Introduction

City Planning, Businessmen, and Scholars

In the 1890s, residents of Pacific Coast cities—Seattle, Portland, Oakland, San Francisco, and Los Angeles in particular—mounted numerous significant, but disjointed, improvement efforts. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, the Progressive Era, their efforts coalesced into city planning movements. Pacific Coast urbanites considered adopting what they thought were comprehensive city plans encompassing harbor improvements, new street and transportation facilities, civic centers, and parks and boulevards. While many groups enhanced the planning movements, businessmen were usually the leaders and major supporters of planning.

Although city planning had diverse roots, much of it originated with businessmen because they viewed planning as a means to shape their urban environments both economically and socially. Businessmen remained strong supporters of the city planning efforts as the planning movements unfolded. Working through both established political channels and newly formed bodies outside of those channels, they played important roles in the planning
movements as they matured. As the planning campaigns evolved, businessmen found themselves joined and opposed by others—professionals (especially architects, engineers, and lawyers), politicians, and workers. Businessmen worked for their goals in political arenas. Politics lay at the heart of planning; the proposed city plans were accepted or rejected in citywide elections in which, to be successful, businessmen had to convince others to vote with them.

In Pacific Coast cities, the politics of planning was pluralistic, but pluralistic only within certain limits. That is, no single group completely dominated the political processes involving city planning, but neither did everyone have equal access to those processes. Business organizations played the largest roles; but other bodies—groups of architects and engineers, labor organizations, and neighborhood improvement associations—were also significant. On the other hand, some people had almost no voice in how city planning developed. Once employed—sometimes engaged by the city governments, but often hired directly by the business groups—city planners initially drafted their plans with little input from others. Preliminary versions of the plans were then discussed with the public, and some revisions were made. But how were the plans discussed? Usually, representatives of various business, professional, neighborhood, and labor groups met with the planners to review details of the plans and suggest changes. Reflecting the organizational thrust of much of twentieth-century American life, only people belonging to recognized associations usually had access to the planners. Members of ethnic minorities and unorganized workers were generally excluded from the discussions. Only when it came time to vote could such people express their opinions in a meaningful way, and then only if they were registered voters.

Businessmen of nearly all sorts were active at one time or another in the planning movements. Real estate men, bankers, newspaper men, and industrialists played roles in the planning campaigns. Merchants were, however, of most significance and provided much of the backbone for the city planning movements—except in Los Angeles where real estate developers were particularly significant. Their importance should be expected, for Pacific Coast cities developed mainly as commercial centers, and merchants saw in city planning—both in the general idea of planning and in the specific improvements they imagined would result from planning—a way to elevate their metropolises above rival cities.
For merchants, planning seemed to promise both progress for their cities and profits for their purses. This study thus differs in emphasis from those that have stressed the importance of real estate interests, housing reformers, and professional landscape architects as the catalysts of changes in city planning. To be sure, they were all significant. In Pacific Coast cities, however, merchants were of more central importance.\(^3\)

That businessmen were involved in city planning should not be surprising. Some businessmen have often worked on their own or with government officials in twentieth-century planning efforts when they have perceived the advantages of planning. Many businessmen were active participants in the development of federal and state regulation of the American economy in the Progressive Era. Businessmen remained active in various planning efforts during the 1920s and were deeply involved in New Deal activities during the 1930s. As some accepted conservative Keynesian economic ideas in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, business leaders continued their engagement in planning in the postwar years. Far from being simply staunch individualists, many businessmen looked to planning as one way to try to stabilize their economic environments.\(^4\)

**Businessmen, City Growth, and City Planning**

Pacific Coast cities were quickly growing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; and with their development came both opportunities and problems for their residents, especially their business leaders. From small villages in the mid-nineteenth century, the Pacific Coast centers emerged only one or two generations later as booming metropolises. With diverse populations dispersed over large areas, the rapid growth of the cities challenged attempts by business leaders to maintain their influence over them. At the same time, even as they became part of America's national urban network, the cities remained tied to Pacific Coast developments. Even as they won national recognition for
themselves as centers more substantial than mining towns and lumber camps, the cities came into increasing conflict with each other for economic control over the Pacific Coast—a rivalry that disturbed established relations among the region’s merchants, financiers, and industrialists. It was in that context of economic and social flux that businessmen turned to city planning. Although the resulting plans were the products of what contemporary Americans called the “city beautiful” movement, they were more than attempts to beautify the cities. They were designed to solve problems and take advantage of opportunities that the businessmen thought their cities faced.

First and foremost, businessmen—especially merchants, but also bankers and industrialists—sought to heighten the economic power and reputations of their cities, and thus their own individual economic positions. For them city planning was both a defensive and offensive weapon: a means to defend their cities’ positions in the intercity contests that were developing on the Pacific Coast, while also extending their economic reach. Trade, industry, people, and capital would migrate to properly planned cities, business leaders believed. City planning was in their minds a tool by which they might win the urban sweepstakes of the Pacific Coast. Merchants were particularly concerned about the opening of the Panama Canal. The imminent completion of the canal heightened an already well-developed sense of urban rivalry on the Pacific Coast, as merchants in each city hoped to reap what they thought would be untold benefits from the canal, at the expense of their neighbors.

More generally, through the civic improvements that they anticipated would flow from planning, businessmen sought to gain national recognition for their cities. They wanted them to be accepted fully as parts of America’s urban network. Civic pride was a large part of the planning efforts. Business leaders in Oakland caught well that feeling when they urged the passage of a bond issue as a way of signaling to the “outside world” that their metropolis had “taken up her march on the high road of progress” and was about to assume “her proper place among cities.” Civic pride could, businessmen thought, have practical benefits. Beautiful and well-planned metropolises would attract new settlers, businesses, and capital. Beauty and economic growth would develop hand in hand.
Social objectives mixed with the economic goals. Through planning, business leaders tried to maintain and increase their social and cultural influence in their cities. Businessmen saw planning, with its espousal of civic pride and civic patriotism, as a potent means by which to buttress their social as well as their economic power. A lessening of social conflict and the uniting of dispersed neighborhoods were important agendas for those involved in city planning. Socially united cities, business leaders believed, would progress more rapidly than those rent by schisms. Thus, a San Francisco merchant lamented in 1909 that his city did "not display the same spirit of unity on local public questions" as did Seattle and blamed the "faction-torn" condition of his city for its lack of progress relative to that of its northern rival.\textsuperscript{6}

Both optimism and pessimism permeated the thoughts of the businessmen involved in planning: they were two sides of the same coin. Business leaders in all of the Pacific Coast cities were optimistic about the future of their metropolises, if proper actions were taken. They were pessimistic, however, in believing that if such actions were not taken (and not taken quickly), their cities would fall behind their Pacific Coast rivals and metropolises across the nation to become merely second- or third-rate centers. Similarly, businessmen saw bright, harmonious futures for their cities, if only other groups could be persuaded to follow their lead in city planning.

**Scholars and City Planning**

During the past generation, historians have reevaluated progressivism. Beginning with studies in the 1950s and 1960s, historians increasingly have stressed the complexity of the progressive movement, seeing it as an attempt to reorder American life in the wake of the social and economic disruptions resulting from industrialization, the rise of big business, and the development of large cities.\textsuperscript{7} City planning campaigns were often associated with progressivism on the Pacific Coast. Many of the general goals of the progressives, especially the desire to reestablish a sense of order and morality in America, were shared by the businessmen en-
gaged in planning efforts. Moreover, many of the businessmen and business organizations involved in planning were active in the progressive movements in their cities.

An interpretation known as the organizational synthesis, first put forward in the 1970s, has helped conceptualize late nineteenth and early twentieth century American history in terms of the growing organization of life and thought. That approach emphasizes the spread of bureaucratic organizations, the growth of professions, and a heightened awareness of a need for order and efficiency as the themes best explaining the course of American history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Organizations had, of course, existed earlier; but their scale and scope increased dramatically after about 1850. Criticism of the organizational synthesis developed in the mid-1980s. Some scholars claimed that its description of modern America embodied "an unmistakable aura of inevitability, a sense that in its broad outlines at least, what has happened had to happen." The approach, its critics asserted, did not allow enough room in history to protest movements and thus "consigns the experiences of vast segments of society to the periphery of historical analysis and, in the end, leaves incomplete our view of modern America."  

The Pacific Coast city planning experience suggests that, its critics notwithstanding, the organizational synthesis approach offers a fruitful way to think about the evolution of late nineteenth and early twentieth century America. It was primarily through the work of their organizations, usually voluntary associations, that businessmen and others worked for and against city planning. Chambers of commerce, merchant bodies, architectural and engineering associations, neighborhood improvement groups, and labor organizations provided the vehicles through which planning advocates and opponents played out their ideas. Moreover, concerns about making urban life more efficient, more orderly, and more subject to the desires of planning professionals ran through the city planning movements.

The development of large cities constituted a major aspect of the modernization of the United States, and how Americans sought to shape their urban environments through planning has been a topic under investigation by a generation of historians. Writing in the 1960s, scholars prepared encyclopedic accounts of the history of city planning in America. Their works pointed the way for
more detailed research on the subject. Less wide-ranging studies, written primarily in the 1970s, examined the origins of the city planning movement. Those works showed that early city planning arose from diverse sources, ranging from municipal art movements to the efforts of engineers to design new urban sewer systems. They reached less agreement, however, about the extent to which the city beautiful movement came to grips with the social and economic difficulties urbanites faced.

In the 1980s, scholars investigated more fully the questions of causation in the development of city planning, the political conflicts surrounding the unfolding of planning campaigns, and the results of the planning efforts. Historians and social scientists renewed their interest in the history of city planning, and approached the topic from different points of view. A growing concern over the perceived failures of American cities in particular led scholars to reexamine the origins and growth of the nation's city planning movement.

Much of the interest initially originated with those who came to the topic from a Marxist or New-Left approach, deeply disillusioned with American society, politics, and institutions. Christine Boyer found that in the first two decades of the twentieth century planning was directed at imposing social discipline upon an unruly urban populace and providing city services needed for private commercial and industrial growth. In the same vein, Richard Fogelson saw in planning the unfolding of two contradictions: “the contradiction between the social character of land and its private ownership and control” and “a contradiction between the need to socialize the control of urban space . . . and the danger of truly socializing, that is, democratizing, the control of urban land.” Fogelson found in early twentieth century planning “an attempt to create social and moral cohesiveness in a heterogeneous urban society in which face-to-face methods of social control had proven unworkable.”

One need not share Boyer’s and Fogelson’s orientation to agree that some of the planning movement was elitist in leadership and that it sought to impose the values of middle-class businessmen and professionals upon other segments of society. Their analysis is, however, incomplete. It obscures much of the complexity of the planning movement, and particularly why it was only partially successful. Businessmen were far from unified in
their approaches to planning. They came into conflict with other groups of businessmen and with other professionals much more frequently than Boyer and Fogelson suggest, and those divisions greatly weakened planning efforts.

Less ideologically motivated have been the recent works of other scholars. In her examination of how Chicago, Boston, and Baltimore rebuilt after being destroyed by catastrophic fires, Christine Rosen has shown that, by eliminating old structures, natural disasters can clear the way for urban redevelopment. She has also demonstrated, however, that disasters may not remove all of the limitations to redevelopment, for political barriers may remain. Rosen's study is particularly compelling for suggesting a way of viewing events in San Francisco after that city's earthquake and fire in 1906.\textsuperscript{16} Stanley Schultz has surveyed improvement and planning efforts in the nineteenth century, focusing on the work of engineers to devise sewer and water systems. Here originated, Schultz has argued, the source of city planning efforts in the twentieth century. Looking briefly at the city beautiful movement, Schultz has found in it far more "than mere aesthetics." Like the progressive movement—of which, according to Schultz, it was a part—the city beautiful movement sought to "restore order to a chaotic society, to render more efficient the functioning of all human endeavors, and above all, to reinstate morality as the core of human behavior."\textsuperscript{17}

The City Beautiful Movement by historian William Wilson offers the most thorough examination of city planning during the Progressive Era. Examining planning movements in Harrisburg, Denver, Seattle, Dallas, and Kansas City, Wilson concludes that the efforts were realistic attempts to handle urban problems. In their planning work "middle- and upper-middle-class Americans attempt[ed] to refashion their cities into beautiful, functional entities."\textsuperscript{18} The city beautiful movement was, Wilson has observed, at one and the same time "a cultural, aesthetic, political, and environmental movement" that achieved considerable success.\textsuperscript{19} In addition to its physical improvements, the movement gave Americans a sense that comprehensive planning was possible. Taking an approach at variance with those of Boyer and Fogelson, Wilson views planning in the early twentieth century as a positive and optimistic effort to remake the nation's cities.

The study of planning also contributes to our understanding of
the roles cities played in the development of American frontiers, especially in the trans-Mississippi West. Scholars have recognized for some time now that cities were crucial to the opening of frontiers to settlement, and solid urban biographies exist for a number of Pacific Coast cities. Historians have also prepared broader studies emphasizing the significance of cities in the regional development of the Far West. Recent interest has focused on western cities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and, in particular, the question of to what degree their development may have differed from that of their eastern counterparts.

Particularly important have been the studies of Gunther Barth and Lawrence Larson. Writing about Denver and San Francisco, Barth has postulated that those cities developed differently from urban centers elsewhere. They grew up very rapidly as "instant cities," telescoping into just one or two generations the economic, social, and cultural developments that most cities required much longer to attain. Barth asserts, "The rapid rise of San Francisco and Denver distinguished them from most other American cities, which matured from settlement to town over many decades and even centuries." Moreover, because of the rapidity of their growth, Denver and San Francisco possessed much more fluid social, political, and cultural structures and norms than other metropolises. To the contrary, Larson has found in his study of the history of twenty-four western cities, including Denver and San Francisco, that western cities were similar to their eastern counterparts in most respects. He concludes, "In building cities western pioneers followed what they understood best . . . [and] they rigidly copied older concepts of urban planning."

Seattle, Portland, Oakland, and Los Angeles—like San Francisco and Denver—grew up very rapidly, perhaps justifying the application of the label "instant city" to them. More than any other single factor, their runaway growth and its influence on businessmen led to the development of planning movements in those cities. Nonetheless, the planning efforts were very similar to those that arose in eastern and midwestern cities at about the same time. In fact, most of the plans were prepared by well-known eastern planners who paid scant attention to the western settings of the Pacific Coast cities.

The study of Pacific Coast city planning enhances our com-
prehension of how businessmen related to their changing social and economic environments. America's foremost business historians have examined the relationships between businessmen and their environments in different ways. In a number of broad-ranging studies, Thomas Cochran has looked at national developments, illustrating well the growth of a business culture in the United States.\textsuperscript{26} More interested in the evolution of the business firm and its management, Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., has written extensively about the rise of big business in America.\textsuperscript{27} Much remains to be learned about how businessmen related to their regional and local environments.\textsuperscript{28} Findings about the roles businessmen played in the planning movements of Pacific Coast cities suggest strongly that, just as they sought to make their business environments more predictable through the adoption of modern management techniques for their firms, so, too, did businessmen try to use city planning to stabilize their urban environments. Just as they were coming to view themselves as professionals and experts in the management of their companies, so, too, did business leaders view planners as experts in the running of cities.

The Scope of This Study

This work examines the genesis of city planning, looks at how businessmen and others sought through politics to put their ideas into practice, and examines the results of the planning efforts. Most importantly, this volume contributes to our understanding of the Progressive era in American history and the politics of city planning as part of the political ferment of that period. Secondarily, it adds to our comprehension of the nature of western cities, especially the degree to which they were similar or different from their eastern counterparts. Finally, this volume increases our understanding of the roles businessmen have played in shaping American society and culture.

Chapter 1 sets the stage for the examination of city planning by analyzing the social and economic development of Seattle, Portland, Oakland, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. Those five metropolises are logical cities to compare in their planning efforts,
for in their economic roots and in their social origins—and how these changed over time—they shared many characteristics. While those centers participated in the spread of a national network of cities in America, the fact that they grew up on the Pacific Coast lent a commonality to their development.

San Francisco, the subject of chapter 2, was one of the first American cities for which a Progressive-Era city plan was drafted. Moreover, because of the destruction caused by its 1906 earthquake and fire, San Francisco had an unusual chance to embrace planning as a guide for its growth in the twentieth century. Why San Franciscans passed up the opportunity to construct a new planned city reveals a great deal about the political, as opposed to the physical, limitations to city planning in the United States.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 investigate the evolution of planning in the other major cities of the Pacific Coast. Chapter 3 looks at planning in Oakland and Los Angeles. Charles Mumford Robinson prepared plans for both cities. Oakland and Los Angeles also pioneered in the use of zoning as a planning tool. Turning from California to the Pacific Northwest, chapter 4 examines the course of events in Seattle. Seattleites considered the most highly engineered, the most technically proficient, plan drawn up for a Pacific Coast city, only to reject it in the end. Chapter 5 looks at Portland. The voters of Portland approved the adoption of a city plan as a guide for the development of their metropolis, the only people on the Pacific Coast to do so; but they soon ignored the plan in the rapid expansion of their city.

Finally, chapter 6 draws conclusions about the nature of city planning on the Pacific Coast. The chapter assesses what was and was not accomplished and compares the experiences of Pacific Coast cities with planning to those of cities elsewhere in the nation.