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Top 10 Books - 2006

Posted by: David Gest
27 February, 2006 - 7:00am

The Fifth Annual Planetizen Top 10 Books List, 2006 Edition



From a national land use manifesto, to a "compact history" of sprawl, a tour-de-force on free parking, and innovate analyses of the intersection of urban planning and gender, transportation, civil rights and bohemian culture, the fifth annual Planetizen Top 10 Books List, 2006 Edition, has it all.

Covering a range of planning and development fields -- including transportation, land use, history, gender, housing, social justice, environmental design, race, and economic and community development -- this year's list represents the best literature planning had to offer in 2005.

The list was compiled by the Planetizen editorial staff based on a number of criteria, including editorial reviews, sales rankings, popularity, Planetizen reader nominations, number of references, recommendations from experts and the book's potential impact on the urban planning, development and design professions.

Planetizen welcomes review copies of books published in 2006 for consideration for next year's Top 10 Books List, or for longer book reviews in the Planetizen Features section.

Below are summaries for each selected title, in alphabetical order.

Planetizen welcomes reader comments on the 2006 Top 10 Books List. [Please add your comment here.](#)

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Honorable Mention

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Genesee/Finger Lakes Regional Planning Council
Feb 24, 2006 - New York



Cities in the Wilderness: A New Vision of Land Use in America

By Bruce Babbitt (Island Press/Shearwater Books, 200 pp.)

Endorsed by Bill Clinton and Frank Gehry, *Cities in the Wilderness: A New Vision of Land Use in America* outlines the national land use manifesto of Bruce Babbitt, former Governor of Arizona and Secretary of the Interior under Clinton. An expert in federal land use laws, Babbitt proposes a new direction for preservation of natural and cultural landscapes in the United States. Rather than leave responsibility with local municipalities and their piecemeal solutions to problems of sprawl, he argues that the federal government must lead the way. "Why demonize land developers when the real problem is the pervasive failure of state and local governments to control sprawl through meaningful land use regulations?" writes Babbitt. "The problem lies within us and our political institutions." Through creative policy, the federal government can (and has, in some cases) protect endangered species, the integrity of interstate rivers, coastlines, forests, and other regions with important scenic, ecological, or historic value.

Imbued with a patriotic, yet not overbearing, sense of America's history of federal land use planning and natural resource protection, *Cities in the Wilderness* is a fast read, including first-person accounts and some humorous anecdotes of Babbitt's politically colored time in office. For example, Babbitt didn't anticipate the potential political fallout resulting from designating a small bird, the California Gnatcatcher, as endangered. Yet by "placing the gnatcatcher on the endangered species list, we had, by operation of law, dropped a blanket development moratorium on much of the remaining developable land in the fastest-growing real estate market in California." The Endangered Species Act has proved to be one of the most effective federal land use regulators, even though it was not intended as such; Babbitt sees farming policies, clean water regulation, and other federally-mandated environmental laws as key to implementing a sustainable land use program for the U.S. Case studies of the Florida Everglades, Midwest farmland preservation, and pollution in and around the Chesapeake Bay enliven this innovative work.

[Buy this book](#)



The City: A Global History

By Joel Kotkin (Modern Library Chronicles, 218 pp.)

A history of all the major cities of the world, from

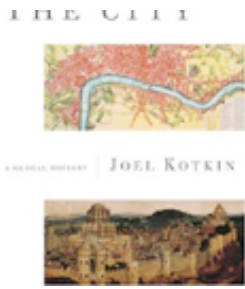
Senior Environmental Planner

Feb 24, 2006 - California

Planners/Engineers I/II

North Central TX Council of Govts

Feb 24, 2006 - Texas



Jericho to Los Angeles, in 200 pages? The work of Joel Kotkin, renowned author and frequent columnist on urban issues, is certainly ambitious and, for the most part, it works. Inevitably, covering so much ground in so little space spreads some content thin, but this fast read succeeds most with Kotkin as storyteller, flying through time and around the world to weave so many disparate histories into one urban tapestry. Kotkin theorizes that there has been a universality of urban experience since the beginning of civilization, primarily due to three critical functions performed by cities: the creation of sacred space, provision of basic security, and hosting of commercial marketplaces. When one or more of these functions are absent, problems can arise. Indeed, "even affluent cities without moral cohesion or a sense of civic identity are doomed to decadence and decline."

Grandiosity aside, by taking what could be called an "ancient" approach to urban studies, Kotkin reminds readers of our collective urban roots. In the 21st century, as cities become increasingly fragmented due to their immense size and the rise of tele-communities, it's important to remember the fundamental elements that caused them to come into being in the first place. As in Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone*, *The City* suggests a call for urban citizens to reevaluate their connection to local communities. In the end, Kotkin argues, urban areas "must be held together by a consciousness that unites their people in a shared identity."

Beyond its theories, *The City* provides a handy resource for those looking for an introduction to the history of cities. Chapters on ancient cities, classical cities in Europe, "The Oriental Epoch", the industrial city, and the modern city include pocket histories of places from Mesopotamia, to Alexandria, Baghdad, Shanghai, and New York. Complete with a chronology of urban history and a suggested reading list, the book is a useful reference to the evolution, and vital organs, of cities.

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City of American Dreams: A History of Home Ownership and Housing Reform in Chicago, 1871-1919

By Margaret Garb (University of Chicago Press, 261 pp.)

What is the American dream? Wikipedia will tell you that "the American Dream is the faith held by many in the United States of America that through hard work, courage, and determination one can achieve financial prosperity." But for many Americans and historians, this dream has boiled down to one

concrete measure: home ownership. *City of American Dreams: A History of Home Ownership and Housing Reform in Chicago, 1871-1919*, written by Margaret Garb, professor of history at Washington University in St. Louis, is ostensibly about home ownership in turn-of-the-century Chicago, but its thesis easily applies to the U.S. as a whole. In fact, in her Epilogue, Garb's description of a well-known 1914 report on housing conditions obviously parallels her own wide-ranging work, as "an explicit critique of the free market in residential real estate and of the assumption that with equal opportunity all individuals could achieve the American dream of an owner-occupied house."

Contrary to pundits who claim that home ownership is a market-driven, innate desire of the American public, Garb argues that "[t]he American celebration of a particular form of property -- the single-family house set on a tidy yard -- was neither natural nor inevitable." She supports her claim on the sturdy footing of history, utilizing a well-researched (and occasionally dense) case study of the emergence of home ownership in Chicago. The phenomenon had its Chicagoan roots, Garb argues, in immigrant working classes, who could use their home for income, by renting to boarders or taking out multiple loans, and food, through vegetable gardens. Gradually, the middle class adopted home ownership as an ideal associated with personal identity, increased health, and privacy, not to mention hefty profits from future sales. As home prices increased, members of the working class who depended on home ownership found themselves left out in a cold rental market not intensely supported by government housing subsidies, which focused on the middle class. As a whole, *City of American Dreams* successfully illuminates a critical window of planning history, with tacit policy implications relevant to today's federal, state, and municipal governments.

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Designing Small Parks: A Manual for Addressing Social and Ecological Concerns

By Ann Forsyth and Laura R. Musacchio (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 205 pp.)

As global population increases and cities and suburbs rise in density, development paves over more and more of the natural landscape, leaving humans with fewer options for recreation and exercise, and the rest of local ecosystems with greatly reduced habitat quality. In *Designing Small Parks: A Manual for Addressing Social and Ecological Concerns*, noted urbanist and author Ann Forsyth and landscape architect Laura Musacchio, both affiliated with the

Metropolitan Design Center at the University of Minnesota, present an elegantly structured, highly practical, accessible, and intensely researched handbook for professionals and concerned citizens alike to improve small parks in their neighborhoods for the betterment of human, animal, and plant communities.

More than "a broader palette of design options" for six-acre or smaller parks, *Designing Small Parks* assembles a surprising amount of information that can be read effectively at multiple levels: from a quick review of the scores of diagrams, photographs, and maps, design development guidelines, and design development issues in brief (actually intended for distribution at public meetings) to an in-depth review of the 12 chapters, including "fine print facts" culled from hundreds of articles and books, a substantial glossary of key terms, and comprehensive case studies including, for example, utilization of stormwater management systems in a new suburban park and reuse of a vacant lot in a downtown setting. Chapter topics include connections and edges between parks and urban surroundings, incorporation (not subjugation) of natural landscape features into park design, plant and wildlife concerns, park management, and public involvement in the design process. Although color photographs and diagrams would have enlivened the text, *Designing Small Parks* successfully explains the need to improve small park design and effectively illustrates the steps needed to develop neighborhood character while enhancing the greater ecological system.

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Gender And Planning: A Reader

Edited by Susan S. Fainstein and Lisa J. Servon
(Rutgers University Press, 313 pp.)

"'A woman's place is in the home' has been one of the most important principles of architectural design and urban planning in the United States for the last century." So wrote Dolores Hayden in her 1981 essay, "What Would a Nonsexist City Be Like?", a chapter in *Gender and Planning: A Reader*. The book assembles a collection of provocative essays written on gender and planning over the past 30 years, adding an original introduction that concisely outlines an area of planning discourse not often taught in traditional schools. Indeed, the reader is intended for an academic setting -- according to co-editors Susan Fainstein and Lisa Servon, planning professors at Columbia and New School University, respectively, it's the book "we wished we had when we taught gender-focused courses." Although at times quite dense and theoretical, especially in the Planning

Theory section, many of the chapters are accessible to a wider audience. Specifically, *Gender and Planning* could be useful to professionals who may have missed gender-related topics in their own planning education, and it includes thoughtful dialogue on the history of feminism, planning, housing movements, and architecture and design.

To the editors, gender is not just about women; it's about societal roles and relationships, and how different groups -- including men, women, and gays, for example -- have varying levels of power and access to resources over time. This temporal, dynamic way of thinking about gender can help planners question their standard practices by acknowledging that cities are not designed simply for humans universally, but for a highly diverse group in terms of race, ethnicity, and class, in addition to gender. How would our lives be improved if planners took gender into account? "People would feel safer on the streets. Homes would function better for families and in relation to communities. Access to services would be improved. All individuals would be entitled to realize their capabilities." With chapters covering public and private space, housing, economic development, and transportation, and topics ranging from microenterprise programs to public transit to sexuality, *Gender and Planning* may be an eye-opening read for many of today's planners.

Buy this book



The High Cost of Free Parking

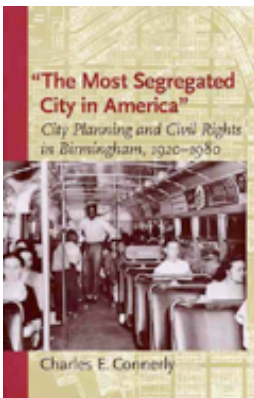
By Donald C. Shoup (Planners Press, 734 pp.)

The hands-down favorite for Top Books status, *The High Cost of Free Parking*, despite its epic length, undoubtedly deserves high praise. Don Shoup, FAICP, an urban planning professor at UCLA, presents a tour de force on free parking, a dubious fact of city life planners have taken for granted for years, and which Shoup has studied for decades. We all know that cars, roads, and traffic have a huge impact on the urban landscape and the environment, yet few realize how critical parking can be. More than simply a spatial element of urban areas -- according to Shoup, parking is the single biggest land use in cities -- well-planned, cost-efficient parking schemes can serve vital economic development needs while decreasing congestion and lessening pollution on city streets. While drivers save time and energy by limiting their cruising-for-parking efforts (the more parking costs, the more frequently spaces empty out), the revenue generated from on-street parking can generate an elegantly simple income model for neighborhoods and commercial districts alike.

Shoup considered naming his engaging, entertaining book -- yes, an entertaining parking policy tome -- *Aparkalypse Now* or *Parkageddon*, and it's easy to see why. Not only does free parking explain "extreme automobile dependence, rapid urban sprawl, and extravagant energy use", skewing "travel choices toward cars and away from public transit, cycling, and walking", it "debases urban design, damages the economy, and degrades the environment."

Essentially, there's no such thing as free parking: the policy actually ensures that the cost of parking is hidden everywhere else, meaning that everyone -- including those who don't even drive -- pays for parking when they go to a restaurant, shop at a store, or buy a house. Shoup estimates that in 2002 alone, cities paid between \$127 and \$374 billion for off-street parking subsidies. What to do? By charging fair-market prices for curb parking, returning the resulting revenue to neighborhoods to pay for public improvements (in the form of innovative Parking Benefit Districts), and removing requirements for off-street parking, cities can quash the hidden yet wide-ranging problems caused by providing free parking.

[Buy this book](#)



"The Most Segregated City In America": City Planning And Civil Rights In Birmingham, 1920-1980

By Charles E. Connerly (University of Virginia Press, 360 pp.)

"In Birmingham, you would be living in a community where the white man's long-lived tyranny had cowed your people, led them to abandon hope, and developed in them a false sense of inferiority...you would be living, in fact, in the most segregated city in America." Martin Luther King Jr.'s insightful words resonate throughout *"The Most Segregated City in America": City Planning and Civil Rights in Birmingham, 1920-1980*, written by Charles Connerly, professor of urban and regional planning at Florida State University. "At its roots," writes Connerly, "city planning is about controlling the land -- most directly about what uses the land is put to -- but also, at least indirectly, about who gets to live on the land and where." Thus begins a chronicle of tangible urban planning policies, mostly spurred by racism, that had a direct impact on the civil rights of blacks in Birmingham throughout much of the 20th century -- policies often replicated across the country with equally detrimental effects to blacks' quality of life.

Specifically, officially segregationist planning policies began in Birmingham in 1920, when the first city plan and zoning ordinance institutionalized racial zoning,

or zoning that prevented minorities from living in certain parts of the city. Into the 40s, 50s, and 60s, more exclusionary zoning, highway construction, urban renewal, and public housing developments further segregated the city and limited opportunities for blacks. Many planners are familiar with the deficiencies of these approaches, yet *"The Most Segregated City in America"* provides a fascinating case study detailing how one city both imposed and reacted to the policies on the whole, with blacks striving to fight them in the context of the civil rights movement. Grassroots organizations like the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights and other black civic leagues often took planning issues into their own hands in reaction to the white-dominated city planning institutions. Although the election of the first black mayor of Birmingham in 1979 clearly marked the end of an era, civil rights planning struggles continue to this day, as policies like HUD's HOPE VI program echo the dislocation forced on blacks by urban renewal.

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Neo-Bohemia: Art and Commerce in the Postindustrial City

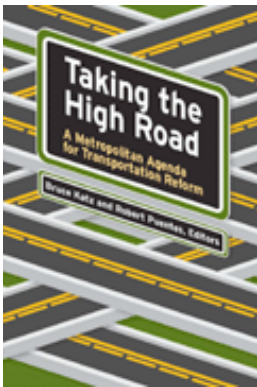
By Richard Lloyd (Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 295 pp.)

Richard Florida's *The Rise of the Creative Class* brought professional creativity -- often associated with a "bohemian" lifestyle -- to the forefront of cities' struggles to remain competitive in a global economy. While Florida considers the countercultural essence of bohemia to be obsolete, Richard Lloyd, a sociologist at Vanderbilt University, argues that although the new bohemia that has developed around the turn of the 20th century "plays a necessarily novel role in enhancing the interests of postindustrial capitalist enterprises, especially property speculation of various sorts, entertainment provision, and new media production," the creative culture does retain an identity respectful of its mostly European roots. In *Neo-Bohemia: Art and Commerce in the Postindustrial City*, Lloyd uses Chicago's Wicker Park -- which emerged nationally as a funky, hip, creative enclave in the mid-90s -- as a case study for the complexity of culture and innovation in today's increasingly commercialized society.

Relying on over a decade of study and Lloyd's detailed field notes, the book departs from Florida's work in that it connects historical notions of bohemia to modern artistic districts in American cities -- sometimes, unfortunately, engaging a theoretical style that may be too "jargony" for a wider audience. Lloyd asserts that neo-bohemians must engage in a

balancing act between countercultural activities and more lucrative mainstream enterprising, although "the traditional do-it-yourself ethos of bohemia fits in well with the entrepreneurial imperatives of neoliberal capitalism." Indeed, the "bohemian ethic" may constitute a modern version of the Protestant ethic, with similar lessons for economic success. Good news for the underemployed musician living in an increasingly ubiquitous downtown loft? Well, if all else fails, at least now he can make ends meet at the local Starbucks.

Buy this book



Taking the High Road: A Metropolitan Agenda for Transportation Reform

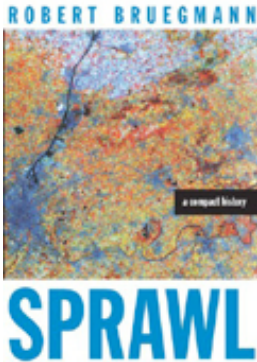
Edited by Bruce Katz and Robert Puentes (Brookings Institution Press, 331 pp.)

In *Taking the High Road: A Metropolitan Agenda for Transportation Reform*, Brookings Institution researchers Bruce Katz and Robert Puentes of the Metropolitan Policy Program have assembled an expert review of the major transportation planning issues in 21st century America. The editors begin by citing late Senator Patrick Moynihan's appraisal of national highway expansion as the federal government's "hidden urban policy", which has cost billions of dollars and dramatically altered the American landscape. Such far-reaching highway policies, in addition to alternative transportation systems like public bus and rail transit, need to be considered seriously by the public, and Brookings hopes that this collection of essays, which emerged from a series of policy papers, will spark that dialogue. Much of the book's content responds to provisions of the landmark Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA, passed in 1991) and the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21, 1998), but it branches out to incorporate a variety of topics.

Although dry in spells, *Taking the High Road* succeeds in questioning assumptions made about transportation policies and funding, making some useful recommendations for reform. Most importantly, instead of relying too much on a top-down, national approach, the government should give more planning and spending power to regions and metropolitan areas, which currently only have sway over about 10% of transportation funding. Innovation, in the form of tolls and congestion pricing, and accountability, in the form of performance standards, would further enhance a more locally-based system of transportation administration. Later chapters detail transportation financing, especially through the gas tax, and how

these revenues are allocated spatially; problems of transit access for working families and the elderly; the highway-public transit balance, or lack thereof, in federal project funding; and the protection of transportation networks in the face of terrorism. Geared principally toward decision-makers at all levels of transportation policy and administration, *Taking the High Road* presents a useful introduction to transit issues for planners in all areas.

Buy this book



Sprawl: A Compact History

By Robert Bruegmann (University of Chicago Press, 301 pp.)

Robert Bruegmann's cleverly titled *Sprawl: A Compact History* is not just another book about sprawl. In fact, critics have called Bruegmann, professor of art history, architecture, and urban planning at the University of Illinois at Chicago, "pro-sprawl", due to the results of his detailed historical analysis and present-day observations, which indicate that urban sprawl is nothing new, and may even be part of the inevitable, natural evolution of growing cities. Yet with *Sprawl*, Bruegmann has not only taken an unusual, contrarian view of the hottest topic in planning and development; his real innovation stems from an iconoclastic presentation of the history of urban expansion and an evaluation of arguments against so-called sprawl. The product is an accessible, concisely written work that asks planners and concerned citizens to suspend belief in conventional anti-sprawl fervor and consider evidence pointing to a more complex, and not necessarily negative, understanding of the phenomenon. The thoughtfully-argued thesis even echoes Jane Jacob's questioning of the then-dominant planning philosophy of urban renewal in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*.

Filled with illustrative graphs, charts, and photographs, *Sprawl* questions the "entire body of ideas and assumptions" that has accumulated around sprawl. First off, despite the recent press, sprawl is far from new, or American: even in ancient Roman times, urban expansion took the form of *suburbium*, or that which was literally below or outside the city walls. More profoundly, Bruegmann considers sprawl as a process, as well as a demographic and economic condition not tied solely to land use or physical planning issues. For example, suburbs with low population density, reliable infrastructure, good supermarkets, and a predominantly middle-class cohort are often labeled sprawl, yet what makes a gentrified Lower East Side, which shares many of the same characteristics, from being called the same?

Bruegmann asserts that suburban expansion is "a logical and perhaps even predictable result of increasing wealth and the democratization of society" -- meaning that "the average family in the affluent world today has more choices available to it than a similar family in any other society or era in history." Although it treads lightly around issues of environmental sustainability and aesthetics, *Sprawl: A Compact History* successfully attacks the prevailing wisdom on sprawl, which influences so much of urban planning today, making this book a must-read for those who care about the fate of cities worldwide.

[Buy this book](#)

Honorable Mention

- [Cities of the World: A History In Maps](#)
By Peter Whitfield
- [Silver Cities : Photographing American Urbanization, 1839-1939](#)
By Peter Bacon Hales

Planetizen welcomes reader comments on the 2006 Top 10 Books List. [Please add your comment here.](#)

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