the high costs associated with operating in New York City.

It is essential to note the central elements of the Bloomberg administration's urban development plan. Julian Brash notes how each of the two central elements of the plan was aimed at enhancing the city's brand; firstly, the administration focused on creating a high-quality residential and recreation environment, including the facilitation of primarily luxury housing

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<sup>136</sup> Larson, Scott. *"Building Like Moses with Jacobs in Mind": Contemporary Planning in New York City*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 33.

<sup>137</sup> Brash, Julian. *Bloomberg's New York: Class and Governance in the Luxury City*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 106.

<sup>138</sup> Brash, *Bloomberg's New York*, 107.

<sup>139</sup> Brash, *Bloomberg's New York*, 121.

throughout the city but especially in the gentrifying neighborhoods of Williamsburg/Greenpoint, West Chelsea, Harlem, and Downtown Brooklyn.<sup>140</sup> The second aim of the plan was to curtail “inappropriate” residential development and protect “neighborhood character” in the single-family-home neighborhoods of the outer boroughs.<sup>141</sup> Beyond a focus on residential development, however, the Bloomberg administration also formulated plans for commercial development in a number of areas, with areas like Long Island City intended to compete with New Jersey for lower-cost, back-office space as well as other districts like Harlem and Flushing, Queens that would be geared towards industries that served local markets.<sup>142</sup> Lastly, the administration’s plan emphasized parks and open space, especially along the waterfront areas where it planned to lengthen the network of bike paths and promote mixed-use development in specific waterfront sites such as West Harlem and Williamsburg.<sup>143</sup> Such an all-encompassing plan reflected the ideals of both Jane Jacobs and Robert Moses, and it would come to have a drastic impact on the city that would alter their legacies.

The manner in which Bloomberg and his administration went about implementing this plan cemented New York’s rebranding as a luxury city. In the last decade of the twentieth century, the city’s population had increased by 695,276, while housing with rents at or below \$500 a month had fallen by 517,345, more than half the total in 1990.<sup>144</sup> During his three terms as mayor, Bloomberg’s administration granted over \$600,000,000 in tax abatements and

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<sup>140</sup> Brash, *Bloomberg’s New York*, 122.

<sup>141</sup> Brash, *Bloomberg’s New York*, 122.

<sup>142</sup> Brash, *Bloomberg’s New York*, 123.

<sup>143</sup> Brash, *Bloomberg’s New York*, 122.

<sup>144</sup> Moody, *From Welfare State to Real Estate*, 177.



exemptions for housing development—only four percent of which went to low-income housing while sixty percent went to upscale housing in Manhattan.<sup>145</sup> Of course, this spike in housing development resulted in a simultaneous spike in housing prices, with the average price of a Manhattan apartment reaching \$1,300,000 by 2004 while luxury apartments averaged over \$5,000,000.<sup>146</sup> These exorbitant home prices would only end up further limiting the housing options for the city’s working- and middle-class.

In an effort to solve New York’s affordable housing crisis, the Bloomberg administration adopted several strategies. One was the New Housing Marketplace plan, which stipulated the construction of 65,000 new affordable units by 2008.<sup>147</sup> This plan was part of a larger strategy as the administration adopted inclusionary zoning, not only in high-density districts in Manhattan but in medium-density areas in the outer boroughs as well.<sup>148</sup> Although inclusionary zoning had been in existence since 1987, it was only during Bloomberg’s tenure that it became central to the city’s affordable housing policies.<sup>149</sup> The ‘Designated Areas’ Inclusionary Housing Program (IHP) not only provided developers a thirty-three percent density bonus in exchange for a provision of twenty percent affordable units at or below eighty percent of the area’s median income, but it also allowed developers to combine these bonuses with tax exemptions like the 421a, further subsidizing the cost of affordable housing development.<sup>150</sup> With these extensive

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<sup>145</sup> Moody, *From Welfare State to Real Estate*, 171.

<sup>146</sup> Moody, *From Welfare State to Real Estate*, 178.

<sup>147</sup> Moody, *From Welfare State to Real Estate*, 179-180.

<sup>148</sup> Larson, *Building Like Moses with Jacobs in Mind*, 94.

<sup>149</sup> Stabrowski, Filip. “Inclusionary Zoning and Exclusionary Development: The Politics of ‘Affordable Housing’ in North Brooklyn.” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 39, no. 6 (November, 2015): 1123. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12297>.

<sup>150</sup> Stabrowski, Filip. “Inclusionary Zoning and Exclusionary Development,” 1123.

subsidies, the Bloomberg administration hoped to facilitate new luxury residential development while also providing affordable housing for the class of people that were seeing an increased shortage in housing options as a direct result of this development.

However, the administration's inclusionary zoning plans largely failed to provide sufficient affordable housing to go along with the thousands of new luxury housing units. Filip Stabrowski argues that while the administration justified inclusionary zoning as a tool for using the city's strong housing market to generate affordable housing, in practice it has generated far too few affordable units, particularly in the areas that needed this low-income housing the most.<sup>151</sup> For example, the IHP that was part of a larger rezoning of Williamsburg/Greenpoint generated only 949 affordable units—only thirteen percent of the total new units in the designated area.<sup>152</sup> Consequently, it is difficult to regard the results of the IHP as anything other than widely disappointing.<sup>153</sup> Not only are these disappointing results especially present in the case of Williamsburg/Greenpoint, but ironically these neighborhoods became one of the most heavily gentrified areas in New York City.<sup>154</sup> Consequently, there is a clear relationship between inclusionary zoning policies and gentrification.

Within this relationship lies a certain paradox. Filip Stabrowski explains that by the logic of inclusionary zoning, it would only be possible to minimize gentrification through the production of affordable units by encouraging the process of gentrification itself through tax

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<sup>151</sup> Stabrowski, Filip. "Inclusionary Zoning and Exclusionary Development," 1123.

<sup>152</sup> Stabrowski, Filip. "Inclusionary Zoning and Exclusionary Development," 1126.

<sup>153</sup> Stabrowski, Filip. "Inclusionary Zoning and Exclusionary Development," 1126.

<sup>154</sup> Stabrowski, Filip. "Inclusionary Zoning and Exclusionary Development," 1121.

incentives and density bonuses for luxury development.<sup>155</sup> Thus, affordable housing came to serve not only as a symptom of gentrification due to the fact that it required a “hot” real estate market but also as a solution to gentrification as its primary displacement-mitigating mechanism.<sup>156</sup> The results of gentrification reveal the clear issues involved with both the underlying logic of inclusionary zoning and the paradox that was central to the Bloomberg administration’s justification of the policy.

There is a substantial amount of empirical data on gentrification, but perhaps the most comprehensive study comes from New York University’s Furman Center. The Furman Center’s report reveals that from 1990 to the last year of Bloomberg’s tenure as mayor, mean household rent in the city’s fifteen gentrifying neighborhoods rose by thirty-four percent; during this same period, mean household rent citywide in fifty-five neighborhoods only grew by twenty-two percent.<sup>157</sup> Moreover, the study notes that in 2000, two years before Bloomberg took office, households that earned eighty percent of the median area income could afford over seventy-seven percent of the recently available rental units in gentrifying neighborhoods; a year after Bloomberg’s mayoralty had ended, that share had fallen to less than fifty percent.<sup>158</sup> The empirical data is clear: rather than providing more affordable units, the Bloomberg administration’s initiatives not only raised rents in gentrifying neighborhoods but also severely limited their supply of affordable housing.

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<sup>155</sup> Stabrowski, Filip. “Inclusionary Zoning and Exclusionary Development,” 1134.

<sup>156</sup> Stabrowski, Filip. “Inclusionary Zoning and Exclusionary Development,” 1134.

<sup>157</sup> Furman Center. *State of New York’s Housing and Neighborhoods in 2015*. (New York: NYU Furman Center, 2015), 4-5.

<sup>158</sup> Furman Center, 15.

Moreover, the administration created more of these gentrifying neighborhoods throughout the city through large-scale rezoning and development. Bloomberg, his deputy mayor Dan Doctoroff, and Amanda Burden—the director of the Department of City Planning—rezoned over thirty-seven percent of New York City, promoting high-density along transit corridors and preserving low-density neighborhoods.<sup>159</sup> These rezonings prioritized specific land uses: Scott Larson notes that of the ninety-five rezonings the administration approved between 2003 and 2008, one-quarter converted manufacturing land to some other use, while none added available industrial land.<sup>160</sup> Additionally, Larson points out that these rezonings only encouraged real estate speculation, driving up rents and housing prices in neighborhoods that were already growing increasingly costly.<sup>161</sup> It is clear that the Bloomberg administration centered its plans around rezoning, and by extension it brought large-scale development and gentrification to the areas that the administration deemed underused, undervalued, and thus most profitable for real estate developers.

With these criteria, it is not surprising that most of the Bloomberg administration's rezoning projects and the gentrification that followed were focused in certain types of neighborhoods. The administration targeted low-income and minority neighborhoods in particular, such as the Melrose neighborhood of the Bronx, where the poverty rate in one census tract decreased by over twenty percent due to a large influx of new development that attracted higher-income residents.<sup>162</sup> Bloomberg and his administration also targeted the city's waterfront,

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<sup>159</sup> "Reshaping New York - Interactive Feature." *The New York Times*. August 18, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/newsgraphics/2013/08/18/reshaping-new-york/index.html>.

<sup>160</sup> Larson, *Building Like Moses with Jacobs in Mind*, 91.

<sup>161</sup> Larson, *Building Like Moses with Jacobs in Mind*, 93.

<sup>162</sup> "Reshaping New York - Interactive Feature." *The New York Times*.

as they planned for a dramatic greenery under the Brooklyn Bridge, a luxury development down the Queens and Brooklyn shore, and a giant park in place of a garbage dump in Staten Island.<sup>163</sup> The focus of Bloomberg's rezoning efforts can thus be categorized into two themes: large-scale redevelopment in predominantly low-income, minority neighborhoods and a transformation of the city's waterfront via similar development as well as parks. It is clear from this categorization that the Bloomberg administration was drawing heavily on the ideals and development philosophy of Robert Moses, a man who prioritized development in low-income neighborhoods and along the waterfront.

Nonetheless, there were many signs that the ideas and work of Jane Jacobs still held powerful influence in terms of urban policy and development. Brash notes that community organization and planning—directly linked to anti-urban renewal movements as well as the grassroots ideals of Jane Jacobs—remained a vibrant source of opposition to large-scale development.<sup>164</sup> As Bloomberg's Deputy Mayor Dan Doctoroff acknowledged almost eight years after he left his post, the administration made a point to redevelop areas where there was no real community and where it would displace the least amount of people.<sup>165</sup> Doctoroff also described the administration's approach as block-by-block and building-by-building, with an eye towards working with communities as well as preserving or enhancing existing neighborhood character through downzoning and landmark preservation.<sup>166</sup> This type of rhetoric suggests an implicit

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<sup>163</sup> "Reshaping New York - Interactive Feature." *The New York Times*.

<sup>164</sup> Brash, *Bloomberg's New York*, 36.

<sup>165</sup> Florida, Richard. "Dan Doctoroff on the Rebuilding of New York After 9/11." CityLab. September 19, 2017. <https://www.citylab.com/life/2017/09/dan-doctoroff-reflects-on-rebuilding-new-york-post-911/540237/>

<sup>166</sup> Florida, Richard. "Dan Doctoroff on the Rebuilding of New York After 9/11."

knowledge within the Bloomberg administration of a need to respect the widely accepted vision and ideas of Jane Jacobs.

To be sure, Bloomberg and his officials made sure to add a nod of approval to Jacobsian ideals whenever they were promoting a project or policy. For instance, the administration viewed zoning as a mechanism for actively fostering density and mixed uses, and it portrayed rezonings as a means toward the end of creating Jacobs' preconditions for a diverse neighborhood.<sup>167</sup> More significantly, Bloomberg's development agenda actually rested on the Jacobsian notion that healthy neighborhoods meant a healthy city, and the administration devised its own formula of protecting neighborhood character in middle- and upper-class residential neighborhoods through downzoning and landmark preservation.<sup>168</sup> Additionally, Deputy Mayor Doctoroff's long-term strategic plan centered around the idea of New York as a city of neighborhoods and even included an emphasis on design.<sup>169</sup> It is clear that the administration made a concerted effort to adhere to the vision of Jane Jacobs in its urban development plans.

However, the effects of these plans reveal that a lot of this effort was merely window-dressing in order to limit popular opposition. Larson notes that despite the administration's portrayal of zoning as a Jacobsian tool for fostering a diverse neighborhood, the actual intended effects of rezoning projects more closely resembled Moses-style redevelopment via a wholesale transformation of large areas of New York City.<sup>170</sup> Moreover, the administration advocated an aggressive new round of creative destruction that harkened back to the methods of Robert

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<sup>167</sup> Larson, *Building Like Moses with Jacobs in Mind*, 81.

<sup>168</sup> Larson, *Building Like Moses with Jacobs in Mind*, 80.

<sup>169</sup> Larson, *Building Like Moses with Jacobs in Mind*, 51.

<sup>170</sup> Larson, *Building Like Moses with Jacobs in Mind*, 87.

Moses, complete with a readiness to invoke eminent domain and public-private partnerships to secure participation for real estate developers.<sup>171</sup> Despite the Bloomberg administration's Jacobs-oriented public portrayals of its policies and projects, in practice these initiatives owed much more to the planning practices of the Moses era.

Moreover, the Bloomberg administration ushered in an era of mega-projects that truly mirrored the top-down, large-scale planning of Moses' career. Bloomberg planned most of the up-zonings required to promote these projects along the city's waterfront, primarily in former industrial areas.<sup>172</sup> These plans often included open public spaces, ensuring city residents access to the water while also providing developers with an amenity that would increase the value of their product.<sup>173</sup> Such was the nature and scope of this new wave of mega-projects that it seemed as though the administration was directly attacking the prevailing vision and wisdom of Jane Jacobs with plans that were almost direct disciples from the Moses era.<sup>174</sup> Indeed, Jacobs herself even weighed in with a letter addressed to Bloomberg himself regarding the proposed rezoning of the Williamsburg/Greenpoint waterfront, arguing for the support of the community's alternative plan which preserved the neighborhood's existing scale.<sup>175</sup> The letter ultimately had no effect on the plans of the administration; thus, it seems that after over three decades, the vision of Jane Jacobs had lost substantial ground to the ideals of Robert Moses.

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<sup>171</sup> Larson, *Building Like Moses with Jacobs in Mind*, 81.

<sup>172</sup> Moody, *From Welfare State to Real Estate*, 215.

<sup>173</sup> Larson, *Building Like Moses with Jacobs in Mind*, 82.

<sup>174</sup> Larson, *Building Like Moses with Jacobs in Mind*, 16.

<sup>175</sup> Larson, *Building Like Moses with Jacobs in Mind*, 56.

To be sure, contemporary mega-projects in New York have taken shape through a process not unlike the large-scale development of the Moses era. Julian Brash notes how in these projects, the use of public-private entities relatively unaccountable to the public or legislatures have allowed real estate interests to avoid popular opposition by establishing a coherent, state-sponsored development strategy that served these interests.<sup>176</sup> The Atlantic Yards development plan in Downtown Brooklyn—the first attempt at a master plan since the time of Robert Moses—originated with the development firm of Forest City Ratner Companies, a principle developer in the borough which had already built three large projects in that particular area.<sup>177</sup> As the project originated through a single developer’s initiative, no other firms had the opportunity to bid on the development despite a substantial contribution of public money.<sup>178</sup> This type of public-private agreement in which the state and city government granted development rights to a single developer without competition was quite similar to the agreements that permeated the urban renewal projects of Robert Moses’ career.

Just as both the press and the public vehemently voiced opposition to those Moses projects, they did the same in response to the similar types of dealings that were central to the Atlantic Yards development. Community organizations also echoed Jane Jacobs in contending that the buildings involved in the plan would destroy the neighborhood character of predominantly low-rise Brooklyn, casting shadows over adjacent neighborhoods and increasing traffic congestion.<sup>179</sup> Just as Moses was able to steamroll his opposition for most of his career

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<sup>176</sup> Brash, *Bloomberg’s New York*, 41.

<sup>177</sup> Fainstein, Susan. “Mega-projects in New York, London and Amsterdam.” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 32, no. 4 (December, 2008): 769-770. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2008.00826.x>.

<sup>178</sup> Fainstein, Susan. “Mega-projects in New York, London and Amsterdam,” 772-773.

<sup>179</sup> Fainstein, Susan. “Mega-projects in New York, London and Amsterdam,” 772.



before public opinion shifted against him permanently, Bloomberg was able to do the same—particularly in the rezoning proposals for the Barclays Center, the professional basketball arena at the center of the Atlantic Yards plan.<sup>180</sup> Through mega-projects, the Bloomberg administration as a collective thus came to represent the individual practices of Robert Moses.

Not only would the administration overcome popular opposition in getting the Atlantic Yards development off the ground, it would do so with many other mega-projects throughout the city. By the end of Bloomberg's rein, massive construction projects were underway at Ground Zero in Lower Manhattan, Williamsburg's East River waterfront, and elsewhere.<sup>181</sup> Although Bloomberg and his officials would consistently contend that they were working closely with communities throughout these projects, in actuality the administration only considered neighborhood concerns and development priorities when they conformed to its pre-established agenda.<sup>182</sup> Therefore, it is evident that the administration was employing a top-down planning strategy that was closely related to Robert Moses' career practices and ideas.

The story of one mega-project on Manhattan's far west side in particular was a clear display of the Bloomberg administration's Moses-like vision. This swath of open parking lots, industrial areas, and transportation infrastructure was often referred to as the last great frontier in terms of development in Manhattan.<sup>183</sup> Brash points out that New York City's most powerful business elites and real estate developers had long targeted the area west of Eighth Avenue from

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<sup>180</sup> "Reshaping New York - Interactive Feature." *The New York Times*.

<sup>181</sup> Florida, *The New Urban Crisis*, 80.

<sup>182</sup> Larson, *Building Like Moses with Jacobs in Mind*, 150.

<sup>183</sup> Van der Veen, Menno and Willem Korthals Altes. "Urban Development Agreements: Do They Meet Guiding Principles for a Better Deal?" *Cities: The International Journal of Urban Policy and Planning* 28, no.4 (August, 2011): 313. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2011.03.001>.

about Thirtieth street to Fifty-ninth street as a site for expanding the Midtown Manhattan central business district (CBD), with proposals for commercial development dating back to the 1920s.<sup>184</sup> None of these proposals had come to fruition, and thus the far west side had been a site of the most grandiose plans and bitterest defeats for New York's real estate elite.<sup>185</sup> Previously, the most comprehensive redevelopment effort was the Lindsay administration's 1969 plan, which included 30,000,000 square feet of office space, new hotels, and a cruise ship terminal on the Hudson River.<sup>186</sup> With the defeat of this plan, the area would remain undeveloped for over three decades.

However, the far west side's underdevelopment throughout the late twentieth century was not due to a lack of effort. The commercial redevelopment of Times Square in the 1980s began to push the edge of the city's Midtown CBD westward, while both the Koch and the Dinkins administrations proposed plans for further expansion to the Hudson river that ultimately did not materialize.<sup>187</sup> The Hudson Rail Yards in particular became the focus of development efforts; owned by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), development of the yards would be exempt from normal city review processes while close proximity to Midtown, Penn Station, and the Hudson River made for an ideal development site.<sup>188</sup> With the construction of support columns in the yards that possessed the capacity to support a deck in the 1970s, development proposals quickly emerged in the last two decades of the twentieth century.<sup>189</sup> The state government proposed the site as a location for a new stadium for the New York Yankees, the

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<sup>184</sup> Brash, *Bloomberg's New York*, 144.

<sup>185</sup> Brash, *Bloomberg's New York*, 144.

<sup>186</sup> Brash, *Bloomberg's New York*, 145.

<sup>187</sup> Brash, *Bloomberg's New York*, 147.

<sup>188</sup> Brash, *Bloomberg's New York*, 147.

<sup>189</sup> Brash, *Bloomberg's New York*, 148.

city's premier professional baseball team, and Mayor Rudolph Giuliani was a big proponent of this plan.<sup>190</sup> When this plan didn't materialize, Giuliani himself proposed the site as a location for two new stadiums—a new Madison Square Garden and a new stadium for the New York Jets of the National Football League, both served by an extension of the 7 subway line.<sup>191</sup> Popular opposition would derail this plan as well, leaving the area still underdeveloped when Bloomberg took office in 2002.

It would be reasonable to assume after these failed redevelopments that, unlike in the Moses era, popular opposition would derail whatever plan the Bloomberg administration could come up with for Hudson Yards. However, the administration's proposed plan brought together real estate developers, planners, corporate executives in a unified front in an effort to overcome this opposition.<sup>192</sup> It worked; the City Planning finalized a rezoning that would facilitate large-scale development on the eastern portion of the rail yards in 2004, and by 2009 a rezoning of the western portion was complete as well.<sup>193</sup> With these zoning changes in place, the Bloomberg administration had laid the platform for the redevelopment of Hudson Yards—in doing so, it had overcome a significant political barrier.

However, there were still a myriad of other barriers that this coalition of power would have to knock down once they presented a comprehensive development plan. Firstly, the administration developed a financing plan in 2004 in which Bear Stearns, Goldman Sachs, and

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<sup>190</sup> Brash, *Bloomberg's New York*, 149.

<sup>191</sup> Brash, *Bloomberg's New York*, 149.

<sup>192</sup> Larson, *Building Like Moses with Jacobs in Mind*, 35.

<sup>193</sup> Larson, *Building Like Moses with Jacobs in Mind*, 36.

JPMorgan Chase acted as senior underwriters for the bonds that funds the rezoning.<sup>194</sup> This arrangement raised red flags among city officials: The New York City Bar Association issued a report on the plan in 2007 noting that this type of financing scheme was highly resemblant to the large-scale commercial development of the 1970s that helped cause the fiscal crisis.<sup>195</sup> Indeed, this public-private agreement included the same type of development subsidies as the incentives involved in the 1970s.

If the financing scheme was similar to the downtown developments of the 1970s, however, the Bloomberg administration's proposed plan differed in that it was centered around hosting Olympic Games along with commercial development. This bid began to form a few years before Bloomberg, but it was a central element in his administration's development agenda. Much of the enthusiasm behind the city's olympic bid—dubbed NYC2012—was the possibility of locating a stadium and Olympic facilities in Hudson Yards while surrounding them with large-scale commercial development.<sup>196</sup> Of course, residents of the area were not too thrilled at the prospect of redevelopment on this scale: many had long opposed the area's redevelopment and they had organized the social institutions needed to oppose the plan.<sup>197</sup> These community organizations eventually helped defeat the plan and New York lost its Olympic bid, but the redevelopment of the area seemed inevitable despite clear opposition.

Indeed, as the area's rezoning was already finalized, new development proposals continued to flow in. The Bloomberg administration resuscitated the redevelopment of Hudson

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<sup>194</sup> Brash, *Bloomberg's New York*, 205.

<sup>195</sup> Larson, *Building Like Moses with Jacobs in Mind*, 37.

<sup>196</sup> Brash, *Bloomberg's New York*, 151.

<sup>197</sup> Brash, *Bloomberg's New York*, 162.

Yards after the Olympic defeat, including it as part of a larger rezoning plan in many areas of the city.<sup>198</sup> This rezoning allowed for the office and residential development that the administration was pushing along with a stadium and the extension of the 7 subway line that Giuliani had included in his plans, forming a clear picture for Hudson Yards as an entirely new, mixed-use waterfront neighborhood for New York City. Brash argues that this picture appealed to “the Moses lying in the hearts of elite urban planners.”<sup>199</sup> Indeed, the administration seemed to be aware of the Moses-like nature of the project as well as the public’s attitude towards Moses. This awareness led the government to stress the idea of this development as “urban place-making,” thereby evoking the ideas of Jane Jacobs by portraying a vibrant, mixed use neighborhood.<sup>200</sup> Despite this tactic, the plan’s eighty-story office buildings and football stadium were clearly not in line with Jacobs’ best planning practices which used the cobblestone streets and low-rise buildings of the West Village as a model of vital urbanism.<sup>201</sup> Brash notes that once the administration ended up removing the stadium, however, the proposal lost its last real planning hindrance.<sup>202</sup> As a result, there was little standing in the way of Hudson Yards’ redevelopment and the Bloomberg administration had used top-down planning practices in the same manner as Robert Moses to overcome sustained opposition.

In order to finalize the area’s redevelopment, the MTA had to agree on a developer for its land. Five companies made approached the state authority with a development proposal, and in

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<sup>198</sup> Larson, *Building Like Moses with Jacobs in Mind*, 37.

<sup>199</sup> Brash, *Bloomberg’s New York*, 165-166.

<sup>200</sup> Brash, *Bloomberg’s New York*, 178-179.

<sup>201</sup> Brash, *Bloomberg’s New York*, 183-184.

<sup>202</sup> Brash, *Bloomberg’s New York*, 195.

March 2008 the MTA agreed to award Tishman Speyer the rights, only for the developer to back out six weeks later and the bid passing to Related Companies.<sup>203</sup> By 2009, around the same time the City Council had finalized the rezoning of the yards' western portion, the council had approved a final revised plan from Related that included thirteen buildings encompassing over 18,000,000 square feet of mixed-use space, featuring an indoor shopping mall and a city-sponsored arts center to go along with fourteen acres of public space.<sup>204</sup> Such size and scope made Hudson Yards the largest mixed-use private real estate development in the history of the United States.<sup>205</sup> However, it would not have materialized without the important role of the public sector and the public-private agreement between the MTA and Related Companies, a partnership that was not unlike the urban renewal agreements of Robert Moses' Title I Housing program.

Earlier this year, over a decade after the approval of Related's plan, the eastern portion of Hudson Yards opened to the public. Detractors point to the neighborhood's \$25,000,000 cost which included over \$6,000,000 in tax breaks and government subsidies, arguing that despite a promise from the developers that the neighborhood would bring over 55,000 jobs they should have to pay their own way and not rely on such extensive subsidies.<sup>206</sup> However, supporters of Hudson Yards argue that these subsidies and incentives will pay vast dividends in terms of this job creation as well as job retention, as much of this financing went toward the extension of the 7

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<sup>203</sup> Larson, *Building Like Moses with Jacobs in Mind*, 37.

<sup>204</sup> Nonko, Emily. "Hudson Yards Wants to Become NYC's Next Great Neighborhood." *Curbed NY*. September 9, 2018. <https://ny.curbed.com/2018/9/19/17861164/hudson-yards-new-york-development-related-companies>

<sup>205</sup> Kimmelman, Michael. "Hudson Yards Is Manhattan's Biggest, Newest, Slickest Gated Community. Is This the Neighborhood New York Deserves?" *The New York Times*. March 14, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/03/14/arts/design/hudson-yards-nyc.html?module=inline>

<sup>206</sup> Haag, Matthew. "Amazon's Tax Breaks and Incentives Were Big. Hudson Yards' Are Bigger." *The New York Times*. March 9, 2019.

subway line and other improvements that will make the surrounding area an overall better neighborhood.<sup>207</sup> Despite these arguments, the sheer size Hudson Yards means that the development merits a much more nuanced discussion, one in which dollar figures and government incentives tell only a small part of the story.

As a result, the reaction to Hudson Yards in the New York press has centered around many different aspects of the development project. While most of the coverage has been negative, some members of the press have also pointed out some positives of the project, such as Alexandra Schwartz of the *New Yorker*. Schwartz argues that the goal of Hudson Yards is to impress, and in this sense it succeeds via the sheer scale of its five gleaming office and residential towers, an observation deck that will open next year, and a city-sponsored arts space spanning 200,000 square feet.<sup>208</sup> Additionally, Schwartz observes that the glass, metal, and stone interior of the shopping mall perfectly portrays tasteful wealth.<sup>209</sup> These positive observations are exceedingly rare, not only in Schwartz's article itself but throughout the New York press.

Much of the negative attention towards Hudson Yards has centered around the luxury and extravagance that the development represents. Michael Kimmelman, the architecture critic for *The New York Times*, argues that Hudson Yards is, "at its heart, a super-sized suburban-style office park, with a shopping mall and a quasi-gated condo community targeted at the 0.1 percent."<sup>210</sup> Similarly, Schwartz argues that Hudson Yards is a neighborhood of the future, a future that the Bloomberg administration imagined as it prioritized turning New York into a

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<sup>207</sup> Haag, "Amazon's Tax Breaks and Incentives Were Big. Hudson Yards' Are Bigger."

<sup>208</sup> Schwartz, Alexandra. "Hudson Yards is the Hotel California of New York." *New Yorker*; March 23, 2019. <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/hudson-yards-is-the-hotel-california-of-new-york>

<sup>209</sup> Schwartz, "Hudson Yards is the Hotel California of New York."

<sup>210</sup> Kimmelman, "Hudson Yards is Manhattan's Biggest, Newest, Slickest Gated Community."

luxury city.<sup>211</sup> Schwartz also refers to Hudson Yards as a luxury enclave and a high-end corporate park, with a number of amenities that make sure its wealthy residents barely have to leave the neighborhood.<sup>212</sup> Indeed, the housing prices and rents at Hudson Yards do reveal that the neighborhood is targeting the top income-earners; one-bedroom apartments rent for at least \$5,000 a month, while a duplex penthouse in one of the towers sells for over \$30,000,000.<sup>213</sup> These exorbitant housing prices do reflect the luxury nature of Hudson Yards, lending credence to the arguments of people like Kimmelman and Schwartz that it represents a quasi-gated enclave within New York’s urban landscape.

Additionally, the tenants of the office buildings and shopping malls as well as restaurants portray Hudson Yards as a neighborhood for the top echelon of society. The seven floors of the mall are a grouping of high-end shops such as Neiman Marcus, Fendi, and Dior, while major corporations like WarnerMedia and L’Oreal USA have agreed to move their headquarters to Hudson Yards’ office towers.<sup>214</sup> Moreover, a number of celebrity chefs such as Thomas Keller and David Cheng will be running the restaurants in the development.<sup>215</sup> With luxury shops, big businesses, and these high-end restaurants respectively dominating the area’s retail and office spaces, it is impossible to ignore the argument that Hudson Yards is merely a wealthy enclave within the urban fabric of New York City.

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<sup>211</sup> Schwartz, “Hudson Yards is the Hotel California of New York.”

<sup>212</sup> Schwartz, “Hudson Yards is the Hotel California of New York.”

<sup>213</sup> Haag, “Amazon’s Tax Breaks and Incentives Were Big. Hudson Yards’ Are Bigger.”

<sup>214</sup> Haag, “Amazon’s Tax Breaks and Incentives Were Big. Hudson Yards’ Are Bigger.”

<sup>215</sup> Haag, “Amazon’s Tax Breaks and Incentives Were Big. Hudson Yards’ Are Bigger.”



For all of the area's luxury, the nature, process, and design of Hudson Yards are the true sources of the negative media coverage. It is therefore unsurprising that all of these aspects resemble the vision and practices of Robert Moses. In terms of its nature, Hudson Yards is indeed an exercise in urban place-making, in creating a new neighborhood for the city of New York. This whole concept of place-making does indeed have its flaws: Logan and Molotch argue that places are different from commodities in that they have certain sentimental value that make them indispensable for their users.<sup>216</sup> Moreover, the authors note that geographical communities are not merely containers of activity, as is the case with Hudson Yards, but rather individuals are vital in fostering community.<sup>217</sup> Perhaps these arguments help to explain the negative reaction surrounding Hudson Yards. Regardless, the development of the rail yards has sparked new development in the surrounding area, and a new place has begun to emerge on the far west side of Manhattan.<sup>218</sup> While the exact type of place is evidently different from the places that Moses created through his urban renewal projects, it does bear many similarities.

Members of the press seem to be aware of these similarities, and they have reflected this awareness in their negative coverage of the project. In terms of the design, Kimmelman notes that the fourteen acres of open space in Hudson Yards merely seems like a different version of Moses' towers-in-the-park housing projects, with office towers rather than apartment complexes surrounding a landscaped plaza.<sup>219</sup> Kimmelman goes so far as to argue that Hudson Yards is nearly devoid of urban design entirely, with the neighborhood declining to blend into the city

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<sup>216</sup> Logan and Molotoch, *Urban Fortunes*, 22.

<sup>217</sup> Logan and Molotoch, *Urban Fortunes*, 10.

<sup>218</sup> Kimmelman, "Hudson Yards is Manhattan's Biggest, Newest, Slickest Gated Community."

<sup>219</sup> Kimmelman, "Hudson Yards is Manhattan's Biggest, Newest, Slickest Gated Community."

grid.<sup>220</sup> Of course, Moses' housing complexes also eschewed design and did not fit in with the surrounding built environment or the urban form of New York City. Due to this same lack of urban design, Schwartz argues that Hudson Yards feels more like a nice airport terminal with the High Line as its moving concourse to the Lower West Side, slicing through the existing urban fabric in a manner not unlike how Moses' highways cut through the city's built environment.<sup>221</sup> Thus, it is clear how the lack of design in Hudson Yards resembles both Moses' antipathy towards design in his urban renewal projects as well as his highways.

The similarities between Hudson Yards and Moses' work continue in relation to the redevelopment and review process. Partly due to the fact that this redevelopment plan was a better alternative to the construction of a stadium on the site and partly due to the public-private agreement between the MTA and the developers, Hudson Yards was able to sail through both the public and environmental review processes and overcome popular opposition.<sup>222</sup> The City Council even agreed to pay \$359,000,000 in bond interest payments when revenue for the development fell short of projections, cementing Hudson Yards as a symbol of the role of government in spurring development that benefitted private real estate developers.<sup>223</sup> Robert Moses typified this role perhaps more than any other figure in New York history, while other aspects of the project have combined to tie his legacy with contemporary mega-projects and Hudson Yards in particular.

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<sup>220</sup> Kimmelman, "Hudson Yards is Manhattan's Biggest, Newest, Slickest Gated Community."

<sup>221</sup> Schwartz, "Hudson Yards is the Hotel California of New York."

<sup>222</sup> Kimmelman, "Hudson Yards is Manhattan's Biggest, Newest, Slickest Gated Community."

<sup>223</sup> Haag, "Amazon's Tax Breaks and Incentives Were Big. Hudson Yards' Are Bigger."

As Moses' enduring legacy has been largely negative, this association is central to negative coverage of Hudson Yards in the New York media. However, the project will not be complete for at least a couple of years, meaning that if it is successful it could help alter the Moses' legacy as well. Kimmelman notes that if New Yorkers flock to the arts building and the mall, the neighborhood will become less like a luxury enclave.<sup>224</sup> If the Vessel—the large public art structure at the center of the plaza—also brings more foot traffic to the area, Hudson Yards will become further integrated as a New York City neighborhood. The pending success of Hudson Yards thus has various implications not only for the city government and the developers that built it, but for the legacy of Robert Moses as well.

If the large-scale gentrification and mega-projects of the Bloomberg era had already begun to shift Moses' legacy, Hudson Yards promises to further this trend. Nonetheless, it is clear from the real estate development practices of the twenty-first century that the vision and practices of Robert Moses have not disappeared from the mind of the public as entirely as many would believe. This fact is significant in that it implies that the legacy and impact of Moses' career is changing, particularly in relation to the period after his career in which the city government made a conscious effort to show how new projects and policies were different from his work and ideas. Conversely, government administrations in the twenty-first century have realized there is no denying the similarities between contemporary real estate practices and Robert Moses projects, despite the long-standing negative public perception surrounding his career.

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<sup>224</sup> Kimmelman, "Hudson Yards is Manhattan's Biggest, Newest, Slickest Gated Community."

Consequently, the question becomes about whether these modern practices are having a positive effect on New York City, particularly as the legacy of Robert Moses has become tied to their success. If modern real estate practices are helping the city, then it should be clear that Moses' ideas and vision had a positive impact on the city despite his many flaws and mistakes. Of course, there is no concrete way to measure the effects of contemporary real estate practices in terms of positives and negatives. However, certain empirical evidence goes a long way in at least identifying these effects. Two years after Bloomberg's tenure as mayor was over, the total value of New York's real estate was roughly \$2,900,000,000,000, a total equal to the entire Gross Domestic Product of the United Kingdom, the fifth-largest national economy in the world.<sup>225</sup> Regardless of the effects on the city's population, the Moses-like building of the twenty-first century cemented New York's place as the most valuable city in the world and thus would seem to aid his enduring legacy.

Of course, one cannot simply ignore the effects that this large-scale development has had on many city residents, particularly in terms of increasing the value of real estate. As development has not reached every part of the city, certain areas have become substantially less valuable than others; the average Manhattan apartment cost over \$2,000,000 as of 2015, while the median home value in most of the city was \$600,000 or substantially lower.<sup>226</sup> Nonetheless, the sharp increases in home prices and real estate values in many parts of the city have still pushed up rents in the areas that have not experienced large-scale development. The Furman Center study notes that the share of households in the city who spent more than thirty percent of

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<sup>225</sup> Florida, *The New Urban Crisis*, 22.

<sup>226</sup> Florida, *The New Urban Crisis*, 20.

their pre-tax income on rent rose by eleven percent from 2000 to 2014 citywide, with non-gentrifying neighborhoods actually experiencing the sharpest rises in rent-burdened households.<sup>227</sup> Evidently, even the areas that have been isolated from the development of the twenty-first century have also experienced an increase in housing costs and real estate values.

However, this increase is relatively little compared to gentrifying neighborhoods. Rents in these areas rose by 34.3% from 1990 to 2014, only rising by 13.2% in non-gentrifying neighborhoods.<sup>228</sup> Rents in three gentrifying neighborhoods—Williamsburg/Greenpoint, Central Harlem, and the Lower East Side/Chinatown—have risen by over fifty percent during the same period.<sup>229</sup> With such sharp increases in rents, it would be reasonable to assume that gentrification has forced out many of the residents in these areas, particularly as the process has mostly occurred in low-income neighborhoods. To be sure, this displacement has been a central theme in negative coverage towards gentrification among the media in the twenty-first century.

While this chapter has already noted the many similarities between the process of large-scale development and gentrification and the practices and ideas of Moses, an important distinction must be made in relation to this displacement. While it is simply a fact that Moses' projects displaced thousands of city residents, it is much more unclear to what extent gentrification has bred similar displacement. It seems that the media has greatly exaggerated the displacement involved in gentrification, as the Furman Center study even acknowledged that although the number of people in New York living below the poverty line has decreased since

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<sup>227</sup> Furman Center, 13.

<sup>228</sup> Furman Center, 5.

<sup>229</sup> Furman Center, 5.

2000, it is possible that these poor residents have been able to lift themselves out of poverty.<sup>230</sup> Indeed, there has been little empirical data on gentrification-bred displacement. If the legacy of Moses is now tied to the process of gentrification and large-scale developments in the twenty-first century, the lack of clarity regarding displacement can only be a positive thing for this legacy.

Beyond displacement and real estate development practices there are also many other elements of contemporary New York City that suggest a more positive view of Robert Moses' impact. One of the hallmarks of the negative public perception towards Moses was his racism; for example, Caro notes that some of his pools were white-only environments, with some left unheated as Moses thought this would dissuade black residents from using the pools.<sup>231</sup> However, every single pool that Moses built in New York had heating capabilities.<sup>232</sup> Moreover, Moses actually built many pools and recreational facilities on underused pieces of land in black neighborhoods such as Harlem, equipping them with recreation facilities in a way no one else could have.<sup>233</sup> Indeed, photos of Moses pools from this century reveal that many of his pools are predominantly used by minorities, such as the Betsy Head Pool in Brooklyn and the Cortona Pool in the Bronx.<sup>234</sup> Whether or not this is what Moses intended is besides the point; in terms of

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<sup>230</sup> Furman Center, 13.

<sup>231</sup> Gutman, Marta. "Equipping the Public Realm: Rethinking Robert Moses and Recreation." In *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York*, ed. Hilary Ballon and Kenneth T. Jackson. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 82.

<sup>232</sup> Gutman, "Equipping the Public Realm," 82.

<sup>233</sup> Gutman, "Equipping the Public Realm," 82-83.

<sup>234</sup> Moore, Andrew. "Robert Moses Projects: A Portfolio of Photographs." In *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York*, ed. Hilary Ballon and Kenneth T. Jackson. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 13-19.

impact, it is clear that he endowed minority neighborhoods with pools and parks that have remained in use well after his career.

Another element that has been central to Moses' negative legacy since his career ended is his infrastructure work. Frequent *New York Times* contributor Ginia Bellafante argues that New York today is actually two conflicting cities in terms of its built environment: the luxury metropolis imagined by the Bloomberg administration and a deteriorating urban landscape around it, one which Moses scarred through his highway ambitions.<sup>235</sup> Moreover, Bellafante notes that many of Moses' highways are now crumbling and in desperate need of repair, such as the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, which Moses did not design to withstand a daily onslaught of 150,000 cars and trucks.<sup>236</sup> To be sure, Moses' highways and bridges did leave certain areas severely disadvantaged and have struggled to stand up to contemporary traffic patterns.

However, it is relatively impossible to argue that the city would be better off without Moses' infrastructure projects. Hilary Ballon and Kenneth Jackson note that Moses' bridges, expressways, and parkways are so indispensable over fifty years on from their completion that one cannot imagine New York City without them.<sup>237</sup> The mere fact that Moses was able to build so many of these infrastructure projects has become positive for his legacy as well, as a layered political process has made it very difficult to complete ambitious public work projects since the 1980s.<sup>238</sup> Moreover, Jackson argues that it is highly unlikely that New York would have

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<sup>235</sup> Bellafante, Ginia. "Brooklyn Heights is Fighting Robert Moses Again." *The New York Times*. October 5, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/05/nyregion/brooklyn-heights-is-fighting-robert-moses-again.html>

<sup>236</sup> Bellafante, "Brooklyn Heights is Fighting Robert Moses Again."

<sup>237</sup> Ballon, Hilary and Kenneth T. Jackson. "Introduction." In *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York*, ed. Hilary Ballon and Kenneth T. Jackson. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 65.

<sup>238</sup> Ballon & Jackson, "Introduction," 65.

rebounded so severely from its dark period in the 1970s and early 1980s without Moses' works.<sup>239</sup> As a result, Jackson believes that Moses was an overall positive influence for the city, and this changed legacy will cement him as a key figure in the rise of New York rather than its fall.<sup>240</sup> Jackson is clearly not alone in this belief—Michael Powell of *The New York Times* notes that an influential group of historians and planners are increasingly arguing that Moses deserves credit for the rise of the city rather than its temporary fall in the immediate aftermath of his career.<sup>241</sup> These arguments are evidence that Moses' legacy is taking a markedly positive turn in the twenty-first century.

This turn is also reflected in Moses' urban renewal work. Just as the media has chided the developers of Hudson Yards for its design which seems to set it apart from the surrounding urban fabric, many in the press criticized Moses' super-block approach in his Title I projects. While there were certainly design failures in these projects, most are flourishing today largely due to the gentrifying effects of these projects on their surroundings and to New York's overall revitalization. Additionally, Moses' Title I template also included certain features that have helped facilitate the reintegration of these super-blocks into the urban fabric.<sup>242</sup> Despite Title I's obvious shortcomings under Moses, the projects helped tackle New York's persistent affordable housing issue while their regenerative features were part of an innovative set of urban renewal

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<sup>239</sup> Jackson, Kenneth T. "Robert Moses and the Rise of New York." In *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York*, ed. Hilary Ballon and Kenneth T. Jackson. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 68.

<sup>240</sup> Jackson, "Robert Moses and the Rise of New York," 71.

<sup>241</sup> Powell, Michael. "A Tale of Two Cities." *The New York Times*. May 6, 2007.

<sup>242</sup> Ballon, Hilary. "Robert Moses and Urban Renewal." In *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York*, ed. Hilary Ballon and Kenneth T. Jackson. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 112.



strategies that are still effective today.<sup>243</sup> Coupled with the impact of his infrastructure projects, the work of Robert Moses in the realm of urban renewal has also turned out to be another boon for his changing legacy.

While it is clear that this legacy is becoming increasingly positive, many of Moses' mistakes and negative characteristics are undeniable. Even the most ardent revisionists recognize that Moses was highhanded, racist, and contemptuous towards the poor, yet they point to evidence that his grand vision and strong will planted the seeds which allowed the modern city to flower.<sup>244</sup> Additionally, time has helped cover many of Moses' more egregious errors, such as the elegant playgrounds that he designed for the white and comfortable which are now recreational spaces for a predominantly minority population.<sup>245</sup> Owen Gutfreund also notes that Moses fell from power at the exact right time; if he was able to proceed with certain highway projects such as the Lower Manhattan Expressway, he may well have permanently undermined the city's core by further easing suburban and peripheral travel.<sup>246</sup> Robert Fishman argues that we can be thankful these plans never materialized and recognize why Moses merits his negative reputation, yet we must also recognize that the city and its surrounding region would not be functional today if it weren't for Robert Moses.<sup>247</sup> This argument seems a concise, accurate way of looking at the

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<sup>243</sup> Ballon, "Robert Moses and Urban Renewal." 113.

<sup>244</sup> Powell, "A Tale of Two Cities."

<sup>245</sup> Powell, "A Tale of Two Cities."

<sup>246</sup> Gutfreund, Owen. "Rebuilding New York in the Auto Age." In *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York*, ed. Hilary Ballon and Kenneth T. Jackson. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 93.

<sup>247</sup> Fishman, Robert. "Revolt of the Urbs: Robert Moses and His Critics. In *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York*, ed. Hilary Ballon and Kenneth T. Jackson. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 129.

legacy of Robert Moses; while he made some glaring errors, his work and ideas have had a vital and lasting impact on New York City.

This impact is especially evident relative to the careers and vision of Moses' critics, particularly Jane Jacobs. As is evident in the public role in contemporary large-scale development, elected officials more concerned with real estate interests than community planners have submerged the self-guiding communities that Jacobs idealized.<sup>248</sup> Moreover, Jacobs did not call for stronger zoning laws that would encourage a mix of uses nor permanent rent controls that would encourage a mix of residents and businesses.<sup>249</sup> It is evident in New York that such laws would have been influential in preserving the neighborhood character that Jacobs prioritized. Sharon Zukin notes that Jacobs had a misplaced distrust in the capacity of state power in protecting authenticity, for without state laws neighborhoods do not have any defense against the market forces that breed development.<sup>250</sup> This distrust represents Jacobs' biggest error in terms of contemporary New York. Though her ideas eventually won out over Moses towards the end of his career, Jacobs' failure to recognize the capacity of government in protecting neighborhoods and her sole reliance on community organizations does not reflect the reality of twenty-first century New York City; large-scale development is now a shared priority among the government and developers alike, while community organization is relatively powerless to stop it.

However, there is evidence that community organization still holds some clout in stopping this type of development. In Long Island City, for example, popular opposition recently

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<sup>248</sup> Zukin, Sharon. "Jane Jacobs (1916-2006)," *Architectural Review*. October 26, 2011. <https://www.architectural-review.com/rethink/reputations-pen-portraits/-/jane-jacobs-1916-2006/8621634.article?search=https%3a%2f%2fwww.architectural-review.com%2fsearcharticles%3fkeywords%3dJane+jacobs+sharon+zukin>

<sup>249</sup> Zukin, "Jane Jacobs (1916-2006)."

<sup>250</sup> Zukin, *Naked City*, 245.

derailed a public-private agreement between New York City and Amazon for the company's second headquarters. Opponents of a deal which included over \$3,000,000,000 in government incentives and tax breaks strongly outnumbered supporters.<sup>251</sup> This opposition on the surface originally seemed futile—New York Governor Andrew Cuomo and city mayor Bill de Blasio had constructed the agreement explicitly in a way that severely diminished the ability of local politicians to stop it.<sup>252</sup> Yet, popular opposition among community organizations and the city press ended up defying the long odds that this type of agreement stacked against it, as Amazon backed off its headquarter project in Long Island City earlier this year. With the power of local politicians severely limited due to the nature of Amazon's agreement with the city and state, the only thing that could have stopped the development was popular opposition; its success reveals that the Jacobsian ideals of community organization are still somewhat alive despite the Moses-like building of the twenty-first century.

It remains relatively unclear what the legacy of Jane Jacobs will be in the future as these ideas continue to lose influence. By extension, it is also unclear what could happen to the legacy of Robert Moses in terms of the ongoing development in the twenty-first century. As gentrification and urban development reach further out from the traditional Manhattan core and new office markets like Long Island City begin to gain more traction, it is certainly possible that some of Moses' ideas and career work could come to harm his increasingly positive legacy. By the same token, Jacobs' ideas could make a comeback as residents in more areas of the city push back in the face of this ongoing development. The next chapter of this paper will look at these

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<sup>251</sup> Goodman, J. David. "Amazon Went to City Hall. Things Got Loud, Quickly." *The New York Times*. December 12, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/12/nyregion/amazon-city-council-hearing.html?action=click&module=Latest&pgtype=Homepage>

<sup>252</sup> Goodman, "Amazon Went to City Hall. Things Got Loud, Quickly."

possibilities in an attempt to answer the larger question of how the ideas of these two important figures could impact the city's future and how their legacies could change as a result.

### **Chapter Three: Looking to the Future**

New York’s current landscape reveals that the city is set up for an interesting and uncertain future. Manhattan is growing ever upward with the construction of super-tall office and ultra-luxury residential towers, while development on the island continues to reach northward as well. In the outer boroughs, large-scale urban development has reached neighborhoods much further out than those directly adjacent to the city’s Manhattan core, forever altering the low-rise skyline and character of many of these areas. Moreover, the growing threat of climate change will certainly have an impact on the city with the preservation of its waterfront now paramount, particularly as many of the new high-rise districts are along this waterfront. This chapter will look at how future developments are likely to play out in New York City—by extension, it will also examine how these developments could continue to affect the prevalence of the ideas of both Robert Moses and Jane Jacobs and thus how their legacies could change once more.

Beginning in the city’s traditional core of Manhattan, the increasing verticality of New York City inevitably will have an impact on the legacies of these two figures. More than twenty super-tall buildings—buildings over 984 feet in height—are now completed, in the development stage, or currently under review in New York.<sup>253</sup> A look at a map of these projects reveals that all but one are located in Manhattan, while many of them are ultra-luxury residential towers that largely occupy the area near the southern edge of Central Park in the heart of Midtown Manhattan.<sup>254</sup> While this area of the city has possessed a high-rise character with commercial offices and luxury residences for decades, the arrival of super-tall buildings and these residential

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<sup>253</sup> Curbed New York Staff. “NYC’s Supertall Skyscraper Boom, Mapped.” *Curbed NY*. January 28, 2019. <https://ny.curbed.com/maps/new-york-skyscraper-construction-supertalls>

<sup>254</sup> Curbed New York Staff, “NYC’s Supertall Skyscraper Boom, Mapped.”

towers display that the low-rise, mixed-income ideals of Jane Jacobs are increasingly under threat as New York moves into the future.

To be sure, the new wave of towering ultra-luxury residential buildings is evidently targeting residents of the very top income bracket. In fact, so many of these towers have popped up along the southern edge of Central Park that the press and public have nicknamed the area “Billionaire’s Row.”<sup>255</sup> The home prices in these new residential towers are indeed so exorbitant that it is likely only billionaires will be able to afford to live there. For example, founder and CEO of the global hedge fund Citadel, Kenneth Griffin, recently bought a penthouse at the very same building for \$238,000,000—the most expensive residential sale in the history of the United States.<sup>256</sup> This particular building required evicting dozens of middle-class tenants from rent-stabilized apartments and demolishing twenty-story building.<sup>257</sup> With increased home prices that are inevitably unaffordable to these previous residents, the new tower has significantly altered the scale and demographic of this particular locale. Whereas those rent-stabilized apartment provided vital housing for the old building’s occupants, Mr. Griffin may not even live in his new home most of the year—after all, in the three block stretch that is “Billionaire’s Row,” 57% of the apartments are vacant ten months of the year.<sup>258</sup> This statistic is a direct result of the exorbitant home prices in this area of New York City; these prices are breeding trophy

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<sup>255</sup> Stewart, Nikita & David Gelles. “The \$238 Million Penthouse and the Hedge Fund Billionaire Who May Rarely Live There.” *The New York Times*. January 24, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/24/nyregion/238-million-penthouse-sale.html?action=click&module=Top%20Stories&pgtype=Homepage>

<sup>256</sup> Stewart, Nikita and David Gelles, “The \$238 Million Penthouse.”

<sup>257</sup> Stewart, Nikita and David Gelles, “The \$238 Million Penthouse.”

<sup>258</sup> Florida, Richard. *The New Urban Crisis*. (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 38.

apartments, homes where the global superrich look to park their money as both a real estate investment and a marker of their wealth.

As is evident on “Billionaire’s Row,” often these superrich buyers from around the world do not inhabit homes they purchase for most of the year. However, Richard Florida points out that this absentee ownership is becoming a trend throughout Manhattan. In the first eleven years of the twenty-first century, absentee owners and renters increased the number of apartments they occupied in the borough by nearly 15,000—a jump of almost seventy percent.<sup>259</sup> Though Florida argues there are not enough super-rich people around the globe to “deaden” large parts of New York City, he acknowledges that these absentee owners or renters and the trophy apartments where they park their money result in lights-out buildings, making certain areas of the city like “Billionaire’s Row” decidedly less vibrant.<sup>260</sup> As a result, it is clear that the rising verticality and ultra-luxury residential apartments in Manhattan are breeding dull luxury enclaves within the borough. These enclaves suggest that the hallmarks of Jane Jacobs’ ideal city—vibrant, mixed-use, and mixed-income neighborhoods are losing relevance.

This trend is seemingly likely to continue, particularly due to the amount of towers still under construction and those only in the proposal or review stages. Moreover, developers are moving beyond the ultra-luxury of “Billionaire’s Row” to other adjacent areas in Manhattan, building tall but not necessarily targeting the absentee owners and top-income earners of that stretch of the city. Of course, there has been neighborhood opposition to many of these projects, yet it has been largely unsuccessful. For example, neighborhood preservation group “Landmark

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<sup>259</sup> Florida, *The New Urban Crisis*, 38.

<sup>260</sup> Florida, *The New Urban Crisis*, 42.

West” recently attempted and failed to stop the construction of a 775-foot building that Extell Development proposed for West 66th Street, where apartments range from just 1,800 to 3,000 square feet and thus are evidently not targeting foreign billionaires.<sup>261</sup> With these smaller units, it would seem as though at least Jane Jacobs’ emphasis on density was still prevalent in the minds of the city planners who approved the project.

However, these city planners also dictate the city’s zoning regulations, and in this sense they have almost utterly ignored the Jacobsian ideal of density. Although the neighborhood opposition to Extell’s 66th Street project was ultimately unsuccessful in stopping the building’s construction, it did reveal how developers are taking advantage of “the void,” a striking loophole in these zoning regulations which allows residential towers like these to grow so tall and command such high prices.<sup>262</sup> As the city’s zoning regulations only limit the number of stories a building can have depending on its location and lot size, they set no limit on the height of any particular floor. This oversight has allowed developers to claim that some floors need to be higher in order to contain building mechanicals, when in reality they are just adding height to the building by creating empty space, in turn allowing them to create apartments on higher floors with better views and higher prices.<sup>263</sup> The result of this lapse in zoning regulations is that these new luxury towers are in fact doing nothing for density despite their extreme heights; the Extell

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<sup>261</sup> Bellafante, Ginia. “How Luxury Developers Use ‘the Void’ to Build Sky High.” *The New York Times*. January 24, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/24/nyregion/luxury-developers-extell-void.html?action=click&module=Top%20Stories&pgtype=Homepage>

<sup>262</sup> Bellafante, “How Luxury Developers Use ‘the Void’ to Build Sky High.”

<sup>263</sup> Bellafante, “How Luxury Developers Use ‘the Void’ to Build Sky High.”



project will only contain 127 units.<sup>264</sup> Therefore, it seems that the last hallmark of the Jane Jacobs vision for an ideal city is also no longer a priority in New York City.

The Department of City Planning (DCP) is attempting to defend some of the hallmarks of this vision. While this agency will likely not be able to reverse the trend of absentee ownership and ultra-luxury development, it does have a role to play in promoting density by correcting “the void” loophole in the city’s zoning regulations. A look at the department’s website reveals that they have recently proposed a zoning text amendment to eliminate the loophole, the overuse of which they note has resulted in residential towers that “disengage with their neighborhoods.”<sup>265</sup> With community opposition powerless in the face of the increasing ultra-luxury residential development in Manhattan that is threatening to destroy the hallmarks of Jane Jacobs’ vision, a planning agency has somewhat ironically stepped in to protect these ideals.

Indeed, a further examination of the department’s website reveals that it has extended this protection to many other initiatives around the city, particularly in relation to the large-scale redevelopment taking shape in outer borough neighborhoods. For example, the agency recently published a set of “Waterfront Design Guidelines” for Long Island City, which aim to foster a sense of place as the area continues to change by requiring a network of “publicly accessible open space” and buildings which reflect the “industrial and creative character” that has defined the neighborhood.<sup>266</sup> This type of rhetoric reflects the ideas of both Jane Jacobs and Robert Moses via references to neighborhood character and open space, respectively, revealing the

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<sup>264</sup> Bellafante, “How Luxury Developers Use ‘the Void’ to Build Sky High.”

<sup>265</sup> “Residential Tower Mechanical Voids Text Amendment.” Residential Tower Mechanical Voids Text Amendment - Department of City Planning. <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/planning/plans/voids/voids.page>.

<sup>266</sup> “Queens.” Queens Projects - Department of City Planning. <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/planning/plans/queens.page>.

extent of the government agency's efforts to protect Jacobsian ideals in the face of increasingly Moses-like development in New York City.

Of course, this government agency also directs the rezoning projects that Jacobs so despised, which are instrumental in breeding development on a similar scale to Moses. With most of the land in Manhattan already developed and real estate prices skyrocketing, these rezonings have not only expanded the island's development northward, but they have also increasingly pushed beyond the confines of Manhattan into the outer boroughs. The development and gentrification of Harlem—a historically black, low-income neighborhood—culminated in a rezoning of 125th Street at the heart of the neighborhood for denser residential development on the wide avenues.<sup>267</sup> The arrival of gentrification and city rezoning this far north in Manhattan was a sign of the island's northward development trend, a trend which shows no sign of slowing down.

As Manhattan is only an island, its land area is finite; development can only progress so far in one direction, and thus the city has increasingly looked to rezone areas outside of Manhattan. These zoning changes have transformed some of the historically poorest neighborhoods of New York City; the DCP is working on an expansion of the Harlem River Waterfront District in the South Bronx, building on the work of two previous rezonings to “ensure the continued growth and resiliency” of the neighborhood.<sup>268</sup> These projects are not only happening north of Manhattan—the DCP has developed a Community Plan for the neighborhood of Bushwick in Brooklyn which their website claims is a “coordinated planning effort” among

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<sup>267</sup> Zukin, Sharon. *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 82.

<sup>268</sup> “Harlem River Waterfront.” Bronx Projects - Department of City Planning. [https://www1.nyc.gov/site/planning/plans/bronx\\_page](https://www1.nyc.gov/site/planning/plans/bronx_page)

developers, the city, and members of the community with strategies for further zoning changes.<sup>269</sup> The scope of the city's plans for outer borough neighborhoods reveals the continued push of development out of Manhattan as the twenty-first century continues.

Most of this development is of a Moses-like nature due to its large scale, and it is increasingly transforming entire neighborhoods. The revisionists who have helped establish Moses' more positive legacy argue that a vision like his is needed to transform the remaining underused or undeveloped areas of New York City, citing the complete transformation of areas like Long Island City, Williamsburg, and Atlantic Yards as examples.<sup>270</sup> Indeed, the rezoning efforts that have helped facilitated these transformations closely resemble the top-down planning of the Moses era and seem to overlook or even outright ignore the neighborhood preservation ideals of Jane Jacobs. The neighborhoods outside of Manhattan are losing their low-rise character, with high-rise districts popping up in areas beyond those directly adjacent to the city's core.

The reality of Long Island City in particular reflects how the ideas and values of Jane Jacobs could continue to lose influence New York City. As the city already rezoned the area in the early twenty-first century, it now boasts a vertical skyline with apartment buildings that have brought 2,000 people while driving out 600 low-income residents.<sup>271</sup> Although the community was able to stop the Amazon project that would have inevitably driving out more of these residents, it is likely that neighborhood opposition will remain powerless in stopping the area's

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<sup>269</sup> "Bushwick." Brooklyn Projects - Department of City Planning. <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/planning/plans/brooklyn.page>

<sup>270</sup> Powell, Michael. "A Tale of Two Cities." *The New York Times*. May 6, 2007. <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/06/nyregion/thecity/06hist.html>

<sup>271</sup> "Reshaping New York - Interactive Feature." *The New York Times*.

continued wave of development. So far, it has managed to maintain a bustling blend of industrial uses, artists, and tech firms while keeping the area affordable, yet preserving this mix is likely to become increasingly difficult.<sup>272</sup> In one decade from 2006 to 2016, developers built over 11,000 condominiums and rental apartments in Long Island City, with another 22,500 apartments in either planning or development stages.<sup>273</sup> These apartments are hardly affordable; in the forty new buildings since 2010, the average home price is over \$1,000,000.<sup>274</sup> As a result, it is likely that home prices in the area will continue to rise, further pricing out the low-income residents that have defined the neighborhood.

Moreover, the rise of Long Island City's office market is increasingly threatening to destroy the mixed uses that have defined the neighborhood. Advocates of the area's longtime manufacturing businesses have become increasingly concerned that the efforts to spur new development in Long Island City will lead to a larger loss of space for industrial uses.<sup>275</sup> Real estate players have increasingly looked at Long Island City as a low-cost office alternative to a Manhattan office market with prices at or near all-time highs, pushing office rents in the area up from around twelve dollars a foot to around thirty.<sup>276</sup> Indeed, there is clear empirical evidence that industrial space is shrinking; by 2020, eighty percent of the industrial firms in the

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<sup>272</sup> Keiko, Morris. "Long Island City Aims to Manage Momentum." *The Wall Street Journal*. November 6, 2016. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/long-island-city-aims-to-manage-momentum-1478481188?ns=prod/accounts-wsj>

<sup>273</sup> Keiko, "Long Island City Aims to Manage Momentum."

<sup>274</sup> Kilgannon, Corey. "Amazon's New Neighbor: The Nation's Largest Housing Project." *The New York Times*. November 12, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/12/nyregion/amazon-queens-queensbridge-houses.html>

<sup>275</sup> Kusisto, Laura. "Setting Sights on More High Rises in Long Island City." *The Wall Street Journal*. January 15, 2015. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/setting-sights-on-more-high-rises-in-long-island-city-1421374499?ns=prod/accounts-wsj>

<sup>276</sup> Keiko, Morris. "Long Island City is the Latest Hot Spot for Office Real Estate." *The Wall Street Journal*. November 30, 2014. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/long-island-city-is-new-yorks-latest-hot-spot-for-office-real-estate-1417399388>

neighborhood will see their leases expire, while property owners already converted 2,100,000 square feet of rentable industrial space for more lucrative uses as of 2016.<sup>277</sup> As a result, it is clear that Long Island City is experiencing a destruction of its mixed-use, low-income character. As development continues in the area, it is likely that this trend will only intensify, resulting in a loss of Jacobsian ideals in yet another New York City neighborhood.

The city government is likely to continue to facilitate similar large-scale development increasingly further out from Manhattan. This continued expansion of large-scale development and gentrification well into New York's outer boroughs undoubtedly reflects more of Robert Moses' vision than that of Jane Jacobs, suggesting that their legacies will continue to become more positive and negative, respectively. However, one aspect of Moses' career will increasingly threaten to harm his legacy while not significantly impacting the legacy of Jane Jacobs: his negative attitude towards mass transit. As development continues to move further out from Manhattan, the errors of Robert Moses in mass transit could derail his legacy's positive progression.

The first chapter of this paper examined Moses' extensive work in building roadways for the city and its surrounding region. Of course, Moses built these parkways and expressways and bridges almost solely for the automobile, which he evidently saw as the future of New York City. While these did provide car users the most modern highways, the massive construction costs involved took public money away from the city's mass transit system which prevented this system from meeting the city's true needs.<sup>278</sup> Under Robert Moses, the Triborough Authority and

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<sup>277</sup> Keiko, "Long Island City Aims to Manage Momentum."

<sup>278</sup> Caro, Robert. *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), 900.

the Port Authority had a combined 1,250,000,000 at their disposal, some of which Moses could have directed towards improving the city's mass transit system—yet all of which he decided to spend on his bridges and expressways.<sup>279</sup> Moreover, when Moses did build transportation facilities he built them strictly for the suburbs, rather than the inner-city ghettos that actually needed them due to the fact that their low-income residents could not afford to own cars.<sup>280</sup> Robert Moses' decisions regarding how to spend the money that was at his disposal and where to spend it are a clear display of his blatant disregard for mass transit and the families that did not own cars in New York City.

To be sure, this disregard harmed the city's mass transit system, and as development stretches out further from Manhattan as the twenty-first century progresses Moses' legacy could suffer. Caro notes that at the time he was writing his biography on Moses in 1974, New Yorkers were still using the same subway and railroad tracks laid between 1904 and 1933 with as the city had not built a single mile since.<sup>281</sup> Caro also makes a broader claim that from the time Moses came to power over the city's roadway system a year later until the end of his career in 1968, the city's mass transportation system had declined from the best in the world to quite possibly the worst.<sup>282</sup> While this particular is lacking in evidence that could substantiate it, it is clear that Robert Moses presided over a period of stagnation in the city's mass transit system, leaving New York behind other cities of the world in this sense by the time he left power.

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<sup>279</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 928.

<sup>280</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 901.

<sup>281</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 930.

<sup>282</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 933.

An emphasis on mass-transit and New York's overall transportation system should grow as gentrification and urban development continue into the outer boroughs. Joel Kotkin and Wendell Cox argue that by 2053, cities will not have increased substantially in density but rather they will have dispersed considerably, as they did in the 2000s, when 95% of metropolitan growth took place more than ten miles from downtown areas.<sup>283</sup> Were this prediction to materialize, areas beyond the current boundaries of New York City such as Yonkers and Bronxville or the immigrant enclave of Forest Hills in Queens would experience major development. Such development could cast a more intense light on the flaws of Robert Moses in relation to mass transit, one that could hurt his new positive legacy.

However, an examination of the era in which Moses worked suggests that he built his highways and bridges in direct response to a trend that was gripping the entire country. Voters in Detroit chose a highway over public transportation in the 1920s, while Los Angeles added 900 miles of highways and 21,000 miles of paved streets throughout the twentieth century—both totals which substantially eclipsed those of New York in the same period.<sup>284</sup> Therefore, it would have been evident to Moses that the cities throughout the United States were prioritizing the automobile, and as a result he followed suit.

In a narrower sense, Robert Moses also acted in response to trends that were affecting New York City. Kenneth Jackson notes that by the time Moses got his first grip on power in

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<sup>283</sup> Kotkin, Joel and Wendell Cox. "The Future of the Affluent American City." *Cityscape* 15, no. 3 (2013): 203. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26326842>.

<sup>284</sup> Jackson, Kenneth T. "Robert Moses and the Rise of New York." In *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York*, ed. Hilary Ballon and Kenneth T. Jackson. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 68.

1924, “automobile traffic was strangling New York.”<sup>285</sup> In order to alleviate congestion yet still prioritize the automobile as the rest of the country was, Moses focused on building his roads and bridges, addressing a great need for the City of New York. While he perhaps should have paid more attention to other needs such as in mass transit, Moses had revitalized the city’s road network over all five boroughs and in the suburbs by the time he left power in the 1960s, complementing a then-sterling mass transit system.<sup>286</sup> Moreover, this transit system stayed in that state for most of Moses’ career, and as a result no one was effectively clamoring for a transit-based alternative to his auto-focused transportation work.<sup>287</sup> Therefore, it is clear how both trends in New York City and in the country as a whole should absolve Robert Moses of some future blame for his flaws in mass transit.

Moreover, Moses’ legacy should not suffer too much from his oversights in mass transit as this flaw not had a particularly significant negative impact on New York City since his career ended. From Robert Caro’s perspective in the 1970s, it would have indeed seemed as though Moses had plunged the city’s mass transit system into crisis with little room for future improvements; in the following decades, however, ridership and safety have greatly increased, suggesting that this crisis was not as dire as Caro believed.<sup>288</sup> Today, New York is the least auto-dependent city in the nation as Moses’ roads have become integrated with the city’s mass transit system.<sup>289</sup> In fact, Robert Fishman notes that the city has thrived as it has repaired and renewed

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<sup>285</sup> Gutfreund, Owen. “Rebuilding New York in the Auto Age.” In *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York*, ed. Hilary Ballon and Kenneth T. Jackson. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 86.

<sup>286</sup> Gutfreund, “Rebuilding New York in the Auto Age,” 86.

<sup>287</sup> Gutfreund, “Rebuilding New York in the Auto Age,” 90.

<sup>288</sup> Jackson, “Robert Moses and the Rise of New York,” 69.

<sup>289</sup> Gutfreund, “Rebuilding New York in the Auto Age,” 93.



the already existing subway infrastructure while bringing it into balance with the complex road network that Moses had built for the city by the end of his career, and as a result he argues a place must be found for Moses' legacy even in terms of mass transit.<sup>290</sup> Although Moses undoubtedly made some mistakes and gross oversights regarding transit, these errors have not harmed the city in the present day; on the contrary, without Moses' highways and bridges the city's mass transit system would likely have never gotten to the place it is at today.

Nonetheless, it does seem as though there will be an increased focus on mass transit in the future primarily due to growing congestion in New York. Kotkin and Cox note that nearly all higher income cities in the world today rely principally on the automobile, and in the cities that don't like New York, residents pay for it in much longer travel times, suggesting that even with increased density citizens may not opt for mass transit over cars.<sup>291</sup> Of course, were this prediction to come true there would be numerous implications for the continued development and expansion of New York City as well as for the legacy of Robert Moses. The city government has made efforts in the twenty-first century to make sure this prediction turns out false, yet Mayor Bloomberg lost his most ambitious offensive against cars in 2008 when the State Legislature defeated his "congestion pricing" plan as a way to discourage the use of cars.<sup>292</sup> If the few New Yorkers that use cars continue to stick with them despite the city's mass transit improvements as well as continued expansion and development into the outer boroughs,

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<sup>290</sup> Fishman, Robert. "Revolt of the Urbs: Robert Moses and His Critics." In *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York*, ed. Hilary Ballon and Kenneth T. Jackson. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 129.

<sup>291</sup> Kotkin and Cox, "The Future of the Affluent American City," 204.

<sup>292</sup> "Reshaping New York - Interactive Feature." *The New York Times*. August 18, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/newsgraphics/2013/08/18/reshaping-new-york/index.html>.

congestion could get out of hand and Moses' failures in mass transit could come back to haunt him.

In particular, this congestion would be detrimental to the city in terms of the growing threat of climate change. New York is particularly vulnerable in this regard; the city is in the top ten of port cities around the world who are most exposed to flooding, while its protection against flooding is just a fraction of better protected cities like London.<sup>293</sup> In order to combat the threat of climate change, most cities in the world have turned to densification as a way to eliminate the need for the automobile, with this density regulated by restrictive land use regulations.<sup>294</sup> While these restrictions could help New York by limiting its continued urban expansion, it is also possible that these restrictions could end up increasing congestion if car users in the city don't give up their preferred mode of transportation. Should New York's congestion problem end up worsening in the future, it would likely harm the city's resilience towards climate change as well as the automobile-focused legacy of Robert Moses.

However, even Moses himself was partially responsible for new alternatives that New York City has implemented to alleviate this congestion. By the end of Bloomberg's mayoral tenure in 2013, the city had added over 450 miles of bike lanes, mostly carved from the city's roadways.<sup>295</sup> Of course, Robert Moses built more of these roadways than anyone else.<sup>296</sup> Without his roads, it is unlikely that New York City would have the complex web of bike infrastructure

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<sup>293</sup> Steinberg, Ted. "Can New York City Survive the Sea?" *Dissent* 61, no. 3 (2014): 61. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/548292>

<sup>294</sup> Kotkin and Cox, "The Future of the Affluent American City," 204.

<sup>295</sup> "Reshaping New York - Interactive Feature."

<sup>296</sup> Campanella, Thomas. "Robert Moses, Pedal Pusher?" *The Wall Street Journal*. June 25, 2012. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303768104577462893808106790>

that it does today and will continue to develop into the future. Although Moses' roads motorized New York City, it is clear as the twenty-first century progresses that they will continue to provide the basic infrastructure for new transportation networks that could discourage car ownership in the city and therefore alleviate congestion.

The use of Moses-era infrastructure for new transportation methods should help protect his legacy even as the threat of climate change increases and the automobile becomes increasingly taboo in New York City. Moreover, the city government has again adopted a top-down planning approach in terms of dealing with climate change. For example, the DCP has adopted a comprehensive program to revitalize the city's waterfront, reflecting the desires of Moses throughout his career to prioritize the city's coastal areas, although in the modern day the priority in these areas has become private development projects rather than highways. Dubbed the "New York City Waterfront Revitalization Program," the initiative establishes policies which include waterfront planning to promote development projects and long-term preservation of the waterfront as sea levels continue to rise, while also bridging over any conflicts between these two goals.<sup>297</sup> The priorities of this program coupled with its top-down planning nature reflect that even the ideas and approach of the man who prioritized the automobile over everything else will remain useful in protecting New York City against ongoing climate change.

However, if climate change progresses as many in the scientific world expect it to, there will not be the same waterfront there for the city government to preserve. Mayor Bloomberg realized that climate change presented an ever growing threat to New York after Hurricane Sandy

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<sup>297</sup> "New York City Waterfront Revitalization Program." Citywide Projects - Department of City Planning. <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/planning/plans/city-wide.page>.

in 2012, and he built a new fortification in the aftermath of the storm.<sup>298</sup> However, Ted Steinberg notes that if the highest sea level estimates do hold up, over 800,000 New Yorkers will live with the possibility of being swamped.<sup>299</sup> Many of these residents are low-income minorities living in New York's floodplain, people whom the city government often undercounts and therefore leaves at a disadvantage when it comes to emergency relief or preparation.<sup>300</sup> While New York inevitably requires a top-down approach in terms of a citywide program to limit the increasing effects of climate change, it cannot ignore the needs of these specific communities and thus must tailor policies for individual areas.

In this sense, the city's approach to dealing with climate change again lies somewhere between the top-down planning approach of Robert Moses and the neighborhood preservation of Jane Jacobs. While Jacobs didn't recognize the role of the government in preserving neighborhoods, climate change has made this role perhaps more important than it ever was in preventing large-scale development or gentrification. However, certain neighborhoods and communities in New York City are much more vulnerable to continued climate change than others, and in this regard the roles of community organization and neighborhood preservation become vital as well. As a result, the DCP has established an initiative called "Resilient Neighborhoods," a place-based planning approach to identify neighborhood-specific strategies such as zoning or land use changes to make certain areas more resilient to future climate change

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<sup>298</sup> "Reshaping New York - Interactive Feature."

<sup>299</sup> Steinberg, Ted. "Can New York City Survive the Sea?" 60.

<sup>300</sup> Steinberg, Ted. "Can New York City Survive the Sea?" 63.

effects.<sup>301</sup> This initiative seems a mix of top-down planning in the form of rezoning with an additional, more neighborhood-specific focus.

The city government has centered much of its neighborhood-specific approach around the most vulnerable areas of the city, particularly those in the floodplain. Of course, much of this approach still involves rezoning and other planning strategies that Jane Jacobs denounced, but the tailoring these strategies specifically for different areas around New York that are the most vulnerable is consistent with Jacobs' vision. Even in a citywide study, the DCP created special zoning rules in the floodplain which allow for recovery and rebuilding while also gathering input from homeowners and community practitioners to understand how to improve special zoning regulations specifically for residential, commercial, or industrial neighborhoods.<sup>302</sup> While zoning in the past directed large-scale development through a top-down planning process, it seems that as climate change continues to threaten New York zoning will increasingly be used as a community preservation tool in order to push back against rising sea levels and flooding.

New York's climate change initiatives and its efforts to change the zoning laws that are allowing for ultra-luxury residential towers along "Billionaire's Row" display that the city government is paying attention to the approach of both Jane Jacobs and Robert Moses as it prepares for the future. While the continued urban expansion of the city does seem to reflect more of a Moses-like approach in terms of the top-down process of rezoning and large-scale development on the waterfront and beyond, it is clear from the rhetoric of the city government that it still has the ideas of Jane Jacobs in its collective mind. Therefore, it is likely that the

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<sup>301</sup> "Resilient Neighborhoods." Citywide Projects - Department of City Planning. <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/planning/plans/city-wide.page>

<sup>302</sup> "Climate Resiliency." Citywide Projects - Department of City Planning. <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/planning/plans/city-wide.page>

legacies of both figures will still have a profound impact in New York City as the twenty-first century progresses.

Nonetheless, history has shown that changes to both legacies as time moves forward are inevitable, although the nature of these future changes is ambiguous at best. While many argue that New York needs the vision of someone like Robert Moses to deal with future problems for the city brought on by climate change and urban expansion, Robert Caro doesn't think so because in his mind, Moses "ignored the values of New York."<sup>303</sup> To be sure, Moses did ignore some of these values: he ignored the needs of the urban poor who did not own cars and he ignored the needs of the entire city in terms of mass transit; however, New York City has rectified his mistakes using the very infrastructure that he put into place during his career. What is left is the undeniable impact that Robert Moses had on the city both in terms of his approach and the projects themselves. How the sands of time will affect this impact in the future is unclear.

New York's urban environment will continue to transform itself with more development in the outer boroughs, an increased emphasis on mass transit, and initiatives to limit the increasing effects of climate change. All of these changes will have some sort of impact on the enduring legacy of Robert Moses, his career, and his influence on the city. By the same token, it is also likely that future alterations in New York's urban landscape will have an effect of similar proportion on the legacy of Jane Jacobs, Moses' most prominent critic. However, ongoing planning practices reveal that these legacies are moving closer to one another rather than further apart. As New York's development continues and the city continues to change, perhaps the

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<sup>303</sup> Powell, "A Tale of Two Cities."

legacies of two of the most important opposing figures in New York history will find even more common ground.

There are many possibilities for the enduring legacies of both Robert Moses and Jane Jacobs. As New York's future remains uncertain, so too do these legacies that are so intertwined within the city's urban environment. On the one hand, it is possible that New York's continued expansion will only increase the city's dependency on the automobile and thus negatively impact public opinion regarding Moses as well as his neglect for mass transit and a cohesive transportation system. On the other hand, gentrification and urban development in the outer boroughs could reveal Moses to be one of the more important visionaries in all of urban history as these top-down processes transform whole neighborhoods and destroy much of the character and authenticity that Jacobs idealized. A third possibility is that suburban development cements the importance of Moses's vast road network in connecting Manhattan to the outer boroughs. Of course, these are not the only possibilities; no one truly knows how New York will change into the future.

At this moment in time, these numerous possibilities for the future make it relatively impossible to predict with any form of certainty what will happen to the legacies of Robert Moses and his most famous critic. Rather, we can only examine where these legacies truly stand today; Moses has gone from reviled to respected since Caro wrote his seminal work in 1974, while many of Jane Jacobs' ideals have been ignored as New York has moved to a new period in its development. However, in a certain sense these legacies have also moved closer together, with development in New York during the twenty-first century suggesting that these figures are no longer polar opposites in the realm of urban theory. Rather, New York City's landscape and

development practices not only in the present but perhaps in the future as well reveal that the city government and even private developers have come to respect and acknowledge the ideas, careers, and visions of both Robert Moses and Jane Jacobs. While the legacies of both figures have changed over time and are likely to do the same in the future, they currently stand as perhaps the two most well-known and important visionaries in the long history of New York City.



## **Conclusion**

This paper has attempted to provide a reexamined legacy for one of the most controversial figures not only in the history of New York City but also in urban history as a whole. In the centuries prior to Robert Moses, New York began expanding northward from its traditional center of downtown Manhattan as a result of the Industrial Revolution and then outward with the incorporation of Greater New York at the end of the nineteenth century. In this sense, New York's development has not changed much as Manhattan continues its northward march and expands beyond its limits as an island with development spilling over into the outer boroughs. However, in most other contexts New York's development has taken a drastically different shape even relative to the years immediately following Moses' career. Today, New York City is in many ways first among all cities and stands at the very top of the global hierarchy.

Despite the negative perception that has surrounded him beginning in the last decade or so of his career, Robert Moses and his ideas have played an instrumental role in allowing New York to achieve this status. The first chapter of this paper details his work and approach throughout his career, beginning with his parks in the 1920s and progressing all the way through his work in roadways and urban renewal. In doing so, this chapter provided an examination of how Moses gained power. Moses provided recreational facilities for an increasingly crowded New York City, he built the largest road network the world had ever seen by the end of his career and created the five-borough metropolis that New York is today. However, the first chapter also concludes with an explanation of why the public and press reviled Robert Moses by the end of his career due to the negative consequences of his highways and urban renewal schemes. These

projects displaced thousands of New Yorkers and accelerated the movement of residents out into the suburbs and ushered in a period of urban decay for New York.

The second chapter of this paper argues that Moses was not principally responsible for this suburbanization and establishes the bulk of the main argument for a reconsideration of his legacy. Beyond the argument that Moses should not bear all of the blame for the state of New York in the years following his career, this chapter contains arguments and evidence for the role his ideas have played in revitalizing the city since the 1980s. In particular, gentrification and mega-projects such as the case study of Hudson Yards have helped establish New York City as the most valuable city in the world through processes not unlike those of the Moses era. These processes include similar public-private agreements, top-down planning practices, and the ability to stymie opposition that defined Robert Moses' career. As such, this chapter argues that his legacy has become tied to contemporary development practices in New York City; while these practices have inevitably had some negative effects on the city's residents, as a whole they have revitalized New York following the worst period in its history in the 1970s. As the legacy of Robert Moses has become tied to real estate development in the twenty-first century, the revitalization of New York City has established a new, positive legacy for New York's master builder.

This paper has also acknowledged that this legacy is subject to change, just as it has since Robert Caro published his book in 1974, only six years after Moses finally fell from power. Moses inevitably made some mistakes in his career, and the first chapter of the paper details how these mistakes contributed to the destruction of his legacy at the end of his career. As New York moves into the future, mistakes such as Moses' oversights in mass transit and prioritization of the

automobile could take on new meaning with the increasing threat of climate change and a subsequent increase in the city's emphasis on discouraging car usage.

In this area, therefore, there is a need for more research from urban studies scholars to examine the various possibilities for the legacy of Robert Moses in the future. Perhaps more research on how his legacy has changed in the present day relative to the end of his career and its immediate aftermath could be useful in predicting what will happen in the future. Indeed, an examination of exactly what has changed Moses' legacy in the modern day beyond what this paper has covered could help reveal how his legacy could change again. While many scholars have written such pieces with similar aims to the main goal of this paper in terms of reexamining Moses' legacy in a more positive light, there has been almost no research so far on how his legacy could again change in the future.

Robert Caro wrote what remains to be the most detailed and expansive work on Robert Moses and his career, yet today it is clear that many of his arguments were short-sighted. Caro failed to see how New York could improve in the future and how Moses' legacy could change as a result. Presumably, Caro believed with some certainty that he was correct in 1974 when he argued that Moses would likely never recovery from his tarnished legacy at the end of the career. After all, Moses had left the city to deteriorate as never before and as it has not done since. Over forty years later, the revitalization of New York City has proved Caro wrong; Moses's infrastructure projects still stand as perhaps even more vital components in the city landscape, his parks serve most residents of the city and Long Island, and his ideas have been instrumental in contemporary real estate practices and developments.

However, the adoption of Moses' ideas and practices in contemporary New York also suggests that his legacy has been a product of time. Whereas Moses' legacy was overwhelmingly negative when New York was suffering greatly in the years after his career, it has turned positive as the city as cemented its status at the top of the global urban hierarchy. By the same token, if New York slips from this pole position in the future, someone like Robert Caro could revisit Moses' legacy yet again. Therefore, there is a need for further research on what can be done to prevent such a slip, whether it be in terms of New York City's affordable housing crisis or its vulnerability to the increasing threat of climate change. Moreover, further research on climate change should examine what would happen to New York's economy and particularly its real estate values if the city fails to adapt to the threat. If rising sea levels submerge New York City both literally and figuratively, Moses could yet again become a reviled figure in the city's ongoing history.

Just as Robert Caro erred in believing the legacy of Robert Moses as a reviled figure in New York history would endure for centuries, it would neither be correct to argue his reestablished legacy will endure nor that it will revert back to its 1970s form. Rather, it is only accurate to say that Robert Moses has come a long way in the decades since the destruction of his legacy in the immediate aftermath of his career. The final question that Caro raises in his book asks why the public was not grateful for Robert Moses in 1974. In 2019, the answer to this question has become clear; Moses was high-handed, perhaps racist, certainly contemptuous, and made many mistakes throughout his career. Yet today, contemporary real estate practices and other phenomena in New York reveal that Moses' projects and ideas have been instrumental in bringing New York City out of its dire state in the 1970s, and thus there should be renewed

gratitude for a man who built more for the world's leading city than any other individual in its three-century history.

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