

AICP STUDY GUIDE

Episode 27: Boulevard of Beautiful Dreams

And welcome to the 27th episode of The VERY UNofficial AICP Study Guide Podcast. I'm Jonathan Miller and thank you so much for joining.

So, this is going to be our last episode for this round of the exam. After this, we're going to take the rest of May off - which is cool - I have some other stuff to work on, but more importantly, you test takers need to try and relax too.

Last week we shored up a bit of what we left off with the Garden Cities and how that all evolved; like a more in-depth look at the three magnets, Letchworth, Radburn, Greenbelt Cities, and New Towns.

This week, we're doubling down on the City Beautiful Movement, and yes, I did these two a little bit backwards since Garden Cities sort of came about as the Anti-City Beautiful Movement. Regardless, we'll look a little more into what characterizes the City Beautiful Movement including the Beaux Arts architecture, and we'll cover a couple of the early examples of Burnham's City Beautiful work like the McMillan Plan in DC, the 1903 Group Plan in Cleveland.

Before we dig in though, I want to make a clarification on this one too just so we're all on the same page.

City Beautiful, Beaux Arts. They sometimes get used interchangeably, probably because City Beautiful is sometimes called Beaux Arts Planning, and the two concepts are generally one in the same. But for our purposes here, Beaux Arts refers only to the architectural style while City Beautiful refers to the planning theory and movement which of course is symbolized by Beaux Arts architecture, but we're getting ahead ourselves.

Anyways, you really can't talk about the City Beautiful movement without talking about Daniel Burnham first, so let's start there.

(2:20)

Burnham - born in New York and raised in Chicago - apparently sort of sucked at school. He would have been amazing in today's school climate which deemphasizes test taking (ironic for a study guide podcast, I know), but he apparently tried getting into Harvard and Yale, but ended up failing the entrance exams; even with private tutoring.

So like most famous, awesome, and amazing people of the day, Daniel Burnham actually has no formal education. Instead, he apprenticed as a draftsmen for an architect in Chicago before taking a bit of a sabbatical of sorts.

He moved to Nevada with some friends to try gold mining, even ran for the Nevada State Legislasture; neither of which panned out obviously. Otherwise we wouldn't be talking about him. So he moved back to Chicago and picked back up with architecture.

Fun fact, he even took a break from the return to architecture to try selling glass windows and work as a druggist, but he failed at those too.

But, he finally settled into architecture when he met his lifelong buddy and architecture partner Jon Root.

From there, they started their own firm and were wildly successful. Together, they built several famous structures like the The Montauk building in Chicago - the one that pioneered the term 'skyscraper' - and the Masonic Temple Building which was the tallest building at the time.

Ultimately, Burnham and Root were selected to oversee the design and construction of the 1893 Chicago World's Fair and when his buddy Root passed away unexpectedly from pneumonia, it lay on Burnham to finish it. Before Root died though, he had the generous idea - I guess - that no one person or firm should design the fair. So he and Burnham opened it up to a committee of sorts that included our friend Olmsted and several famous architects of the time: McKim, Hunt, Post, Van Brunt, and Sullivan.

After Root passed, this Committee of sorts changed plans, and decided to design the whole thing in a Neoclassical or Classical Revival style of architecture, and this would evolve into the Beaux Arts style; a decision that would basically forever change the course of planning.

But, what exactly constitutes the architectural style known as Beaux Arts.

(5:45)

First a disclaimer: I'm not an architect and I've never taken a class in architecture. I was deferred from the Architecture program at the University of Cincinnati, and yes, there's a squinty eyed glare with that; but whatever. It allowed me to go into planning, so there's that too. What's that saying again? Life's what happens you're busy making plans.

Regardless, the Beaux Arts style got its name from the French school with which the style was named: Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Ultimately, it took elements from Roman architecture, and Baroque and Renaissance styles as well.

The american evolution of the style leaned more towards the Roman side though. The end result is a building whose basic structure has hard, straight lines like flat roofs and definitely pediments - or those triangles in the center of the roof. the exceptions being domes or arches on windows or doors, colonnades, and lots of architectural ornamentation.

So, back to the fair.

(7:01)

With the architectural style settled and buildings divvied up between the architects, Burnham set out to organize them. And he did in the style of what we call, 'City Beautiful.' Sort of in response to the crowded urban form that was shaping up in industrial America, the City Beautiful movement focused a lot on creating civic pride.

In short, the City Beautiful ideology lied in the concept that the social issues of cities were really inseparable from the City's design. Hence, the design of a city should instill civic pride and really engage the people of the city. How was this accomplished?

Well, primarily this was done through the creation of a civic center and the use of grand boulevards; usually axial to the more minor street grid and ending at prominent civic buildings. That way, if you're headed down a grand boulevard, centered in the distance is a large gorgeous structure.

If you google, '1893 world fair map' you'll see what I mean. That though was just the first real example we got of the whole city beautiful thing. But really, also probably one of the more fuzzier version. The 1901 McMillan Plan of DC is much better.

(8:34)

The McMillan Plan - officially called, 'The Report of the Senate Park Commission' - was a plan for the city's parks and named for the Senator who sponsored the Bill that created the commission; not for

anyone who was actually on the commission.

Starting as far back at 1880, people starting being highly critical of the nation's capital's lackluster architecture and crappy parks, and that sounds like a job for the City Beautiful movement. So in 1901, the US Senate for Senate Park Commission which consisted of the all-star cast of Daniel Burnham: Frederick Law Olmsted JR, and Charles McKim. And in 1902, boom, they were done and it all worked out too perfectly.

The central mall was the main part of the McMillan Plan. The commission said goodbye to the Victorian landscaping in place and said hello to a giant cross of open grass with the long part going east/west and the short part going north/south; common for those grand palaces in Europe at the time; and the Washington Monument in the middle of course.

On the ends were the US Capitol Bulding on the east end of the east/west axis, the white house on the north end of the north/south axis and parks on the west and south ends. And the commission recommended putting the newly approved Lincoln Memorial in the park on the west end.

Not everything was completed though. The plan wanted some axial gardens and terraces around the Washington Monument (those were never done), and a swimming pool on the south tidal basin was proposed as well (and that didn't get done either). Maybe a good thing there though.

Anyways, based on the success of the McMillan Plan that Burnham was a part of, The City of Cleveland said, 'Hey, we want some cool civic spaces too.' And with that, Burnham went back to the Great Lakes.

(10:46)

Maybe it's self-indulgence that I add the 1903 Cleveland Group Plan, but it's also an excellent example of how the trend of the City Beautiful movement really ramped up after the 1893 World's Fair. In fact, its probably one of the better examples of the City Beautiful movement.

Anyways though, the Group Plan Commission as it was called, formed in 1902 in response to - well - the same thing every city was responding to at the time: a chance to beautify itself. Anyways, the resulting plan in 1903 really embodied the City Beautiful movement and - if you look at images of it - shows very clearly the relationship to the McMillan Plan.

The mall, the central focus on the plan was near the existing public square and had several buildings proposed to be constructed around it. Seven of those did get built with only one being torn down. The mall itself was just like Washington's; a tree lined open swatch of grass with a train station planned for the south end. That was never built and was instead moved to public square in the 30's, but that's Cleveland History.

The seven structures that were built though all surrounded the mall and were all built in the Beaux Arts style. The one that was torn down was replaced by a Hilton hotel. But, that's the way it goes.

(12:32)

Oh City Beautiful, such a short lived movement. It really began with Burnham and the World's Fair in 1893 with a first real example in the McMillan Plan of DC in 1901 which in turn inspired Cleveland's 1903 group plan. The movement made its mark too in - well - most major cities at the time: Baltimore, Columbus, Denver, Detroit, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh. Even San Francisco and Kansas City - two cities that are also songs by the Mowgli's.

Anyways, any talk of the City Beautiful movement wouldn't be complete without the argument against that ultimately caused the movement to die off: It was too expensive.

The 1930's weren't kind in a fiscal sense and City Beautiful was expensive. And our planner friend Ms. Jacobs - who we will eventually get to (and disclaimer, whom I have very mixed feelings on) called City Beautiful an, 'Architectural Design Cult.'

And I could do a whole commentary on the semi-hypocritical nature of that remark, but that's not popular and I digress.

(15:08)

Well, thanks again for joining me! If you have any questions and have any corrections to my probably poor synopsis of architectural styles, feel free to reach out to me at theveryunofficialAICPGUIDE@gmail.com and I'll do my best to help out if I can, or pass along any needed corrections.

For those who tuned in last week, our question was, "Who headed up the Resettlement Administration, and what are the three greenbelt communities that he helped plan?"

And that would be Rexford Tugwell, and the three Greenbelt Cities that he was responsible for are Greenbelt, Maryland, Greenhills, Ohio, and Greendale, Wisconsin.

If you want to play along this week, our question is, "What was the central concept of the City Beautiful movement's ideology?"

Well, I'm taking the rest of May off. Good luck to everyone taking the exam. And since I won't be here next week, your answer to the question ten seconds ago, "What was the central concept of the City Beautiful Movement's Ideology?" is the idea that the social issues of cities were really inseparable from the City's design.

As far I'm concerned, based on the initiative you're showing by even taking and studying for exam, the profession is much better off for having you and I'm confident you all will do just fine.

Just remember, learning is a lifelong endeavor so even though our time together may seem like it's over with the exam, why not stick around and listen in anyways for some (hopefully?) interesting tidbit on planning. You never know when some episode might help you spark the next great idea.

Anyways, don't forget to subscribe to this podcast on whatever platform you use for podcasts and feel free to sign up on the show's website so you can follow along with future episodes, help prepare for the exam and supplement all of your other study regimens. And share this out with any planners you know and don't forget to leave a review either.

Again, good luck everyone. When we get back to it in June we'll talk about the City Efficient movement.

Thanks again everyone, 'till next time.

Links:

Daniel Burnham:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_Burnham

City Beautiful:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City_Beautiful_movement#:~:text=The%20City%20Beautiful%20Movement%20was, and%20monumental%20grandeur%20in%20cities.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/City-Beautiful-movement>

Washinton D.C./McMillan Plan:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/McMillan_Plan

Cleveland's 1903 Group Plan:

<http://www.clevelandmemory.org/groupplan/#:~:text=Inspired%20by%20the%201893%20World's, arranged%20around%20a%20central%20Mall.>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Mall_\(Cleveland\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Mall_(Cleveland))

<http://urbanplanning.library.cornell.edu/DOCS/brunner.htm>