

ARCHITECTS OF THE MILLENNIUM

SHALL WE TURN OVER OUR MUNICIPALITIES
TO RADICAL PROFESSIONAL PLANNERS

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Practical or long haired planning /

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'PRACTICAL' or 'LONG HAired' PLANNING?

By **Robert Moses**

The American Society of Planning Officials recently held a three-day jamboree in New York, delivered themselves of some eloquent tirades on planless cities, announced that the revolution is at hand, and sketched the steps, or rather leaps and bounds, by which the so-called planning profession will shatter this sorry scheme of things, and remould it nearer to the heart's desire.

Let us, for the benefit of those who can not live on the clouds and must look beyond honeyed words to the underlying thought and objective, analyze coolly what the professors are really aiming at, and then see if it looks as good to us as to some of our moulders of public opinion who are so eager to be regarded as eagle-eyed and progressive that they throw their arms around every plausible visitor who has the word "planning" engraved on his calling card.

If I understand the English language, the top-flight, post-prandial orators, panel entertainers and discussion leaders at the recent planning symposium, with the exception of a relatively few modest and thoroughly

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squelched sceptics who did not attract much attention, are committed to four basic theories which they believe are principles on the way to universal acceptance. Here are the four planning axioms:

First: Dispersion. This theory is based on anticipation of total war by atomic and other high explosives, chemical and germ bombs, guided missiles, etc. The idea is to scatter industry and people in relatively small units over wide areas.

Second: Urban decentralization or disintegration. This is based on assumptions that big concentrations are intrinsically bad and wasteful, that what is called the "good life" is impossible in them, and that most people are fed up with them.

Third: A grand controlling plan. This is based on assumptions that it is possible authoritatively to replan a city or metropolitan area on revolutionary theories of dispersion and decentralization, to make every current change involving private as well as public enterprise conform to a grand, overall plan, and that habit, sentiment, pride of citizenship, conservatism, prudent investment, business stability, and property and other rights guaranteed or acquired in for generations, must give way to the decisions of planning bureaucrats frozen into office for long terms and lifted beyond the reach of the fluctuating and untrustworthy electorate.

Fourth: Green Belts. Green Belts, in the Tugwellian planning lingo, are great wide swaths of parks and open spaces within the city, created in place of present undesirable buildings and other uses as the dispersion, decentralization, dispossession and the great central plan get under way.

Now let us analyze these axioms to see if they are true or false, certain or dubious. Always remember that the long-range planning revolutionist here or in Russia makes his statistics support his ends. He climbs the peaks and slides down the hills of graphs with the agility of a Rocky Mountain goat, and follows trends like an old bloodhound who has been given a whiff of a bloody shirt. If the trail doesn't lead to revolution he starts off on another tack. In the end, proof must

be found or fabricated that all the pomp of our big cities will very soon be one with Ninevah and Tyre, that is, a future happy hunting ground for worms and archeologists.

The first axiom of the radicals is that of dispersion for total war. Even if dispersion for military reasons were logical, most people would still regard as fantastic, absurd and contemptible abandonment of our entire civilization, retirement to caves and cellars and surrender to fear, pessimism and despair. Sane measures to facilitate mass movements and promote safety in emergencies, and avoidance of undue concentrations were promoted by farseeing officials and engineers long before Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The public now seems about ready to pay the bills for such protection, but is not to be stampeded into hysterical repudiation of our free and easy way of life either by extreme militarists or planning revolutionaries.

As yet we know little about industrial dispersion for either war or pacific ends. Were the people living under the smog in a little Pennsylvania village safer because they were remote and small in numbers? Why are the atomic scientists in both laboratories and manufacturing plants so careful about weather and wind in getting rid of waste? In emergencies of all kinds, hospitals, ambulances, fire and other equipment are closer at hand in metropolitan areas. No one knows the answers to such riddles sufficiently to be dogmatic about them, and an open mind is still the surest avenue to the truth.

The National Security Resources Board, in a recent report on Industrial Location, which it says is intended to be "neither arbitrary nor hysterical," states that "It is strategically desirable to plan industrial expansion so that further urban concentrations of more than 50,000 people may be avoided" because "the scarcity of the essential materials for the manufacture of an atomic bomb makes production so costly that we may reasonably assume that no country in the foreseeable future will ever have enough to afford to use one on each city of as few as 50,000 people, or on a congested industrial area of less than five square miles."

This report argues that a plant location less than three miles from a potential target center of an atomic bomb is "seriously vulnerable" and then writes off practically every large industrial city in the nation by describing a vulnerable location as an area containing paint plants, chemical plants, power plants, public utilities, railway, water and other transportation facilities, oil refineries, oil storage facilities, military establishments, bridges, airports, steel plants and other important facilities found in almost any city of medium size.

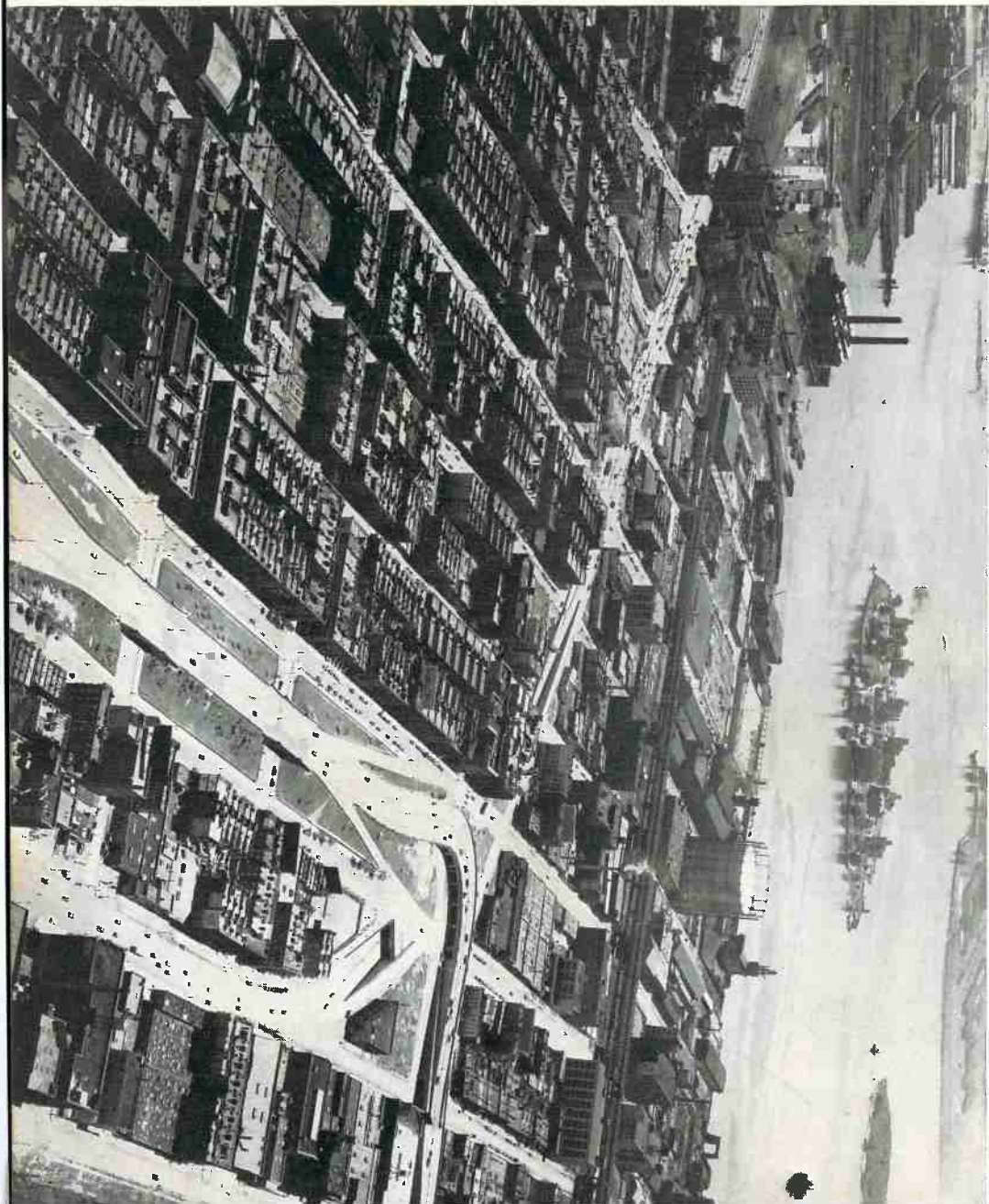
The report declares that "the important thing is to devote study and effort with a view to making the earliest possible start toward dispersion as the means of achieving a reasonable degree of plant security." On the other hand, it hedges in a very cagey way by concluding that "the suggestions made in this pamphlet are not intended to encourage the relocation of manufacturing facilities for the purpose of adversely affecting wages, working conditions and union contracts." What can any conscientious local official make of such double-talk paid for out of the U. S. Treasury?

Contrary to the impression sought to be created by regional planners and advocates of the dispersion theory that there has been no co-ordination of physical improvements in and outside of the metropolitan area of New York, it is a fact beyond possible dispute that there have been many daily contacts and much quiet and effective co-operation between and among city, state and suburban officials on practically all matters of mutual interest, including arterial improvements, abatement of water pollution, rapid transit, etc. These joint activities have been dictated by common sense rather than by coercion or by attempts to set up additional regional administrative authorities.

As to decentralization or disintegration, it is to be noted that the movement to cities continues more or less unabated, that urban population still grows at the expense of the farm and country, and that the average American seems to believe that his ambitions are most likely to be realized in an urban or sub-

Rehabilitation of the East River Shorefront Section north of Williamsburg Bridge showing new parks along the River, the Franklin D. Roosevelt Drive, and Jacob Riis and Lillian Wald Houses under construction. In the background are the great Metropolitan Life developments—Stuyvesant Town and Peter Cooper Village. Governor Smith Houses and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers' Hillman Houses to the south not shown are underway, and other public and quasi-public housing developments and incidental facilities are planned.

The Major Deegan Expressway as it approaches the Bronx arm of the Triborough Bridge with North Brothers Island, recently converted into a veterans housing project, in the East River. Rikers Island is just beyond. This island is used for the city penitentiary and for a city park nursery. The industrial water front, also shown in the background, is rapidly developing and the close relationship between industry and residence is clear. Major Deegan Expressway is being extended along the east side of the Harlem River to Westchester and will be one of the main mixed-traffic routes to the north.



urban setting. With this spur he is apparently willing to put up with incredible discomforts in order to live and work in crowds, and is not very insistent upon the improvements and modifications which will save his nerves and lengthen his span.

We are told by glib adherents of the so-called satellite town theory—that is, the theory that we should deliberately scrap all large cities and establish ideal villages of 50,000 inhabitants each in the nearby country—that the potential forces of urban disintegration are the rationalization of the home-building industry, military decentralization and industrial use of atomic energy. The answer to this gibberish is that rationalization of home building affects city, suburban and urban construction equally; that military decentralization has neither been officially recommended by the General Staff nor accepted by Congress and that the harnessing of atomic energy for civilian utilities and other peaceful uses is decades off, according to the scientists who are working on it.

Don't be fooled by radical scribblers and researchers who regard the rings around cities to a depth of forty or fifty miles as just happy fields for experiments in urban reconstruction. The extraordinary vitality of village, township and county governments, the determination of townships and counties bordering on big cities *not* to be absorbed or even overshadowed by the metropolis, their successful fight to maintain their own individuality and self-government, their stubborn and sometimes foolish reluctance to co-operate on even the most obviously needed regional improvements, their extraordinary ability to convert the newcomer to another political party and a totally different philosophy and way of life than he had before—all these are evidences of the strength of resistance to satellite town and regional planning theories.

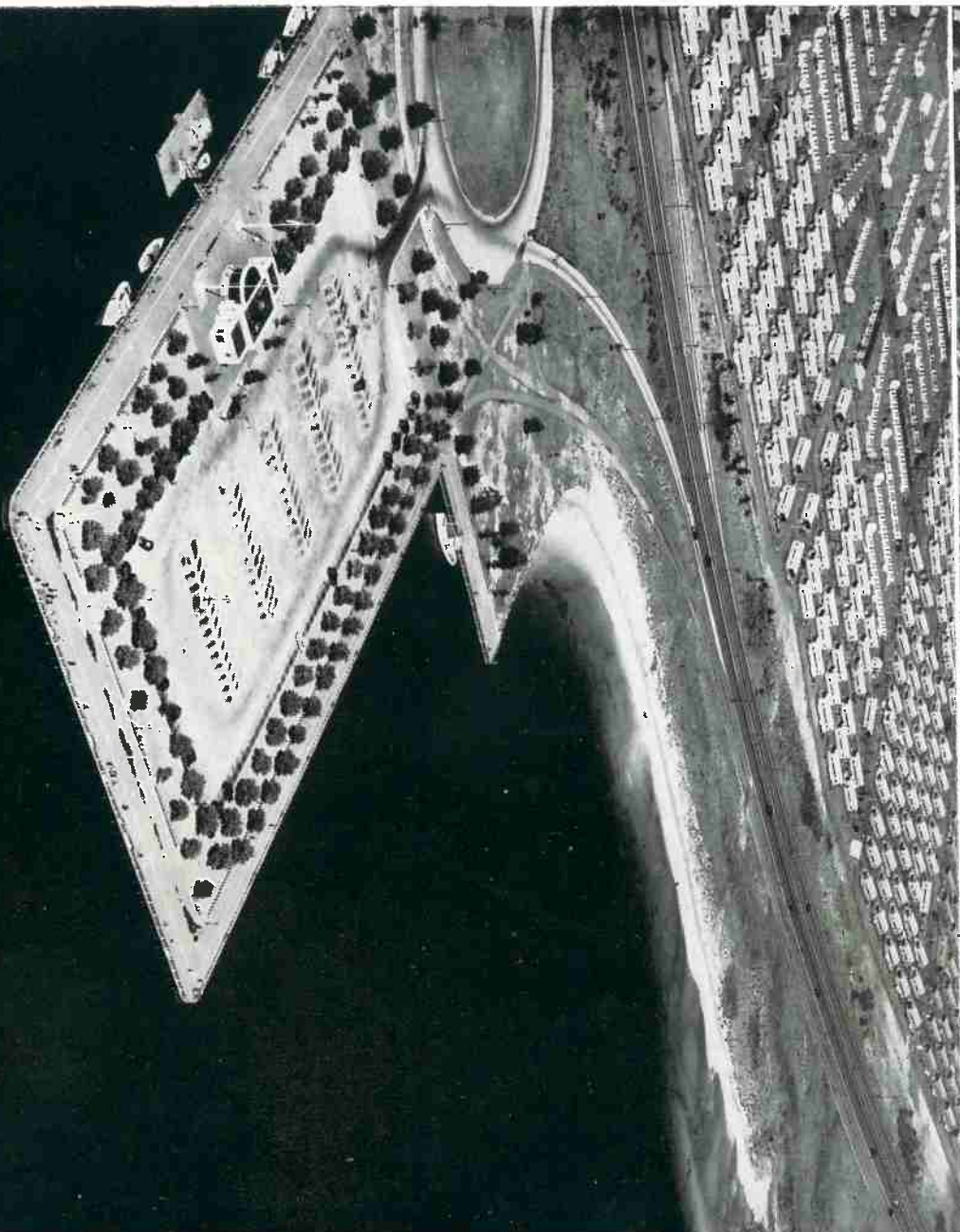
The enthusiastic believers in disintegration usually point also to what they call the superior "amenities" of the suburbs. There is, of course, no essential difference in the amenities, whatever they are, in Riverdale, four-fifths of Staten Island, half of Queens, and the southerly third of Brooklyn, all within

Bronx-Whitestone Bridge . . . In the background, to the right of the Bronx approach to the bridge is the Ferry Point Park addition (white line). The land under water and meadows are being reclaimed with hydraulic sand and sanitation fill. The entire area will finally be transformed into a bathing beach and year-round park with appropriate facilities. This will take the load off over-crowded Orchard Beach and serve the south and central Bronx.

Canarsie Pier on the north shore of Jamaica Bay, with the Belt Parkway and emergency veterans housing development in the rear. Almost the entire Bay and its islands have been turned over to the City Park Department and the shore front, both on Rockaway Beach to the south and the meadows on the north, are being rapidly converted to residence and recreation.

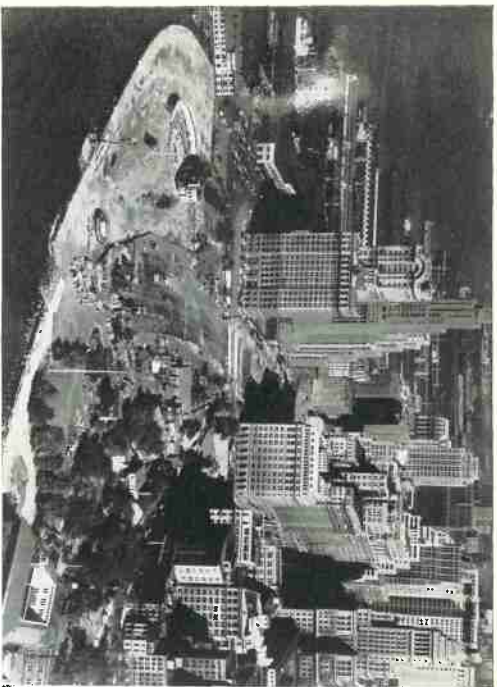


FAIRCHILD AERIAL SURVEY, NO. 1



FAIRCHILD AERIAL SURVEY, NO. 2
This aerial photograph shows the layout of the development, including the central open area and the surrounding roads and buildings.

FAIRCHILD AERIAL SURVEY, NO. 1



MANHATTAN PORTAL

**TUNNEL
UNDER RIVER**



**OPEN CUT
IN BATTERY
PARK**

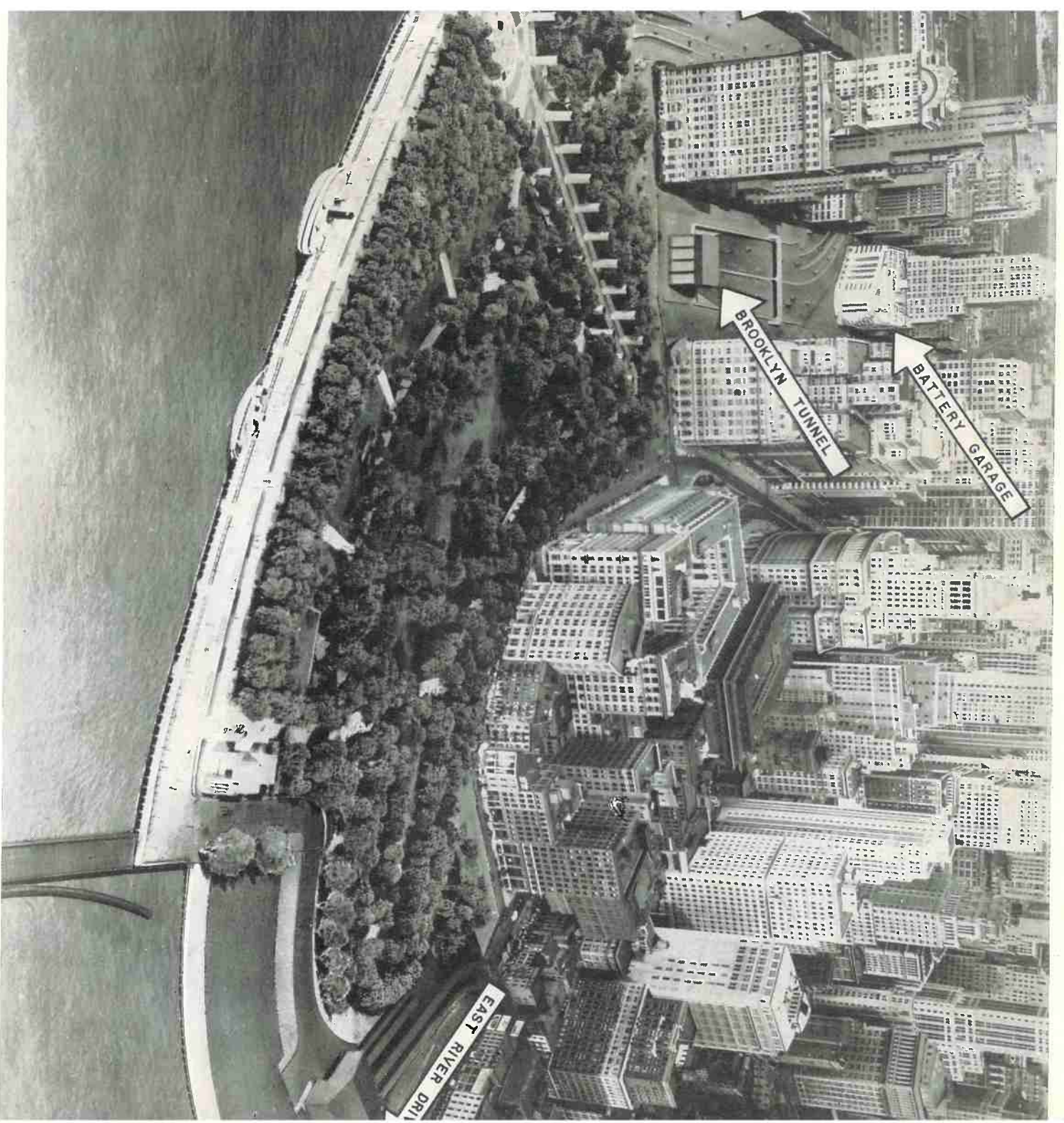


BROOKLYN PORTAL



TRIBOROUGH BRIDGE

**PROGRESS PHOTOGRAPHS
FALL 1948**



Model of the transformation of the Battery at the southerly tip of Manhattan Island. The Brooklyn Battery Tunnel and its approaches, new Battery Garage and park developments are shown. The entire project is two-thirds completed and will be opened in the Spring of 1950.

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New York City, and those to be found in the outlying counties of Nassau, Westchester, Western Suffolk, Rockland, and dozens of communities in New Jersey. Another set of amenities, however, flourishes in the heart of the city which does not exist at all in the suburbs, and some of them on the cultural, scientific, entertainment, mercantile and mentally stimulating side are not to be lightly dismissed. Some people prefer to commute to the big city for this stimulus; others choose to live in town, perhaps in somewhat cramped quarters, and to have a little pied-a-terre or stamping ground in the country for weekends and summer, or patronize our public beaches and state parks.

Those of us who build parkways and expressways or fuss with other avenues of transportation—what the scoffers call “escape routes?”—cater to all groups. We get them coming and going, night and day, and in all seasons and weathers. Not one out of a hundred of our patrons has the slightest interest in theories of decentralization, diffusion and disintegration. In an industrial and mechanistic age, they still follow the simple and more or less primitive conflicting urges to live close together, get out into the open, enjoy city advantages, raise families in pleasant, leisurely surroundings, have a little excitement, get recreation and rest, etc. Above all, they won't be pushed around and regrouped by smart aleck planners.

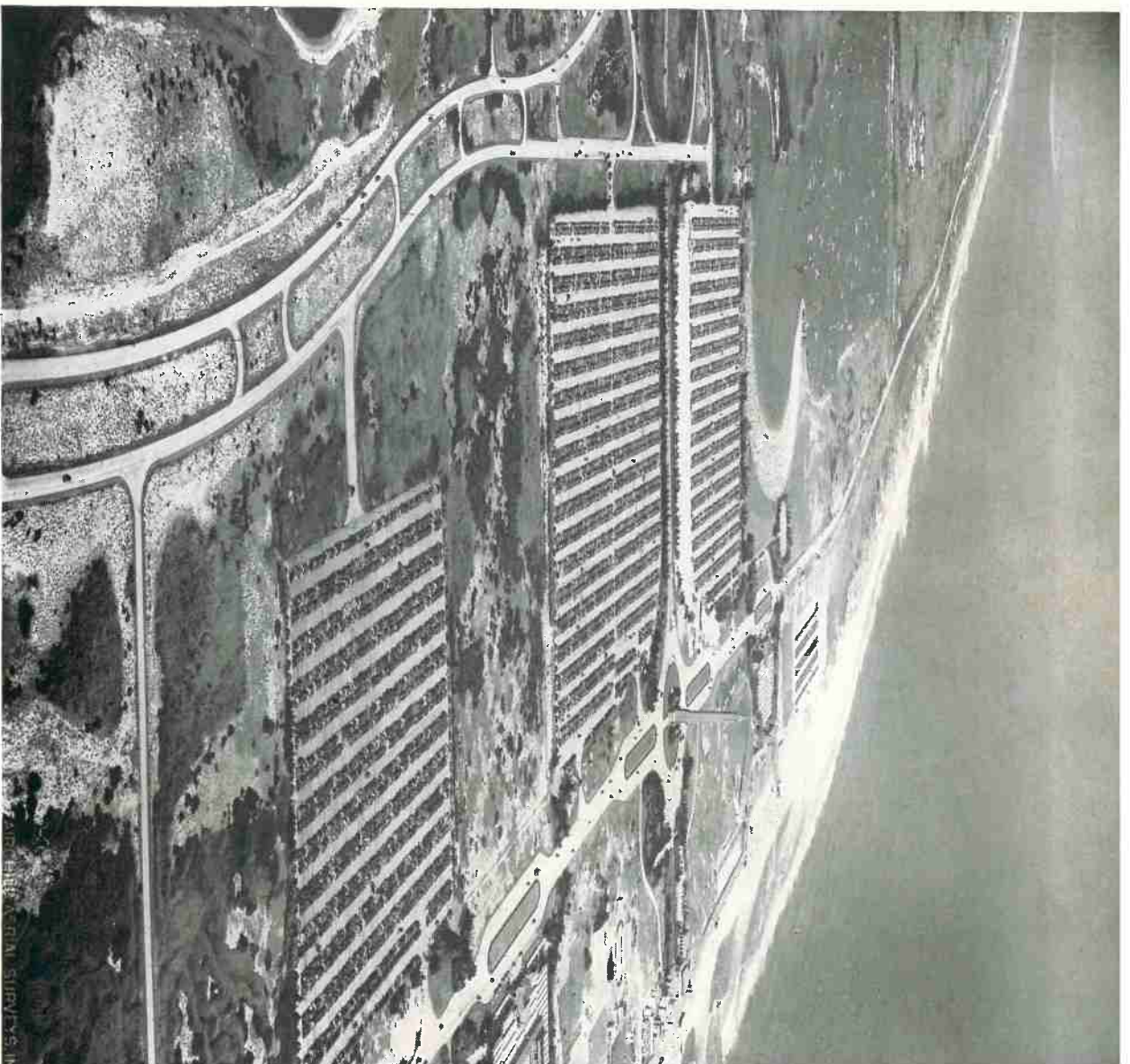
The grand plan axiom rests upon the wholly erroneous notion that our American voters have less confidence in elected than in appointed officials, and that they are ready to entrust their government to the Vestal Virgins of radical, mass planning, believing them to be all-wise and incorruptible. We are not likely to rebuild wholesale on the basis of any grand plan however cleverly devised and persuasively presented. We shall continue to improve piecemeal and by limited objectives, as we have so conspicuously and successfully in recent years. The growing list of achievements of our more progressive municipalities is impressive in every field—housing, health, recreation, travel and transportation, utilities, reclamation and disposal of waste. Much remains to be done, and therefore for our needs

in the next decade or more we have made careful detailed plans which are ready to be taken from the files and shelves as funds become available for building. Those who think we shall scrap these plans and substitute a revolutionary program of total reconstruction and dispersion in the hands of irresponsible radical planners are just a little bit mad.

The Green Belt axiom, last of the four big theories, proves on examination to have a very sinister side. It inevitably leads to a conflict between the planning and the taxing authorities of the city, between the revolutionaries who spin theories and the conservatives who have to keep the government running, maintain credit and avoid bankruptcy. The trouble is that the planners are busily labeling vast sections of built-up land, often constituting a third of the whole city area, as worthless for their existing purposes, while the city tax authorities continue to regard them as valuable, even raise their assessments and collect substantial taxes from the owners. The collapse of values which would result if if thousands of indignant owners insisted in certiorari actions that their assessments be rapidly reduced to zero, is worth pondering.

At this point the revolutionary planners let another cat out of the bag. They admit that it is part and parcel of their scheme to do away with heavy real estate taxes as the basis for municipal budgets. They offer no substitutes, and seem to be split into two factions, one which favors the single tax and another which goes for municipal personal income taxes, for increased handouts from assorted Santa Clauses at Washington and in state capitols and for supposititious profits from anticipated efficient government operation of utilities and other nationalized corporations.

Scratch a revolutionary planner and you find a left-wing socialist. If that's what you want, begin with the Green Belts. I am a park, parkway and playground enthusiast. I deplore the lack of open spaces well located in our older American cities. I know how difficult and expensive it is to supply them, but I would rather battle for them one by one and neighborhood by neighborhood, than subscribe to the crazy notion that splashing green water colors all over a city map will produce



Jones Beach State Park . . . Nationally famous suburban ocean beach resort built by the Long Island State Park Commission on a previously inaccessible and partly submerged sand reef. It is connected with the mainland by a parkway system which extends thirty miles into the City of New York. This park is host to 5,000,000 persons annually.

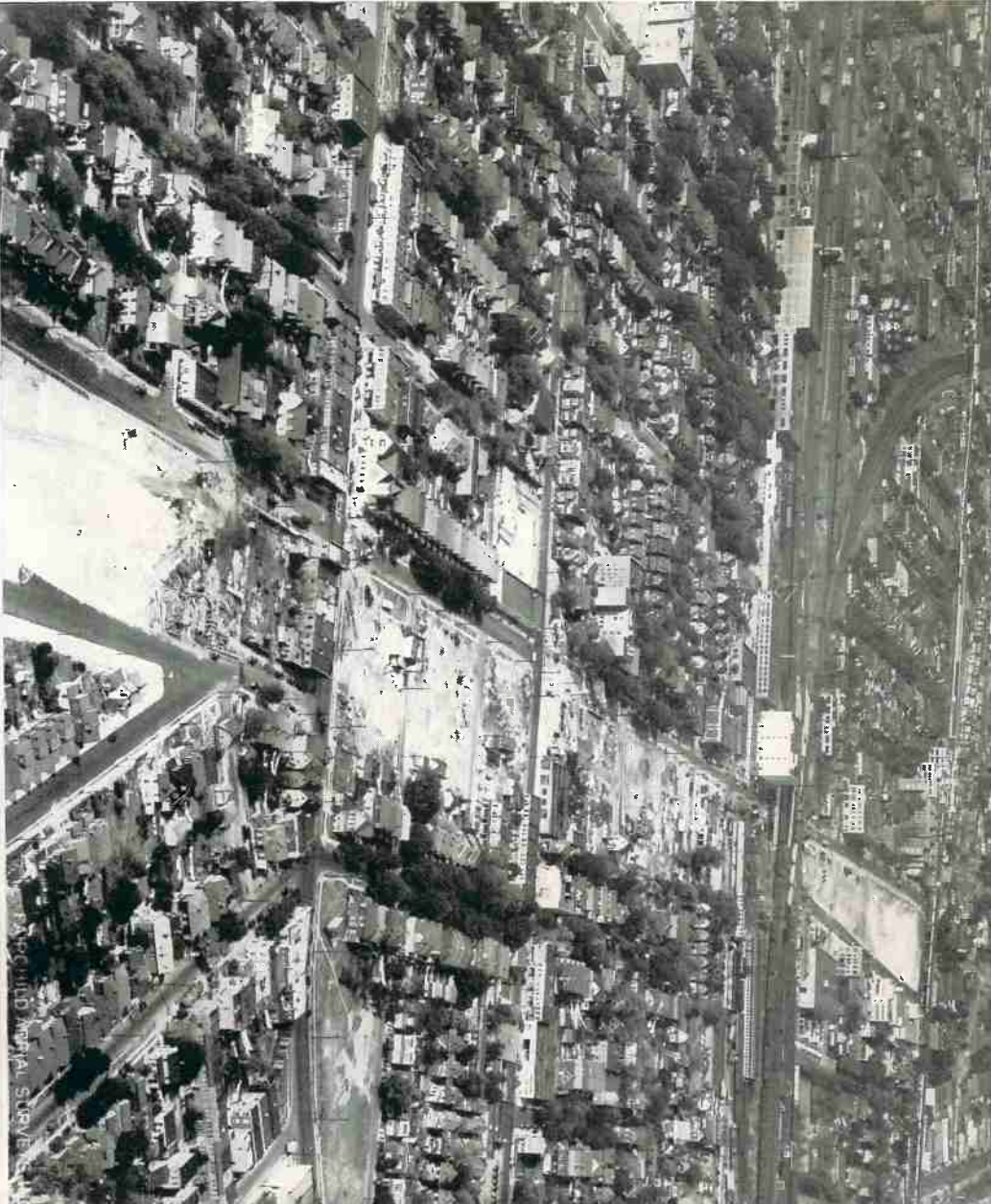
anything but public revision and contempt. Of course in a Communistic state the government owns everything and there is no need to condemn private property. Theoretically, this affords a perfect setting for Green Belts. Practically, I don't think it would make any great appeal to our people here.

When another golf club, farm or institution within the city is sold to developers or falls under the auctioneer's hammer, and public officials attempt to rescue a few acres for a future neighborhood park, are the Green Belt boys and their supporters in evidence? Not on your life. Instead, they denounce the subdivision as too minute and too dense in population and draw pictures of lovely, spacious two-story garden apartments hidden in luxurious landscaping and grammed with amenities. When the battle is waged over adequate recreation space incidental to new schools and public housing, and over higher zoning restrictions, are these people found in the ranks of the progressives? No, they are high up in their Ivory Towers preparing blue-prints for the millennium.

Curiously enough, among the advocates of dispersion, decentralization, grand planning and Green Belts, are a number of tough and shrewd business and professional men who, in their own daily work use every ingenuity the law allows to obtain zoning variations to put garages where they don't belong, build up small plots to the last allowable inch, seek to break down restrictions against nuisances in residential neighborhoods, pile up more and more traffic and congestion by tearing down perfectly sound buildings in order to substitute bigger ones, and plaster the City with billboards which blot out the landscape for advertising purposes. These same men in their more pious and less serious moments advocate complete rebuilding of cities on anti-urban and regional satellite lines. The explanation is too deep for me. But of one thing I am quite certain: The planning revolutionaries who carry the longest and most powerful telescopes and utter the most resounding and presumably inspired prophecies don't know what they see and what they are talking about.

Construction of Van Wyck Expressway to the International Airport, showing what a tough job it is to build one new artery in a city. Houses, stores and factories had to be moved and rebuilt. One underpass beneath two levels of the Long Island Railroad cost over three million dollars. The express lanes will be depressed and there will be service roads, landscaping and small parks and playgrounds. Wholesale demolition and rebuilding would paralyze and bankrupt a city. That is why city plans must be based on limited objectives and piecemeal progress.

Grading and bridges for extension of the Northern State Parkway in Nassau and Suffolk Counties. This extension will carry the parkway into Sunken Meadow State Park on Long Island Sound. This park will have to be considerably expanded since it is the first public beach and recreation area on the North Shore available to New York City people. On the 50 miles of Sound shore front in Nassau County there is not a single adequate beach open to the general public without restriction.



THE CHILDS HOSPITAL SURVEY



FAIRCHILD AERIAL SURVEYS IN

DRIVE IN COMFORT - GET AROUND IN AND OUT OF THE FIVE BOROU

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