The City Beautiful Movement

In America, the movement was most associated with Daniel Burnham, the architect and city planner, most known for his 1909 Chicago Plan, which redesigned the Central Loop of Chicago into the monumental space that it is today. Hall provides insights into the significance that beauty played in the City Beautiful Movement:

- Of the objectives of planning that Abercrombie was to lay down in his slim textbook of 1933, beauty clearly stood supreme for Burnham, commercial convenience was significant, but health, in its widest sense, came almost nowhere. Later commentators have been kinder: elites like the Commercial Club were simply battling the pervasive ugliness of the late nineteenth-century American city; they thought that a beautiful city would make its inhabitants better people; and, through theirs was a movement for social control, they were not authoritarians, for their rhetoric was a belied by their actions. (Hall, 196, 1988)
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- As a movement, the City Beautiful is significant in that it raised awareness of planning and in some way, gave birth to modern American planning. However, the impacts of its plans and their implementation are few and therefore not very significant. Hall further explains the Chicago plan:
  - More subtly, the plan – like those for San Francisco and Cleveland before it – could be called centrocentrist: it was based on a civic and business core with no conscious provision for business expansion in the rest of the city. As Mel Scott put it, 'the Chicago plan of Burnham is a city of the past that America never knew,' an aristocratic city for merchant princes. In that respect, it was like many other urban development strategies to come. But even here, it contained a basic contradiction: as Herbert Croly pointed out at the time in the New York Architectural Record, posited as it was on formal qualities, it accorded ill with the realities of downtown real-estate development, which demanded over-building and congestion. (Hall 1967, 1988)
  - Burnham Plans: Cleveland (1903) - San Francisco (1906) - Chicago (1909)
    - Most early plans dealt with public buildings, parks and streets. No changes to or control over private property.

- Some good things to know...
  - The Columbian Exposition (World Fair) of 1893 ‘White City’
  - Daniel Burnham’s Plan for Chicago (1909)
    - “Make no little plans they have no magic to stir men’s blood…”

- What they learned
  - Beautification and adornment (at huge costs) had limited practicality for most cities.

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- What is interesting and more significant about the City Beautiful movement, is its ties to Haussmann and his central Paris plan. The City Beautiful movement brings the grand plan idea—the ability to demolish the old and start fresh with “good” design to improve the city. However, implementing such plans was costly, as Hall explains:
  - That proved its downfall...some planners and their business supporters came to see that utopia would demand more than some were willing to pay. The City Beautiful rapidly gave way to the City Functional, to be achieved by zoning – a topic to which the Burnham Plan had devoted scant attention (Hall, 1988: 197).
  - The idea of starting fresh, with a clean slate, that began in Paris with Haussmann and was made popular in American by Burnham, will continue to resurface with other planning movements and planning strategies:
    - The modernist and Le Corbusier’s Radiant City
    - Urban renewal in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s.
    - Downtown and waterfront redevelopment
    - The New Urbanists

Elements
1. Cities can be beautiful
2. Good design pays
3. We can solve urban problems through rationality
4. We can improve the plight of the working classes
5. We should do this or else they will harm us
6. Europe as a model for American urban form and government
7. A new acceptance of the city
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- Big Projects as catalyst for growth & civic pride
  - See Adriaen’s Landing, Radio City, the Big Dig...
- Some good things to know...
  - The Columbian Exposition of 1893 ‘White City’
  - Daniel Burnham’s Plan for Chicago (1909)
    - “Make no little plans they have no magic to stir men’s blood…”
- What they learned
  - Beautification and adornment (at huge costs) had limited practicality for most cities. Hmmm...

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Make no little plans. They have no magic to stir men’s blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will never die, but long after we are gone will be a living thing, asserting itself with ever-growing insistency. Remember that our sons and grandsons are going to do things that would stagger us. Let your watchword be order and your beacon beauty, Think big.
Daniel Burnham, Chicago architect. (1864-1912)

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Modern Planning Redevelopment:
- Adriaen’s Landing:
  - Convention Center
  - Marriott Hotel
  - Science Center
  - Front Street Entertainment
- Other Projects:
  - Constitution Plaza
  - Bushnell Tower
  - Civic Center
  - State House Square
  - Hartford 21 – Civic Center

The City Beautiful:
- Influence:
  - Think Big
  - Public Private Partnerships
  - Improve city through development and Beautification
- Outcomes:
  - The Remaking of Space
  - Tourism and Consumption
  - Jobs, taxes, etc... ???
  - Improve city?
  - Undermine market?
  - The next ‘big’ idea/project?
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1905 view of Bushnell Park and the State Capitol. Repeated flooding led the city to enclose the Park River in an underground conduit in 1941.

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Adrian’s Landing
- Front Street
- Connecticut Convention Center
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Adrian’s Landing
• Connecticut Convention Center

Hartford Civic Center
• 1970s Redevelopment
• 2004 Redevelopment