The Age of Leisure

In the 1930s park administrators abandoned their idealistic efforts to use parks as a mechanism of social reform. In New York City the reform period clearly terminated in 1930, with the appointment of Robert Moses as park commissioner. Moses’ first annual report was a sentiment: “We make no absurd claims as to the superior importance and value of the particular service we are called on to render, and we realize that budget making is a balancing of comparative needs of numerous competing agencies.”

Similarly, the president of the American Institute of Park Executives explicitly abandoned a reform attitude. He felt that park administrators should no longer view themselves as their brothers’ keepers; if people were not already essentially wholesome, he could “hardly hope to effect their salvation.”

The implicit message of such statements was that “the service” needed no particular justification, that park facilities were an expected feature of urban life. Park officials around the country adopted this attitude, repeating the claim that they no longer had to justify parks and that recreation had been accepted as an essential of life, like health, education, work, and religion. “Basic,” “universal,” were almost as frequent as “essential” in describing the new ideologically denuded status of parks. Other terms such as “fundamental” and “important” implicitly justified the status of parks
as a function of government. No longer luxuries or even amenities, they became necessary parts of every city.³

One consequence of this apparent complacency was that the underlying rationale for park activities was often forgotten. Recreation Magazine admitted: "Unfortunately, many of our leaders are primarily concerned with providing a 'smorgasbord of activities' without regard to quality and purpose."⁴ Instead of giving careful attention to programming, park administrators now endeavored to expand the physical system. Facts, not their meaning, would speak for themselves. Recreational facilities in New York increased fivefold over the twenty years from the mid-1930s, and Moses felt that this "twenty year record of park expansion . . . speaks for itself."⁵ The Chicago Park District was eager to help "build a bigger and better Chicago." Through a ten-year park development plan more parks, field houses, children's playgrounds, swimming pools, and acreage were added: "The objective has been to meet the needs of Chicagoleans for more recreation facilities."⁶ More and bigger were argument enough.

More facilities were undoubtedly a response to a general increase in demand for park services. The population was growing rapidly, for example, and a rising standard of living was leading people to think more of play and less of work. The exodus of families with children to the suburbs brought with it demand for park services in new areas. Nevertheless, response to demand was not the same thing as action according to purpose, and this disregard of purpose implied a lack of philosophy. As a Chicago reporter observed, "People interested in a larger modern park system charge that there is no park philosophy, only park patronage. No push for park creation, only recreation."⁷

The term "recreation," in fact, was the watchword of the era, since unlike "play" it seemed to exclude no activity or age group. In the early 1930s its use increased in the San Francisco Commission minutes: land began to be purchased for recreational purposes, not for a playground or a small park, and the Playground Commission started refer-
ring to itself informally, and in its permanent records, as
the recreation commission. Correspondingly, parks became
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Thus, from the start the emphasis on leisure characteristic of the whole period went along with arguments for the need to expand park programming, and, since the period
was typified by tight park budgeting, these arguments needed to be strong ones. Moreover, since leisure time was indeed increasing, after the Depression as well as during it, the new emphasis had a basis in fact. The shorter work week, long weekends, daylight-saving time, improved automobiles and road systems, earlier retirement ages, and longer lives meant that more people had more time outside work and sleep than ever before. Though these generalizations apply equally to the previous era, and talk of leisure time was not entirely new in this one, the effects of these developments were cumulative.\textsuperscript{12}

In addition to its factual basis, the emphasis on leisure involved an interpretation of social phenomena, calculated to weaken any impetus toward radical social economic change. Essentially, it involved the characterization of the urban mass population as a leisure class, one whose members had achieved their goals. The practical effect of these assumptions was the virtual elimination of class hierarchy—hence conflict—since any differences in income, power, or prestige were residual and did not affect basic life chances. Americans were pictured now as occupied chiefly with combating boredom or, more generally, remaining happy. A new interest in mental health—the first articles in Recreation Magazine by psychiatrists appeared in the late 1940s—contributes to this characterization. This interest carries over from the pleasure ground era, but the focus was no longer just on the preservation or restoration of health but on the pursuit of happiness itself. If the people were unhappy and bored, that was cause for alarm. The responsibility of the public servant, the new bureaucrat, was to fulfill their relatively mute demands: Social control of the masses no longer proceeded via improvement but rather via flattery.

\textbf{System}
In replacing an ideology of reform with one of leisure, park departments put themselves on a par with commercial producers of entertainment commodities. By acknowledging that their function was to meet the public demand for leisure activities, they made themselves subject to demand rather than to a norm of public service not necessarily reflected in demand. This led, on the one hand, to an increased emphasis on the efficiency with which they could deliver services on demand, and this emphasis led to systems thinking and bureaucratization. On the other, it led to a general loss of interest in the purposes of parks and of park services which was in turn entirely compatible with the bureaucratic mentality. With the loss of idealism, however, came a loss of authority and prestige, and this was reflected in park budgets, which failed to rise during the era in a way commensurate with the expansion and diversification of park programming.

The consequent economizing affected, first of all, the training and hiring of staff. The physical plant could be built quickly, using skilled and unskilled labor, and capital outlay was a one-time event. Supervision, in contrast, required skilled leaders with at least some college education or special training, and their salaries were an unending cost. Reduction in staff, however, was in keeping with the reduced concern for coherent programming.

The war exacerbated pressures to reduce staff, and economizing pressures generally. Gas rationing and restrictions on vacation times forced people to turn to their local parks, and the stress of wartime factory production demanded release in recreation. But at the same time construction activities were curtailed, and the draft and the high wages of war production combined to strip the park departments of their personnel in all ranks.\textsuperscript{13}

Systems thinking coped with economizing pressures, rationalized them, and to some degree even fostered them. With programming expanding faster than budgets were increasing, parks began to rely increasingly on cooperative ventures with other municipal agencies. Park officials needed to look for friendly allies. The Leisure Time Directory issued by the Chicago Recreation Commission for 1939–1940 listed the locations of social agencies, public
schools, church agencies, libraries, and Works Progress Administration education classes along with the locations of public parks and playgrounds. Parks departments had become one of many agencies in an increasingly complex web of bureaucracies, and park administrators needed the ability to navigate their way through the network. [In New York the completion of the West Side Improvement was thought to owe much to the fact that Robert Moses had this ability.14] Consolidation of the park bureaucracies was one way to cope with bureaucratic complexity. Moses consolidated all five of New York's boroughs when he took office in 1930; Chicago consolidated its park districts in 1935, and pushed park-city consolidation of the two police forces in the late forties; and San Francisco merged its separate Park and Recreation Commissions in 1950.

Throughout the period planning and systems integration gained in sophistication. Parks departments had been working with schools for years, but the practice only reached institutional proportions in the 1930s and 1940s, when school-park plans were developed in New York, Chicago, and San Francisco. Even junior colleges were betrothed to recreation departments. Such affairs were typically one-sided; parks spokesmen viewed recreation work as a part of education broadly defined, but few school historians even mentioned the relation of education to parks or recreation.

Liaisons with housing authorities were also common during the period. In 1941 San Francisco became one of the first cities to coordinate the Housing Authority with the Recreation Department and the Parks Department. The first assumed responsibility for programs in all public housing developments, the second paid for park construction, and the third paid for equipment and maintenance. Ideally, this housing and recreation agreement would yield community centers for entire neighborhoods which would help to break down the barriers between public housing tenants and private home owners. In keeping with this ideal, in 1948 a constitutional convention advocated the national policy that low-rent housing, rehabilitation, and slum clearance include recreational facilities.

Parks professionals had complained, since the days of Olmsted, that city planning was too often piecemeal rather than comprehensive, but now such coordination with other agencies allowed them an involvement in it. The need for city planning, comprehensive studies, and master plans was reiterated by park spokesmen during the Depression and World War II, and in 1942 the San Francisco City-Planning Commission spelled out criteria for a master plan that included guidelines for the distance between play fields and schools and between libraries, schools, and recreation places. After the war San Francisco's City-Planning Commission continued to try to combine park projects with the projects of other city departments; and the Housing Authority's interlocked slum clearance, defense housing, and cospending recreation programs brought the Recreation Department into the scheme of overall city planning.

The development of planning standards was a preoccupation of park administrators during the period, and this turned them into statisticians, relying on quantitative studies of the social structure of the populations they served. Along with pretensions to science came improved equipment, modern switchboards, and later computers, all talismans of the efforts of park organizations to adopt the professionalism, procedural sophistication, and bureaucratic complexity spreading nationally through government and business.15 In a related development, uniform procedures for recruitment and training of staff, data analysis, and bookkeeping emulated business techniques, and for the first time park commissioners were justifying the outlay of money for publicity and park departments were hiring full-time public relations men. All of these changes, of course, meant that a smaller proportion of recreation service focused on the user and his moral welfare. Like all bureaucracies the park department took on a life of its own and came to be committed first of all to its own maintenance and enhancement.
The Demand for Services

Depression and war provided park programmers with causes, and for the duration of these emergencies this helped to conceal their growing loss of direction. For example, the Depression stimulated a relief recreation program in San Francisco, where fourteen centers containing reading rooms, games, and tools for handicrafts were opened to keep up the morale of the unemployed. In New York and elsewhere WPA workers were placed on park construction and maintenance projects as well as the later satirized “Sahara Desert Projects,” leaf raking, and sidewalk polishing.16

If these activities served an evident purpose, and required little justification, at least to the sources that financed them, the war put the parks on the defensive. Under wartime conditions, if park and recreation commissioners did not justify park activities as absolutely essential to the welfare of citizens, their budgets would be cut. In San Francisco, for example, Mayor Angelo Rossi said that he would not approve any additional employment, service, equipment, or capital expenditure in the Park Commission unless vital to the safety of San Francisco’s citizens.17 Morale was vital, though, and to boost morale many park activities, even traditional holidays and children’s activities, could be oriented toward the war. Children could do Red Cross work or help entertain soldiers, and even Valentine’s Day could be celebrated patriotically by using red, white, and blue.

While old activities were given a new definition, new activities such as first-aid classes and demonstrations of the proper methods for combating incendiary bombs could be introduced. In this spirit, despite earlier restrictions against selling on park property, the sale of war bonds was encouraged. Stadiums and school gymnasiums were used as casualty stations and gas decontamination units. And morale boosting turned into full scale propaganda campaigns. A manual with suggestions on “how to organize counterpro-
paganda campaigns to offset subversive and disorganizing influences" was sent to all Chicago park staff. 

Camera clubs pledged to take pictures the subject matter of which would lend itself to patriotic purposes or "to so arrange the composition that a subtle patriotic message was involved," and recreation leaders organized drama classes, artcraft, physical education, lobby displays, news releases, and branch libraries to promote patriotism. Children's playgrounds were renamed day camps to suggest the availability, closer to home, of activities otherwise curtailed by gas rationing and also to associate children's activities with those of military camp.

The Lanham Act provided federal money for nursery schools, day care, and recreation, and day-care centers were set up in some park playgrounds and field houses to take care of children whose parents were at work in defense industries. 

In San Francisco the Board of Education took care of preschoolers from 7:00 to 3:00 in the afternoon, and the Recreation Commission took over until 7:00 in the evening, while the Health Department looked after their medical welfare. Similarly, Victory Gardening—so named when adults began vegetable gardening in parks—was given a new rationale during the war: families would benefit the nation as well as themselves by growing their own food. Accordingly, parks departments issued permits for vegetable gardening, lectures were given in park conservatories on Victory Gardening, and private garden clubs and newspapers exhibited prime homegrown vegetables and set up educational exhibits and model gardens.

The war also made sports useful in a new way. San Francisco's Recreation and Park Departments were now offering "program services" rather than old-fashioned activities: organizations were serviced, units operated group service, and units of service were dispatched. Changes in the actual activities offered, however, were largely in terminology, as in the case of the transformation of gymnastic exercises into physical fitness programs, or the reclassification of the old
stand-bys, such as boating, baseball, and skating, as physical activity services. The actual range of activities was familiar: skating, fishing, tennis, children's pony rides, golf, and swimming. (Water sports were stimulated by the wartime Red Cross campaign.) What was different was that now there was a wartime urgency to the goal of conditioning youth to a harder and more disciplined way of life, and a political threat to make the unity felt by people exercising together more highly valued.

Wartime Civil Defense programming in the parks furthered the tendency of park departments toward interagency cooperation. In Chicago, for instance, the program required coordination with city's traffic divisions, state medical services, the Federal Atomic Energy Commission, and private universities, and involved contacts with draft boards, local community groups, citizenship training programs for the foreign born, and programs in first aid, nutrition, and home economics. This trend toward cooperation among government agencies was paralleled by an internal programming policy that favored the federation of interest groups and their integration into broad regional organizations. Contemporaries claimed that this phenomenon was the most significant aspect of the programming of the era. The basic idea was that enthusiasts in the same activity, although in widely separated communities of the city, could get together to share experiences and pool resources. But since neighborhood groups might fear losing identity or self-direction, the answer was the creation of federations of autonomous groups. Many interest groups formed such loose affiliations: baseball leagues, camera clubs, fishing clubs, archery, tennis, and dog-training associations.

The idea of communitywide events easily transformed into a new interest in large celebrations. In Chicago in the 1930s, the completion of Soldier Field facilitated mass events: football games, circuses, Fourth-of-July celebrations, music festivals, and Easter sunrise services. Outside Soldier Field there were additional parades, festivals, ceremonials, patriotic gatherings, athletic tournaments, and concerts. Nationwide, park commissioners proposed special weeks or days of nonstop celebration: Rhododendron Week in San Francisco, Chicago Week, a National Bill of Rights Week, Farm Week, Recreation Day in San Francisco, Civil Service Employees Day in Chicago, and Negro Day. Fairs—like the Chicago World's Fair of 1933—were consistent with the emphasis on pageantry and particularly during the Depression valued as an economic shot in the arm.

These pageants and communitywide events had a social focus that reflected their origins in what social researcher and playground activist Clarence Rainwater, called the community development phase of the later reform era. Despite a general move to cut back on them during the re-trenchment of the late 1930s, park departments throughout the recreation era encouraged activities which lent themselves to festivals and pageantry—music, dramatics, dancing, art exhibits—because of their power to stimulate community interaction and integration. But it was characteristic of the era that these activities were also advocated by park spokespersons who viewed them primarily as means of self-expression. The absence of a clarion call to reform during the era allowed a carefree variety of claims and appeals to surface.

Music lent itself well to mass events. For example, open-air music concerts at Stern Grove in San Francisco became part of an annual music festival, and Christmas carols were offered by park choral groups. Symphony concerts in Chicago's Grant Park attracted large audiences—an estimated three million people came downtown to attend the series, and many more listened over the radio. By the 1960s jazz festivals were being offered at Soldier Field.

Along with music theatrical fare, ranging from dramatic productions to simpler activities like story telling, story plays, puppetry, and singing games expanded during the era. Central Park offered story telling and Shakespearean drama, and Chicago both puppetry and conventional theatre. City-
wide programs were presented to the public annually, and there were smaller programs for the neighborhoods.

Social dancing which after much soul-searching had been allowed in the reform era, increased remarkably after 1930. In San Francisco weekly dances cosponsored by the Recreation Department and the Board of Education were given a trial in 1933, and public dances on Sundays were no longer against commission policy. In Chicago folk dancing underwent a very great revival which was probably far from spontaneous. Folk dancing, a jollier socializing activity than ballroom dancing, was considered to "have a rollicking quality which breaks down stiffness and formality, permits people to be more naturally themselves, rids them of stiff and self-conscious restraint." Nor was classical dancing entirely overlooked. In 1936 ballet was performed around Buckingham Fountain in Chicago's Grant Park: "The artistic beauty of the fountain itself made it unthinkable that a crude program should be conducted on so magnificent a site."

During the Depression unemployment gave crafts additional meaning. Spare time, regarded as an idle half day or more, necessarily required more than sports, games, and physical occupations. Men and boys were particularly affected, so some of the new crafts programs were developed just for them. The range of enterprises, remaining narrow in the exclusion of fine arts, was extended to include lapidary, pottery, weaving, dressmaking, knitting, costume design, millinery, crocheting, and embroidery work, and leather tooling. Boondoggling, the use of material ordinarily considered unusable, was promoted: "Even the less favored neighborhoods are able to secure heavy bones from the community meat markets, and by bleaching the bone in gasoline they can make it almost ivorylike in appearance. With this inexpensive material to work on, a great deal of artistic ingenuity has been displayed by hundreds of interested workers."

During the war hobbies were promoted because they could release pent-up, nervous tension. After the war craft pro-

grams continued, with power-equipped shops facilitating a much higher level of expertise. Crafts, like the other social activities, were valued both for their ability to satisfy "the creative urge within us all," and to "reach people who might not be reached other ways," specifically the shy and isolated. By 1961 in Chicago such benefits had to emerge through hat making, probably the most popular of all art-craft activities.

Communitywide federations and events were encouraged by those park theorists who believed the neighborhood-level group work characteristic of the reform era made children too dependent on a single play leader. Mass activities would force leaders to refer children to different leaders as they noticed their interests developing in one direction or another. Chicago experts turned to group work, and claimed thereby to have fostered a social consciousness which became communitywide in its scope. But no single theory of social organization dominated park thinking during the period. Thus some social workers believed that group work should be practiced in recreation centers, that recreation leaders should work with small groups of children over extended periods of time. Others argued that this leadership function should be extended to individual counseling, with its focus clearly on psychological development rather than community cohesion.

Demand, or need, were more often put forward as rationales for programming than any particular theory. For example, teenagers—identified as such for the first time during the era—increased demand for what the young people called "Rec" centers and thereby created the necessity for more facilities. Thus teen canteens were patterned on the war-born USO canteens, and after the war the teen center evolved, a place for dances, parties, athletics, handicraft, dramatic and music activities, meetings, and games—and for "dropping in" and "hanging out." The reason that teenagers were singled out as a special group, in fact had less to do with demand than with the traditional elite practice of solving social problems of their own definition.
Legalese

Just as the reforming motives for park programming tended to hide behind the pseudoeconomic model of supply and demand, reforming motives for exclusions from programming tended to be expressed in legalese, to hide behind the law. Thus official attitudes toward commercial activity were still at least ambivalent, but decisions to exclude such activity were often—at least apparently—made by attorneys. Thus in San Francisco a controversy about a tourist information center in Union Square led to the demand for a legal definition of "recreational" and "nonrecreational" purposes. The commissioners turned to the city attorney for an opinion, and he arrived at it on the basis of an analysis of the use of the term "recreation" in other statutes around the country. He decided that "the word 'recreation' has a narrow meaning and does not mean every form of enjoyment," thereby excluding tourist information. Thus the board did not have the power to authorize such a building. Commissioners relied heavily on his definition thereafter.

Similarly, when the Junior Chamber of Commerce tried to hold an aircraft show in a Chicago park, a permit was denied, citing the section of the city charter that restricted park usage to recreation. When the U.S. Department of Commerce wanted to install radio equipment to transmit signals in connection with Chicago's municipal airport, the commissioners merely claimed that they had no legal authority to lease park lands for such a purpose. Statements or principle regarding appropriateness and inappropriateness, so seriously enjoined in earlier eras, were conspicuously absent in this era.

In these cases the law was used to bolster a traditional anticommercial stand, but during the recreation era the stand was no longer uncompromising. Eventually advertising was allowed when it promoted park activities—in the 1930s Chicago city buses were allowed to carry posters advertising special park events and new facilities—or promoted commercial values generically. Thus the Chicago Auto-

mobile Trade Association received permission to decorate lamp posts on a major park avenue for a "Prosperity Demonstration."

These ambivalences in the commercial sphere had their counterpart in the timid attempts to regulate drinking and dancing. The Chicago commissioners decided they had no right to regulate—which is not to say they approved of—the sale of liquor on private property adjacent to parks or boulevards. With the end of Prohibition the park food services themselves sold beer in Golden Gate Park, though not within the same block as a playground.44 Similarly, though the San Francisco commissioners now welcomed social and folk dancing, they still wished to keep dance halls away from playfields despite their conclusion that it was not within their province to take action—a restraint they would not have imposed on themselves in the past.

The Supply of Sites

The idea of the recreation facility was powerful enough during the 1930s and 1940s to transform some older parks, but most new park construction had to wait until after the war. In fact, because long-term maintenance had been almost as slow as new construction during the Depression and war, repairs had first priority, and construction only began to boom in the 1950s.

From then on, the authors of the national literature and yearbooks took delight in describing the increase in the number of playgrounds provided. Descriptions of the number of parks, their acreage, and their distribution were endlessly repeated, with little reference to the underlying justification for their extension. Recreation and playgrounds were universal needs, and simply fulfilling the mandate to provide more of them was all that was required of park promoters.

The new parks were sited throughout the city fabric, often in the congested areas of the inner city and the public housing projects and suburbs, both newly developed after the
war. In order to be numerous, these new acquisitions were remarkably small—even smaller than the reform park. "It is much better, if a choice is forced on us, to acquire one block in a congested part of Manhattan than ten acres in the open areas of Richmond." The establishment of parks in the projects and older areas often involved or abetted slum clearance, though the park commissioners never mentioned land values, business interests, or political-economic considerations of any kind in their reports and claimed to be responding simply to abstract demand or need.

The school-park plan, in which schools and parks were sited adjacent to one another, continued through the era, with the two agencies sharing both construction and operating costs according to circumstances. This coupling contributed to the development of the neighborhood theory, the idea that a given geographic unit and a given population cluster should have one each of a series of urban facilities [schools, housing, health, commercial, transportation], and more generally to the systematic urban planning that characterized the era. Many city-planning departments instituted master plans for recreation in anticipation of the population expansion at the end of the war, and immediately after the war Chicago came out with "More Parks for All Chicago," a ten-year postwar park development plan. In 1942, the San Francisco Recreation Commission described a master plan for San Francisco’s physical development, and a plan for the development of all the city’s parks (variously called a comprehensive or a master plan) was introduced in 1954.

Forward-looking city planning of this sort inevitably involved the planners in large questions concerning the public good and encouraged in them, or demanded of them, something of a reform or progressive mentality. Thus it fell somewhere short of the ideal neutrality of pure systems thinking. More typically questions of site selection resolved themselves in practice into questions of expediency, often involving competing land uses. Robert Moses was the harbinger of this development. Of large-scale, urban planning he said, "The city is not going to be torn up and rebuilt on a decentralized satellite or other academic theory." Moses considered himself a realist who expanded and built not according to a "radical plan of decentralization," but to practical objectives. He defended his catch-as-catch-can practice of siting parks accordingly: "The theorists and the perfectionists of course, say that there has been no comprehensive plan and that ours has been a spotty program. We have indeed taken what we could get in the face of enormous difficulties." When addressing himself to the issue of planning standards, he disavowed any "such thing as a fixed percentage of park area to population" and, in fact, spoke out on the inapplicability of mathematical formulas to solve social needs. For Moses, "Sensible, practical people know that the answer depends upon the actual problems of the city in question and not on a slide rule." In the long run this sort of realism encouraged the spread of a purely technical systems approach in park departments.

The enormous difficulties that led Moses to take "what we could get" arose largely because of intense competition for urban space. Highways, schools, shopping centers, hospitals, and public housing competed fiercely for space with the parks and, in fact, even preyed on them. In part this situation resulted from the impoverished goals of the recreation facility, which was hard pressed to take an aggressive position because of its lack of reforming zeal. In part, however, the intensity of the competition itself caused that impoverishment, in that the parks were now forced to scramble for land and could hardly afford to be consistent or principled.

Throughout the period, social program and physical form were only loosely related. This stemmed partly from the influence of a new design ideal—the multiple-use facility—which dictated what architects today call "loose fit," partly from the fact that the underlying social goals of park programs were not clear enough for park planners to recognize
one style or feature as more relevant or useful than another. In practice, various features of the preceding eras were juxtaposed, and a banal eclecticism was the result. Because this model simply extended a service defined previously, and no new forms were needed, none developed. As the Chicago park commissioners put it, "The shift was not in things or properties, it was in the social meanings of those things and properties."\(^{44}\)

A few people were worried about the strict facility orientation of park service, but, rather than attack facilities altogether, they took the eclectic position that a park should have old fashioned pleasure ground elements as well. In the words of one park professional:

The city park is gradually becoming functional in its character and, if some recreationalists had their way, would all consist of baseball fields, tennis courts, shuffleboard courts, and other specialized facilities that are hot by day and ablaze with floodlights at night. We must realize that beauty and congenial surroundings are an important adjunct to such planning and, let us not forget, that some of us require a place of peace and rest even before the grave.\(^{46}\)

Meanwhile, annual reports spelled out the numbers and kinds of facilities in detail: "five splendid golf courses, seven yacht harbors ... twelve bathing beaches, over fifteen miles of equestrian bridal paths, five casting pools, one hundred eighty-four children's outdoor playgrounds, three hundred horseshoe courts and numerous running tracks, archery ranges and playfields."\(^{46}\)

The real design innovation of the era was the standardization of all the old elements into a basic municipal package, one that was used repeatedly, without regard to local site conditions. Parts, materials, and procedures were reduced to a minimum—asphalt paving and curbs, standard fences and benches, and prescribed trees specified and detailed in construction drawings embalmed in blue cloth and issued to any park architect.\(^{47}\) As landscape architect Garrett Eckbo said in 1962, "... American park design is more limited, conventional, stereotyped, repetitive, and resistant to innovation in form than any other area of design."\(^{48}\)

In general this standardization served an economizing function. What has been called parkway picturesque, the lawn and spotting of trees and shrubs here and there along parkways, on college campuses, and around corporate headquarters and suburban buildings, which was a characteristic of the era, was merely a blend of minimal standards of appearance and the desire to keep maintenance and supervision costs to a minimum. Economy also led to the removal of previous planting, especially shrubbery, though here decisions to strip parks rather than fund the supervision and maintenance of planted areas could be justified as proceeding from concern for safety and ease of surveillance. Thus in San Francisco, when the Playground Commission received a complaint about "men lurking in the trees at St. Mary's Playground," the superintendent remedied the situation by making changes in the landscaping, and Buena Vista Park was stripped of its undergrowth after complaints that women and children were shunning the park because it was attracting undesirables and winos. Similarly, hard surfaces, usually blacktop, were favored during the period, partly because of the premium placed on the multiple use of facilities but also because of economy of maintenance.

**Architectural Design**

Buildings in the recreational facility were larger, more numerous, and more various in function than they had been in previous eras. During the war, in particular, many non-recreational structures were built in parks: navy control stations, fire houses, air raid shelters, temporary housing (tents, quonset huts, and trailers), and stockpiling houses.

Styling was eclectic, the new constructions being Victorian, Georgian, Alpine, nautical, and, after the war, modern and even glasshouse modern. In the 1930s designers made use of some new cast and machine-made materials and relied less on hand-crafted ones: economic conditions made rustic treatment a luxury.\(^{49}\) After the war some landscape architects actually began to welcome the use of industrial materials: "The mediums for expressing modern park architecture are not factory-made 'hand-split' shakes ..."
sawed timbers... log termite havens patterned after pioneer cabins. Modernists believed that park architecture should utilize the material and construction methods of other building types and not be camouflaged nor historicalized. Concrete and cinder block were suddenly refreshing.

Though architectural materials were typically modern, for the most part design was not. In New York Park spokesmen defended this policy:

Our standards of design have been conservative. We are public officials clothed with brief authority, custodians of the common lands and not speculators risking their own, or other people’s resources. Our work must be usable and durable in the esthetic as well as the physical sense. It must last a long time and survive freakish changes of style amid the modes and fancies of the day. New materials and methods must, however, be recognized, and change is a law of life. Our job is to keep what has been proven good until we find something demonstrably and manifestly better.

By 1973 the New York Times could characterize this combination of new industrial materials and drably practical design as “Robert Moses’s brick-and-tile lavatory style.”

Recreation facility design was epitomized by the park bench and the Cyclone wire fence. Because the bench was standardized and easy to maintain, manufactured in large numbers, ready installed wherever a place needed to be defined as a park, it became the symbol of the city park. Its inclusion in a park was never challenged, although on occasion there might be some brainstorming about whether or not it should be long enough to accommodate a reclining figure since more and more parks, always attempting some sort of social control, were becoming the sleeping grounds of drunken derelicts. The fence, a park tradition only since the reform era, was equally standardized as an unimaginative solution to the problem of demarcating land uses, especially the park from residential areas around it: fences also helped to prevent accidents and thus were cheaper than supervision. In San Francisco, in keeping
with the more-is-better practices of the entire period, the number and height of fences at park boundaries went up over the years.

Less supervision also meant more need for signs. In the pleasure ground and reform eras they had been restricted to entrances, where rules for use of the park might be posted. Now they were used to identify park boundaries, paths, and playgrounds and in general to organize the use of the park.

Signs needed to be highly visible—strongly contrasted with their surroundings—to be useful, and this was even more true of waste containers. In 1935 a national contest for an attractive, practical design of a waste container was held. This drew attention to the design potential of waste containers, and various designs for such contrivances like "garbage gobblers" dotted professional literature thereafter.

Even more striking was the fact that the color of equipment now merited attention. In Chicago the formerly acceptable dingy green zoo cages were repainted a bright, "sunshiny" tan, and other colors were added to the zoo environment, with the object of getting a more lively, modern color combination than the old staid zoo green. Still administrators cautioned that a mere change of color could not always transform a dilapidated building. Drinking fountains, giant strides, slides, swings, picnic tables, turning bars, and teeter-totters, along with garbage cans, were painted bright red, white, blue, orchid, rose, and lavender.

A development of the period slightly more radical than bright coloration was the small children's amusement park, sometimes called Kiddieland, Storyland, or Fairyland. Storyland, developed by San Francisco to compete with Oakland's Fairyland, was a special playground with a village of fairytale houses, child-sized buildings inspired by Mother Goose rhymes such as "The Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe," "Humpty Dumpty," and "Peter Peter Pumpkin Eater" as well as the tales of Hansel and Gretel and The Three Bears. Storyland also had a drawbridge and an en-
Park design has accommodated the automobile in many ways, largely without question. Seattle Auto Tourist Park, 1920s. Seattle Historical Society.

While Olmsted and Vaux had carefully sunk the transverse roads in Central Park to keep the pedestrians' experience undisturbed by vehicular traffic, planners of the recreation era paved and widened roads and expected pedestrians to wait for a safe crossing. Lincoln Park, 1921. Courtesy Chicago Historical Society.
chanted palace, a birthday party area, a puppet theatre, and a live farm.

Until Storyland, playgrounds had become increasingly mechanized. Much more technical equipment was purchased after the 1930s than ever before, and, since supervision did not keep pace, it had to be safe, well built, and simplified. Thus the more adventurous gymnastic equipment, even the teeter-totter, was dropped, and the residue was the standard municipal playground with paved surface and fence, sandpit, swings, and jungle gym—in good municipal parlance the "pipe frame exercise unit."59

After the success with Storyland, park departments around the country tried to overcome the standardization of playground equipment by creating free-form play sculptures. Forms often followed a theme appropriate to the surrounding neighborhood, such as an Oriental design for a Chinese neighborhood; color and plant materials expressed the theme, and this provided both an educational and an artistic lesson. The new forms required new techniques, such as the use of glass matting and glass cloth laminated to a metal armature with synthetic resins.60 In Chicago the designers used prefabricated concrete equipment in bright colors to supplement standard swings and slides.61 Elsewhere a magic key to a talking book, actually a mechanical device for telling stories, went with the illustrated fairytales; a tiny-tot freeway helped children imagine themselves as grown-ups using freeways. Children themselves helped construct a nature study park, they used giant culverts for "spontaneous play" and a surplus jet fighter as a crawling device.62

The idea behind this new equipment, which anticipated the thinking of the following era, was "versatility, spontaneity, a freedom and openness of physical plan and programming, the encouragement of dramatic and imaginative play."63 During the middle 1950s its most advanced expression was the "terrain sculpture" of Alberto Giacometti and Isamu Noguchi. But the standard argument for these innovations was merely that people had to be lured from their homes by something more than a place to picnic. "Even the
zoo must be glamorized and publicized. The ability to hold and attract people to our parks for any length of time is in proportion to the number of attractions offered. This competition has been met by progressive park departments with the installation of children's zoos, animals acts, birthday party areas and rides. Children's rides supplement other park attractions and have a definite place in municipal parks.”

Even these few innovations were answerable to the characteristic logic of the recreation era: multiplication of offerings, justification by demand, defensiveness of orientation.