therefore, Parker was right in suggesting that segregation was in the interests of everyone. By keeping disparate groups of people apart, the redesigned park system minimized conflict. It prevented an endless struggle over whose version of proper behavior would prevail, and an equally futile struggle to stifle nonconformity. Parker had given up on Bushnell's hope that the park would be an unstructured natural environment that would bring back the face-to-face relations and harmonious society of an idealized rural past. Personal encounters could have only limited effects in the dispersed, class-segregated city that Hartford had become, and a new model of the social environment was needed. Parker chose the model of rational organization that urban institutions and infrastructure provided, and he accepted the existence of a pluralistic society. In place of the stark spatial antithesis between park and city envisioned by the Olmsted's and by Wirth, Parker created a fine-grained division of space to bring order to a profusion of recreational tastes.

Arriving in Hartford in the summer of 1923, a nine-year-old Russian Jewish boy found that the fastest way to fit in was to play in the street with the other children. "I became one of 'the boys' in short order," Morton Tenen recalled years later. "The language came very easily to me, especially swearing, and I acquired this part to perfection. I had to learn how to fight, play ball and piggy, gamble with tops, play jack-knife, marbles, and last but not least, how to raid fruit and peanut wagons at night and steal candy from store counters. This was known as having fun and being brave. Any boy not taking part was dubbed a 'sissy' and became virtually ostracized."

Boys in the immigrant wards of the city had for decades enjoyed a rowdy street culture that set them against the adult world. At one end of the range of play were harmless games like ring-o'-levio, piggy, pony, hide-and-seek, and marbles — games in which boys claimed the streets and the sidewalks for their own use, to the occasional annoyance of adults. More daring boys would steal rides on streetcars and delivery wagons. But play
could easily stray into violence, vandalism, or petty thievery. Boys enjoyed throwing snowballs at peddlers and pedestrians, as well as playing pranks like stretching a rope across a dark street at a night to knock surprised bicyclists to the ground. Some would show their bravado by stoning children of other ethnic groups, starting brawls, swiping food from sidewalk displays, and setting fires.\(^2\)

Unruly street play was not limited to the immigrant working class. Middle-class boys on Prospect Street in the late nineteenth century "romped up and down the street and through all the back yards, which they regarded as public property," remembered one of these boys years later.\(^3\) Yet it was the play of working-class, immigrant children that most alarmed Progressive Era reformers. Growing in numbers as a result of the great waves of European migration, crammed into what reformers believed to be pathological slum environments, and standing apart from the mainstream culture, these children seemed to pose a grave danger to the values of the native-born middle class. Reformers sought some way of taming and Americanizing these children, lest they grow up wholly estranged from mainstream life.\(^4\)

The Progressive Era movement to reform inner-city play was not, however, primarily motivated by nativist fears. It was roused instead by concerns about the effect of the new slum environment in which much of the immigrant working class had settled. Inner-city children and youths were thought to be trapped in congested, manmade environments, where they were battered by a constant volley of sensations. Reformers, influenced by a new understanding, namely, that the growing child passed through discrete, quasi-evolutionary stages, feared that sensory overstimulation could disrupt proper development. Reformers in Hartford and other cities sought to create new alternative environments that would remove children and youth from street influences. They built playgrounds, gymnasiums, and athletic fields in which play could be directed and in which, they hoped, proper child development could take place.\(^5\) Desires for social control and for proper child development merged in a sophisticated campaign to reform the use of urban space.\(^6\)

As the experience of young Morton Tonken suggests, Hartford reformers were ultimately unable to remove children from the street or to replace the influence of children's street culture with their own version of Americanization. And in order to attract children to the playgrounds and parks, they had to give up much of their control over even these spaces. Nevertheless, the playgrounds and new park facilities were a significant addition to the urban playscape—for the first time, areas within the city were specifically designated for children's recreation. The unexpected growth of automobile traffic complemented this trend toward sharper borders in the geography of play. Traffic forced children off major thoroughfares and into alleys and quiet side streets. Public officials and advocates for motorists indirectly encouraged this development by educating children about traffic safety. By the late 1920s, twin forces—the playground movement and traffic—had resulted in the growing segregation of children's play from adults' use of the street.

Boys' Clubs

The effort to reform play in Hartford began with five boys' clubs established in the second half of the nineteenth century. The first four of these clubs, like so many other local efforts at social work at this time, were connected in one way or another with the charitable efforts of the city's Congregational churches. The Dashaway Club of the early 1860s, the Sixth Ward Temperance Society that succeeded it, the Boys' Reading-Room Association, and finally the Boys' Club of the late 1870s, all aimed at instilling Christian morals in the benighted youth of the slums.\(^7\)

Though club leaders rarely discussed how play was affected by the physical characteristics of the city, their judgments about space were clear from their choice of interior settings. Not surprisingly, the clubs' middle-class, predominantly female leadership shared the nineteenth-century belief that the home was morally superior to the street. An attempt was made to give a home-like atmosphere to the clubs' meeting rooms. The teenage boys in the Sixth Ward Temperance Society, for instance, met in a room at the Morgan Street Mission furnished with a piano, books, and pictures to make it look more like a middle-class parlor. As in a parlor, activities included playing games and singing songs, and emphasis was placed on encouraging self-control. Similar activities prevailed at the Boys' Reading Room, where, according to the secretary, H. P. Goddard, "The object has been to make the Reading Room as much like a cheerful, pleasant home as possible." Boys at the Reading Room were required to wash their faces, and they were encouraged to
The Boys' Reading Room, a nineteenth-century boys' club. Discipline was a constant problem for those who sought to control children. (Scribner's Monthly, November 1876)

...the in the bathtubs provided. "It is believed that good has been accomplished, by drawing the boys away from liquor-saloons and other questionable resorts, and by making their evenings pass pleasantly in innocent amusements," Goddard continued, adding that the club's influence made the surrounding neighborhood quieter and more peaceful as well. Leaders of these four clubs found, however, that their attempts to convert the boys to the moral standards of the genteel home involved difficult negotiations. If the boys did not find the club enjoyable enough to balance out the tedium of being uplifted, they could simply refuse to return, as seems to have happened with at least the first two of these clubs. 8

By far the most successful of the five boys' clubs was the Good Will Club, founded and led by Mary Hall, the defender of new girls. Supervisors and boys compromised on a recreational environment, one in which the values of the home mingled with those of the street and in which different models of discipline were developed. The Good Will Club had its origins in the Boys' Evening School, as the Boys' Club was called in its final years. Hall began supervising that school three evenings a week in 1879. She also met separately with a few of the boys to read them Horatio Alger stories and give them lessons in geology and other subjects. Hall eventually severed the club's connections with its parent organization altogether and moved its meetings to the building where she had her law office. 9

By the time Hall organized the Good Will Club, boys' clubs were appearing in other American cities as well, starting with one in New York in 1876. Other clubs also aimed at improving the moral character of the poor and were often sponsored by middle-class Protestant churches and missions. "Common to all was a sense of mission to the poor in which Christian and philanthropic motives intertwined with fear of class strife and social upheaval," writes the historian David MacLeod. Like the clubs in Hartford, clubs in other cities aimed at encouraging self-control and polite behavior. In the early twentieth century, club workers responded to public concerns about mass immigration by playing up the clubs' power to Americanize the children of immigrants. 10

Like the four earlier clubs in Hartford, the Good Will Club aimed at educating children in manners, morality, personal appearance, and even some academic subjects. Boys had to pledge not to drink, smoke, or swear. In addition to playing games and singing songs, they received lessons in elocution and lectures on history, geology, and oral hygiene. The club later developed a list of rules that governed the boys' manner of entering and leaving the building, their comportment nearby and inside the building, their personal cleanliness, their greeting of supervisors, and their handling of books and games. 11 Unlike its predecessors, the Good Will Club was avowedly secular. Hall promised that Catholics and Jews could join without fear that anyone would try to meddle with their religious beliefs. She made good on that promise by ending a brief affiliation with the Young Men's Christian Association in the mid-1880s, after Catholic parents started pulling their children out of the club. 12

The leaders of the Good Will Club pinned their hopes for moral reform on the indirect influences of a wholesome environment and constructive activities. In the 1880s the club began offering physical education programs similar to those later provided by the vacation schools. Physical education consisted of regimented exercises that fit in well with the club supervisors' determination to maintain discipline. In contrast to the leninized parlor or schoolroom atmosphere that earlier boys' clubs...
had struggled to achieve, physical education at the Good Will club had
manly—even militaristic—overtones. A young man led all the boys one
evening a week in drills with dumbbells and instructed some of them in
fencing and boxing. Other boys joined the “Good Will Cadets,” in which
they drilled in uniform with wooden rifles, learning how to march and
maneuver in formation. Many members enrolled in the club’s craft and
vocational programs. Though club workers insisted on courtesy, they
knew that genteel decorum was an impossible goal. “The noise in that
vicinity is pretty loud. Put several hundred boys together and they are
pretty sure to make themselves heard,” Hall said.13

By the early 1910s, the Good Will Club had grown into a major institu-
tion for supervising the play of boys from the slums. It attracted more
than a thousand individuals a year. Its ever-increasing size forced it to
move frequently, and the club was shuffled from one cramped space to
another until Hall enlisted the support of the Hartford Times publisher,
Alfred E. Burr, in raising money for a club building. The club bought
the former Hartford Female Seminary on Pratt Street in 1889 and stayed
there until 1911, when it built an even larger building on the northern
edge of downtown.14 Hall believed strongly that removing boys from bad
surroundings was as important as providing good influences. “The Good
Will Club was intended to take care of the young people in the ghetto
and keep them off the street and keep them from falling into evil ways,”
recalled Morris N. Cohen, one of the boys who attended the club in the
1910s. Cohen said he was not sure at the time what those evil street influ-
ences might be, but the club’s message was unmistakable. “All I knew
was that they did not want us on the street so we went to a club where we
could not get into mischief.”15

The Good Will Club and its predecessors pioneered much of the
work later undertaken by vacation schools and supervised playgrounds.16
The boys’ club supervisors sought to shape the character of working-class
boys by gathering them into an uplifting environment in which their
leisure time could be directed. Though the Good Will Club based its
work on a fundamentally religious concern for instilling morality in the
individual, its mission by the early twentieth century explicitly involved
saving children from the harmful effects of the urban environment. Hall
was not fully converted by the segregationist views of other Progressive
Era reformers; at the Good Will Club, Hall, who in the newsgirl con-
troversies of 1893–1914 had differed from most of the others active on
the issue, showed her tolerance for street values by allowing noise levels
wholly inappropriate for the parlor. But the overall thrust of her play re-
form work put her clearly in the camp of those who wanted to rescue
children from the street.

The Shortage of Play Space

By the turn of the century, boys in Hartford’s inner neighborhoods could
find few outdoor places in which their right to play was uncontested.
The city’s growth was severely limiting children’s access to off-street play
space. Vacant lots were disappearing, and the densely developed area of
the city was expanding. In 1869 the built-up part of the city had covered
only the area bounded by Pavilion Street in the north, Sigourney and
Broad streets in the west, and Park and Wyllys streets in the south. Much
of the North End and the South End was still farmed, as was part of
Asylum Hill, and what became Frog Hollow was mostly open land as
well. Backyards were still common even in parts of what is now the
downtown.17

By 1909, however, development had spilled across the western limits
of the city and was marching rapidly through both North End and South
End. Though the West End was growing into an elite, semisuburban
estate of single-family homes and backyards, the inner neighborhoods
were much denser. Frog Hollow was almost entirely built up with free-
standing tenement houses on small lots. The characteristic building of
the neighborhood—the “perfect six”—left the six tenant families with
only a cramped rear yard and a narrow strip of ground between the side-
walk and the house. The East Side, always the densest section of the city,
remained that way despite the clearing of a few blocks of housing for the
approaches to the new Connecticut River bridge, as new buildings were
rafted out into rear lots. Housing of similar density was also spreading
north into the Arsenal neighborhood below Suffield Street. To the west,
the expansion of the downtown had spread tightly packed buildings all
the way to the eastern slope of Asylum Hill.18

Within Bushnell Park in the late nineteenth century, children were
allowed to play in a grove of trees west of the Trumbull Street bridge, but were not permitted to play on the lawns.\textsuperscript{19} Children in the poor neighborhoods were left to play in the streets, but even their streets afforded less space than those in the outlying areas. Unlike in the semisuburban outskirts, where houses stood alone in grassy yards, the typical street in Hartford's slums resembled many other urban American streets at this time: a trench lined on either side with a solid wall of buildings. Jagged roof lines of two to four stories tall framed broad muddy streets or narrow, muddy alleys. Though most of the streets were wide enough to catch sunlight, they looked like closed spaces—long rooms with a dirt floor and a partial ceiling of utility wires. If the street ended in a dead end or at a cross street, an additional wall heightened the look of enclosure. A few alleys, such as Marsh Court, were literally no wider than an ordinary room, and Oriental Alley was so narrow that two tricycles were said to be enough to block the way.\textsuperscript{20}

The confined, almost interior quality of these streets limited the games that could be played, while discouraging (but not entirely preventing) such sports as baseball and football, which were popular where children had access to more space. Baseball and football were intended to be played on specially designed fields, or at least in wide-open spaces where play was shaped by rules, not by lack of space. Street games were more readily adaptable to the interferences posed by tight quarters and competing uses of space. In some, such as ring-a-rosie or hares-and-hounds, the urban environment was an essential part of the game and added interesting and challenging dimensions. For example, a winning tactic in the chase game of hares-and-hounds was running through a store and out the back—the hares usually made it through quickly enough to avoid interference, but the shopkeeper was roused to anger in time to stop the pursuing hounds.\textsuperscript{21}

Though play could continue under difficult physical conditions, it was sometimes overwhelmed by a combination of insufficient space and determined adult interference. Even outside the slums, boys found their play opportunities limited, as a group of boys who lived on the southern edge of Frog Hollow wrote in a 1912 letter to the mayor. They complained that they had been used to playing in a nearby vacant field, "but the officer on this beat puts us out every time we get there, [so] we have decided to play in the street... So last night we were playing on Lincoln..."

Street in front of the home of two boys in our crowd. Hardly had half an hour elapsed before the officer came up and told us to get the devil out of there." The boys claimed, "We are entitled [sic] to some place to play," and asked the mayor to do something about it.\textsuperscript{22}

City officials had been trying to do something, but apparently not hard enough. In 1891 Mayor Henry C. Dwight had proposed that the city lease or purchase land "for use as playgrounds for the young people of our city. The ordinances of the city forbid the use of the streets for such purposes, and the boys and girls have no place for games of ball, tennis, etc." The park commissioners suggested a three-acre site on North Front Street, but city officials later dropped the matter without explanation.\textsuperscript{23}

The next year, the local publisher Leverett Brainard proposed that the city establish a public park and playground east of Broad Street between Yard and Jefferson streets, on the edge of the working-class Frog Hollow neighborhood, but he fared no better.\textsuperscript{24} The expansion of the city's park system in the mid-1890s provided new play spaces, particularly in Riverside Park, and later in Pope and Colt parks as well. Riverside Park, the closest to the East Side, was planned from the beginning with children...
The most unreflecting, the most selfish person could not pass through the streets of our East side on a blazing July day without wishing to carry the children off to a more suitable spot. They sit on the curbstone and extract strange substances from the mud of the gutter, they play, more or less peacefully, in the path of wagons and horses, they rush in front of electric cars, screaming with delight at the motorman's frantic bell. If they do not lose a limb or contract a fatal disease their constitutions are weakened by this contact with things unclean. And the moral dangers are more hideous than the physical ones.26

The Vacation Schools

Civic Club members, inspired by hearing a talk about the "vacation schools" of Cambridge, Massachusetts, took the lead in carrying children off to more suitable spots. In 1897 they decided to set up a similar school to serve Hartford's East Side. According to an account published a few years later, the vacation school project was based on the club members' desire "to provide other influences than those of the streets and alleys of our tenement districts for the children during the long summer vacation." The project was headed by Dotha Bushnell Hillyer, who took a special interest in what she called "the children of the streets" and their recreational needs. "We have three kinds of education, that of the schools, the houses and the streets; that of the streets undoing in a few hours the painstaking labors of the two others," she argued a few years later. To save the children from this malign influence, Hillyer and other Civic Club members arranged for the use of part of the Brown School on the East Side, hired teachers, and took applications from parents who wished to enroll children from six to fourteen years old. The school opened on June 28 for six weeks of half-day sessions, with eighty students chosen from more than seven hundred applicants. Additional students were later admitted, so that the average attendance was about a hundred.27

Like the boys' clubs, the vacation school program initially took place indoors, and the organizers found that their work demanded negotiation and compromise. The school tried to simultaneously educate, edify, and
entertain the children, who were predominantly poor and of immigrant stock. In the "manual training rooms," boys were taught clay modeling, while girls were given dolls and taught to sew clothes for them. Children also listened to music and to lectures on natural history, sang songs, read books, copied drawings, wrote letters and stories, exercised with dumbbells, and learned to play organized games. In choosing and managing the games, according to a later account, the teachers took "special care that they should be of such a nature as to inculcate [the children] in honesty, self-denial, fair play, and courtesy." As part of the opening exercises on the first day, students bearing flags marched into the school to music, sang "America," and pledged allegiance to the flag. Then the students and a small audience of club members and other interested adults listened as the principal gave a speech on the importance of polite behavior. For the students, reported the _Hartford Courant_, "The vacation school opens up a new life. Instead of spending their play hours through the summer weeks on a hot, dry, and dusty street, they will find amusement that will be instructive as well as pleasant." The school actually was popular with students. Many more wanted to get in than could be accommodated, and a crowd of disappointed children waited around the door for the first two days in the hope of being admitted.

At the end of the term the students wrote letters describing their experience. The letters selected for publication in the _Courant_ were apparently those that best expressed the teachers' ideal of the perfect child—one who was well behaved and abjectly grateful for the kindness of the Civic Club. The students who lived up—or down—to these expectations also gave hints in their letters of the reasons children might have wanted to go to the school. They wrote of receiving dolls, singing songs, and especially going on the picnic excursion. No one noticed the natural history lectures or the pledge of allegiance. Still, the emphasis on etiquette was unforgettable, and some of the students had also had other bits of advice drilled into their heads. "Mrs. Hillyer told us if you want to have houses you should work," wrote little Annie Bishoff. Despite the doses of advice and discipline, the vacation school did provide children with a mildly entertaining change from spending every summer morning playing in the street. Children enjoyed the school on their own terms, though only within the narrow limits set by club members and teachers.

The vacation school program grew quickly over the next few years and spread into outdoor spaces. With charitable donations and financial aid from the city government, the Civic Club expanded the program to include seven hundred children by 1899, opening a supervised outdoor playground at the Brown School. By 1900 about a thousand students were enrolled in three schools, and an equal number of others came to use the three supervised playgrounds. Uncounted others used the playground that the parks department had installed at Riverside Park for the use of the vacation school. Realizing that the vacation schools had grown too big for the club to handle, Civic Club members asked the city to take over. The Common Council agreed in 1901 and voted enough money to keep the program growing.

Public officials supervising the vacation schools described them more explicitly as social engineering tools, perhaps in an effort to defend the use of public funds for such work. The school and playground environment, they wrote, allowed better child development than the hated alternative of the street. In 1901, according to a special committee that was considering how the program should be run, "The main object of vacation schools is to provide the children during the summer months in the congested sections of the city, where the home life is narrow and the dirty public streets offer the only playgrounds, with environments that are pure and healthful, and to bring such children under influences that make for good."

The committee emphasized the vacation aspect of the vacation schools and argued that the character molding practiced there was quite different from that of the regular schools. This difference should become even more pronounced, the committee argued. Already the vacation schools operated in outdoor as well as indoor environments. Indoors, "the children are occupied for three hours of the morning with physical exercises and drills, and instructed in manual work, such as paper-cutting, woodworking, painting, sewing, weaving and other light exercises which train the eye and the hand, and given helpful talks on cleanliness, civic virtues, and patriotism." Outdoors, in the schoolyards and public parks, they were taught to play games. The committee wanted to expand outdoor work to include more games and more nature study, "and the present indoor schools, savoring so strongly of the regular curriculum, [should be] practically abandoned."
The committee desired a sharper division of children's lives into work time (education) and leisure time, paralleling the experience of their immigrant parents as they adapted to the modern industrial city. The disjunction would be strengthened by splitting children's lives between contrasting physical spaces: a summer of recreation in natural surroundings followed by an autumn of study in the urban, interior setting of the schoolhouse. "With a summer spent under such favorable conditions, the children would return to the serious work of the public schools strengthened physically and mentally by their outdoor life, and better prepared for the strain of the new school year." Children spent more and more time outdoors as the program continued to develop under city supervision from 1901 through 1903. The number of playgrounds grew to five in 1901, including one each at Riverside and Pope parks. Students spent two days a week in the schoolroom, two days in the park, and one day on field trips. The new emphasis on providing amusing recreation made the vacation schools more popular among children, and it also won the support of working-class adults. John F. Gunshanan, a working-class social reformer and former semiprofessional baseball player, was among those advocating an extension of the vacation school program. Gunshanan spoke before the Board of Park Commissioners in 1901, successfully requesting help to open a vacation school at Pope Park near the Frog Hollow district and to install swings and sandboxes there.

In 1904 the public school system took over management of the program and temporarily reversed the trend toward fun and games. The school system was brought in when previous vacation school leaders decided that they could not manage such a large program (enrollment had hit a peak of 1,869). The new supervisors shifted the emphasis away from enticing children into healthy, off-street environments, and back toward education. Field trips were cut back, and children now spent three mornings in the classroom and two in the parks. Furthermore, according to the new vacation school principal, Stanley H. Rood, the mornings in the park "were not passed wholly in aimless play on the part of the children, but were treated in as serious a manner as the other days; the teachers being present with their classes, and stipulated periods being given up to athletic games and gymnastic drills for both boys and girls under the direction of capable physical instructors." Though Rood did not admit it, many children appear to have been unenthusiastic about standing in the muggy heat of the Connecticut Valley summer swinging dumbbells in time to a teacher's commands. Attendance, which was voluntary, dropped off on the outdoor mornings, prompting Rood to conclude rather lamely that "the indoor work appears to have a more potent attraction."

The school system was trying to have it both ways: to give the children an invigorating vacation and to extend their schooling through the summer. According to Rood, who during the regular year served as the grammar schools' supervisor of manual training, the purpose of the vacation schools was to take children off the streets and teach them manners, morals, and manual skills. From the children's perspective, however, the vacation schools lured them in by promising a less restricted play environment only to impose new forms of social control and manipulation. Children expressed their displeasure by dropping out. Attendance at the vacation school fell precipitously during the 1904 term, from 1,348 on one of the early days down to a daily average of 876 in the final week.

School officials never admitted their error—but the program did become gradually less authoritarian and more enjoyable in the years after 1904. The program leaders expanded those aspects of the program that were most popular with children and gave children more choice in their activities. Park days in the 1905 session followed no fixed program; children were allowed to devote their time to whatever form of recreation they wanted. Rood noted a marked increase in attendance compared to the 1904 session. Also in 1905, the Civic Club offered children a chance to plant their own flowers and vegetables in small plots at Riverside Park. In doing so, club members repeated their original call for supervised activities that would draw children away from the street and emphasized the healthy effects of a natural environment. The "school leaders" proved extremely popular, were added to the vacation school program the following year, and were expanded to Colt Park. Observing in 1906 that undirected play was the most popular part of vacation school, Rood urged establishing more playgrounds.

The greatest shift came with Rood's resignation or dismissal following the 1906 season and with the subsequent decision of the superintendent of schools to let principals adapt the program to the interests of their students. Eleven playgrounds were in operation by 1911, and the vacation schools themselves were being allowed to wither away. "Two
Vacation Schools, properly speaking, were continued during the month of July . . . but both of these schools were auxiliary to the playground work carried on at these same plants,” school officials reported in 1912. By 1913, what had once been called the vacation school program had been rechristened “Recreation Work in Summer.” Average daily attendance reached 4,631 in July 1912 and 6,808 a year later. Having focused on luring children off the streets, the vacation schools had become mainly a program to provide play spaces.

George Parker and the City Child

As the emphasis in playground work shifted from education to recreation, the provision of playground facilities drew greater attention. Leadership passed to the city’s parks department, whose superintendent, George A. Parker, viewed the situation of city children with great anxiety.

The problems posed by the urban environment were the worst for the children of the slums, Parker believed. Affluent families living in single-family homes with yards could “reproduce in the city, somewhat, the conditions and freedoms of the country.” But the children of the working classes were crowded into dense tenement districts, where opportunities for proper play were lacking.

In assessing the problem, Parker employed more sophisticated conceptual tools than had the leaders of the vacation schools. Like his counterparts in recreation work throughout the country, Parker drew on the new ideas of child development being articulated in the late 1890s and 1900s by Granville Stanley Hall and Luther Halsey Gulick. According to Hall, a child psychologist and the president of Clark University, children passed through stages of development that recapitulated the prehistoric cultural evolution of the human race. Gulick, physical education director first for the Young Men’s Christian Association International College and later for the New York City public schools, argued that proper physical and moral development required that children act out instinctual drives through age-specific types of play. For instance, track-and-field sports and tag games were appropriate for boys aged seven to twelve, who were driven by pre-savage, individualistic hunting instincts. Adolescent boys, whose development corresponded to that of hunting tribes, needed more complex team sports. Proper development would prepare the boys to play constructive roles in society when they reached adulthood.

Parker feared that city conditions threatened to prevent this natural development. “The environment for many a child in Hartford destroys or weakens these instinctive emotions, and it is Hartford’s problem to remove such environments.” Unless the city provided decent play spaces, the child would fail to reach the proper stages of development on time and would become “a hoodlum, a tough, a ne’er-do-well.” Parker feared that the growth of youth gangs in the tenement districts was evidence of just such retarded development.

In Parker’s view, the socializing power of parks and playgrounds was especially needed because of the home’s decline as a family workplace. Though fondly recalling the close family life of his rural youth, he observed:

The family no longer works together, the man goes to his place, and the woman altogether too often goes to her work, the children are in school, the young boy and girl [each] to their own particular task, until [?] the coming together again at the evening meal. Formerly the evening was spent together in the house, but the housing conditions
are such among too many of our workers that they cannot and will not stay in the house. The man, the boy and the girl usually separate for the evening each to their own amusement, the mother more often stays in the home.

Without guidance or proper home life, the children were loose in the streets, which had taken the place of the open fields of the rural past. There, they were in danger of succumbing to evil influences. "A remedy for all this is recreation, and only through recreation do I see an adequate relief from present city conditions under which 3/4 of the people live." Adding to the urgency was the fact that "Hartford is a city of many nationalities and has become (whether we will it or not) one of the melting pots out of which is to come a virile race or else the barbaric element will predominate. . . . At the present time there is a deep unrest, a discontent, a tendency toward a dissolution of much that has been considered most worthy to strive for in the past, and the public parks and playgrounds are places where in a large way all classes and conditions of people may come together daily." Wholesome, age-appropriate recreation was the cure for what ailed the modern city, particularly its poor and immigrant neighborhoods. The city government had to support it in order "to prevent the children of the coming generation from destroying the work of the past." 47

Parker placed even greater expectations on recreational space than had Horace Bushnell. Like Bushnell, he saw parks as bringing salutary aspects of rural life into the unwholesome urban environment, promoting physical health, and exerting an "unconscious influence" that eased social divisions. But Parker saw the city's ills as even more numerous and serious than Bushnell had. As a result of poor housing conditions and the diurnal departure of fathers, children, and even mothers, the home no longer properly nurtured the young. Therefore, "the city should mother its children," and its task would not be easy. Children were not the mere passive lumps that Bushnell had described. They had innate drives whose management was both crucial and highly complicated under the artificial conditions created by the modern city. "Play should be spontaneous, yet often under our abnormal city conditions it has to be taught and directed. When it has to be taught or directed, it is more of the nature of education than play," Parker wrote. If the parks and playgrounds failed to meet the need for play that was both appropriate and enjoyable, the streets were always there, first beckoning the young with a meretricious illusion of freedom, then luring them to their doom. The children's decline might even have permanent, hereditary consequences; in neo-Lamarckian fashion, their lapse would produce a race that was barbaric rather than virile. Park officials, on whom such awesome responsibility was placed, had to find a solution to these problems.**

**The New Play Environment

Despite the growing national mania among recreation workers for "directed play," Parker had been skeptical about the concept even before his promotion to Parks Superintendent. In a 1906 article he described how he had sat on a park bench one day the previous summer, puzzling over his vague sense of dissatisfaction about a successful field day put on by the vacation schools. "Slowly my attention was attracted to a dozen children, under ten years old, who had escaped from the procession as it marched off the park and had returned to pick flowers and play by themselves." Unsupervised, the children played more enthusiastically and vigorously than they had all day, leading Parker to wonder "if too much direction did not weaken the spirit of the child" and undermine individuality. But Parker did not have full control over the playgrounds, and he continued to allow a wide range of play experiences even in the parks. Children participated in everything from highly regimented drills to the completely unsupervised recreation that one girl called "real play."**

**The most disciplined play, ironically, took place in the wide open, tree-lined meadows of the parks, where schools in the 1910s staged elaborately choreographed pageants in which hundreds of children danced in formation and waved flags. In contrast to the streets, the park meadows placed almost no physical constraints on play, but teachers more than made up for this. Describing a 1914 event in Keney Park that involved 2,500 children and 4,800 flags, a reporter commented snidely that it epitomized both the spirit of democracy of our public schools and the trend of the times in organized playing. For nowadays, it is not permitted that the pupil run and jump and shout as he will, for such playing needs no supervision; he must stand thus and so, and move his arms and legs
in unison with hundreds of other little arms and legs, thus and so. This is organized playing, running in a groove and supervised by an instructor who comes fresh from a mould.”

Children were allowed somewhat more freedom in the bounded, less naturalized playgrounds. A playground in a schoolyard or vacant lot was typically surrounded by fences that kept children from running in and out except through the gate. Even a playground in a park was a clearly demarcated space set apart from its surroundings, an outdoor “room” with sandboxes, slides, and swings for furniture. Whatever its location, the playground’s atmosphere was in stark contrast to the slum street, where rowdy behavior, dirt, and brusque police intervention belied the equally interior appearance. Playgrounds were intended to combine the best aspects of interior and exterior space, while streets were thought to combine the worst. Children in the playgrounds were supposed to play harmoniously under the leadership of middle-class women, instead of in constant struggle against shopkeepers and policemen. In these bounded yet open environments, two or three women could supposedly keep an eye on hundreds of children, making it possible to maintain a balance between control and freedom without resorting to the military discipline of the park pageants.

Degrees of discipline varied from one playground to another. Of the eleven playgrounds open in 1912, seven offered directed play, and four offered free play. Parker wanted more free play, which meant that no child was told to participate in a specific game or to use a specific piece of equipment. Children supposedly had the freedom, within limits, to follow their instinctual drives. “Directed play, like the schools, is from the outside in, while free play is from the inside out,” Parker wrote in 1919. Yet in practice, the distinction between free and directed play was blurred. Even when the play was “free,” the children were often watched by supervisors, most of whom in the 1910s were employees of the school system. Like their counterparts in the boys’ clubs, these supervisors sought to keep rough street behavior from contaminating the playground, and enforced a detailed list of rules. They instructed the younger children in the proper use of the slides and swings, prevented anyone from monopolizing equipment, kept order in the waiting lines, stopped boys from teasing girls, and broke up fights. The staff hoped not merely to keep order, but also to teach children to be considerate, to have “dis-

cipline” and — once they were old enough — to join in the spirit of team play. The playgrounds had fixed seasons and hours posted on signs at the gates. Supervisors made the children leave at closing time just as if they were in a store or factory.

The key was not to boss children around, Parker believed, but to provide them with spaces in which they would be eager to pursue wholesome, age-appropriate activities under the guidance of supervisors. “I believe in a segregation of play activities by sex and age periods with suitable and separate provisions for each,” Parker wrote in 1915, expanding on the segregationist philosophy he had recently expressed in his redesign of the parks. It was not necessary in every case for each age group to have its own field or playground area, but the groups should be kept apart and occupied at different forms of play. Sharper distinctions were created by age limits at some of the playgrounds. The parks department also built some gender-specific facilities, such as an “outdoor gymnasium” for girls at Pope Park. Through the 1910s and 1920s, the school system and the parks department encouraged the growth of children’s athletic competitions, another form of directed play in open fields. The
school system organized a public school athletic league in the early 1910s, with competitions between the schools leading up to a general field day in the parks in June. During the summers, the parks department organized games and races in which children from different playgrounds competed. The department also organized baseball leagues, which by 1928 totaled fourteen, with about a hundred teams.

Parker struggled throughout the 1910s and 1920s to increase the number of playgrounds. He received at least some backing from residents of neighborhoods needing play space, but his strongest support came from the Juvenile Commission, a newly created municipal advisory panel that was his brainchild. The Civic Club had secured the legislature’s approval for such a commission, which began its work in the spring of 1909 with a reformist membership including Parker, Detha Bushnell Hillyer, Mary Graham Jones of the Hartford Social Settlement, and the Rev. Rockwell Harmon Potter of the First Congregational Church.

Potter, the commission’s chairman, had long been concerned about immoral street influences. During the Hartford Federation of Churches’ 1907 antiprolitution crusade, he had preached on the same text that Bushnell had chosen for the chapter on play in Christian Nurture: “And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof” (Zechariah 8:5). Bushnell had used the verse as the starting point for generalized ruminations on the divine sanction for play and had considered the street as a physical space only in one passage recommending that parents in large towns forbid their children to play there at night without supervision. Potter’s sermon, on the other hand, was a convoluted discussion of the effects of the urban environment on children. He urged in one place that city dwellers “make the streets of the city clean for the play of developing life,” but in others he equivocated about whether the word “street” should be interpreted literally or taken as a metaphor for public space in general. Potter complained that in the modern city there were not enough places for children to play, hinting that actual streets were not even to be considered for such use. Streets were, instead, places of temptation, where older children were lured into commercial amusements and other vicious pursuits—“Hence the critical and imperative duty of keeping watch and ward over the streets of a city in such wise that the play of these older children shall be safe.” Vacation schools offered suitable play spaces for some younger boys and girls, and further development of the park system would help meet the needs of all children, Potter argued.

In early 1912, while suffragists and clergy were fighting to keep the vice district closed, Potter’s Juvenile Commission surveyed the need for playgrounds. They decided that, in addition to the six existing playgrounds, seventeen more were needed, a disproportiante number of these in the slums. George Parker argued that the city should provide a playground in every neighborhood with six hundred children under the age of twelve, and in fact, “The city should be prepared to furnish sandboxes and rope swings wherever a neighborhood of thirty or more children ask for them,” but he did not specify what constituted a neighborhood. The Juvenile Commission insisted that the need was urgent: “There are about eleven thousand children under ten years old in need of these playgrounds,” and only about three thousand were able to use existing playgrounds or other suitable spaces near their homes. The commission was unable to get all the playgrounds it wanted, but added several in the congested area east of Main Street, boosting the total number there to seven and the total in Hartford to eleven.

Parker and the Juvenile Commission continued to try everything they could think of to increase the numbers of playgrounds. Examples were their attempt to lease land from private owners and their use of the Hucksters’ Market as a part-time play area. But even with the addition of more school playgrounds in the late 1920s, the total number of playgrounds operated by the parks department and the school system rose only to twenty-seven by 1930. To ease the crowded play conditions, the parks department worked to keep playgrounds open for longer periods of time. Playgrounds had been open only from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. in 1912, but in 1914 the city opened a night playground at Colt Park that was lit until 10 p.m. Playgrounds were also kept open for more of the year. By 1919 their seasons, which had included only July and August, ran from early spring through the fall. An all-year playground for young children opened at Elizabeth Park in 1914 to supplement the skating and skating activities popular with older children. By 1919 the city also had three indoor recreation halls. Supervised play was now possible year round and in any weather.

Parker and his allies claimed to see great improvement in those children who chose to play in the playgrounds instead of the streets. The
children not only were learning to play properly but also were less inclined toward delinquency. 'Playgrounds, if abundant and properly located, equipped and managed, make the neighborhood more orderly, clean and better,' Parker wrote in 1912. 'A policeman of the east side is reported as having said, 'the playground has solved the juvenile problem for us. We have none now, for the children are off the streets.'" This appears to have been little more than wishful thinking. Parker admitted later that there were still "thousands of children in Hartford growing up without a better playground than the street which is the most dangerous spot judged from every angle—alleys and streets do not turn out the best product for citizenship, and the officer on the beat has agreed to that declaration. Three or four city blocks are about the limit of travel for children who are looking for a playground." 61

That remained the problem. No matter how beneficial the influence of playground space, it could not touch the lives of those children who for whatever reason stayed away. W. J. Hamersley, the secretary of the juvenile commission, admitted in 1914 that most play still took place in the street. Boys appear to have been more likely than girls to prefer the street over the playground. According to parks department attendance statistics for 1915, significantly more girls than boys visited parks and playgrounds. The department recorded 144,000 visits by girls aged 5 to 11, compared with 125,000 visits by boys of the same age. Visits by girls from 12 to 16 years old outnumbered boys' visits 220,000 to 206,000. Only in the next age category, 17 to 25 years, was the ratio reversed. The figures do not separate playground from park attendance, but S. Wales Dixon, Parker's recreation director, noted that the playgrounds drew mostly girls and that many boys preferred more vigorous games than were played on playgrounds. 62

Parker continued to hope that more playgrounds and athletic fields would end street play, but from 1909 through the early 1910s he considered trying to extend the influence of the playground into the street as a temporary measure. Parker said in 1909 that the city should hire "a neighborhood or street worker" to see that "street play might be made more wholesome and advantageous until playgrounds are provided." He explained: "If the street is to be the playground for the children, then is it not logical to make the best use of it as a playground, until such time as a better one is provided? A 'director of street play' may yet be the

title of some school official. A playground worker for the street would be a novelty, but yet might be useful. If the children have no playgrounds to go to, then let the playground supervisor go to where the children do play." 63

Elaborating on this idea in 1914, Parker wrote that recreation workers should be given responsibility for play in the entire neighborhood, not just in the playground. Once again, he drew on familial imagery in describing recreation work: "The city should be divided into districts, each with a supervisor of play, to take care of the play . . . in that way we could keep track and be at the service of the people all the time. These people could be employed by the year, and by meeting people all the time, they would become the big brother or sister of that neighborhood . . . Every recreation employee should have a uniform, so that they would be easily recognized, and they would be known as the Big Brother of the district." 64

Parker never put this idea into practice. In 1916 he wrote that the department should not try to organize street play "until all protected spots have been equipped and found wanting." His assistant, Dixon, did at least some informal work with street play on the East Side, stopping boys from fighting and teaching them to play piggy instead. But park officials were reported in 1917 to believe that street play was too dangerous unless the street was blocked off, a step that they did not choose to take. 65

The fact that Parker even considered supervising street play is a sign of how desperate he was to improve play conditions in Hartford. He had emphasized repeatedly that children needed better play environments more than they needed direction from adults. He had hoped that playgrounds, though supervised, would substitute for the freer play spaces of the countryside that had nurtured previous generations of American children. If he had hired street play directors — "Big Brothers," in his unfortunate words — he would have been tacitly accepting that supervision was more important than environment.

The Impact of the Automobile

Parker did not fully achieve his goals. He succeeded in creating new play spaces for Hartford's children but found that these supplemented rather
than replaced street play. Even where playgrounds were available, many boys apparently preferred the greater freedom and excitement of the street. But the rapid growth of automobile traffic in the 1910s and 1920s made it far more difficult for play to coexist with adult activities. Ultimately, such traffic became another powerful force for getting children off the streets.

Parker never explicitly stated that he wanted children off the streets in order to ease traffic flow, and there is no reason to doubt his sincere concern for children's well-being. Nevertheless, he viewed the segregation of play as part of a larger differentiation of public space that would make Hartford function as an efficient system. In such a vision, nontransportation street uses were obstacles to be removed and put in their proper places. Segregating the uses of urban space would reduce conflict and benefit everyone, especially in a financial sense. Parker argued that the main goal of city planning was "to give every foot of . . . territory the greatest use and value to its present owner, its future owner and the city as a whole." As other observers would declare in more explicit terms, such utilitarian planning aimed at greater economic efficiency—a cause to which the games of street urchins clearly did not contribute. Parker and like-minded public figures successfully urged the city to improve the streets to speed the flow of traffic, and some of them worked to control pedestrian behavior for the same reason.

These reforms further encouraged the rapid growth in automobile use during the 1910s and 1920s. Horse-drawn traffic had interrupted play less frequently, and horses usually had the sense not to trample the children in their path. "We would run into the dirt covered roads and there we would play our games. Horses and wagons would pass us carefully," recalled Rose Witkower, who grew up on the East Side in the 1890s and 1900s. But the faster and more numerous vehicles of the 1910s and 1920s diminished the advantages of street play by creating constant interruptions and much greater danger. On many streets, children's claim to the space was overwhelmed. Traffic casualties soared in these years, and the vast majority of the victims were on foot. Children—notably in the immigrant wards—were particularly likely to be killed or injured. Of the thirty-one people killed in automobile accidents in Hartford in 1925, fourteen were children. Another 301 children were injured.

Playground advocates continued to couch their arguments in terms of the moral superiority of the playground over the street, but their rhetoric in the 1910s also emphasized the need to get the children away from the physical dangers traffic posed. A 1913 fundraising letter warned that children were playing in the streets "at the risk of their lives." A 1917 article describing the lack of playgrounds in some tenement districts warned that "the children have to play in streets under the horses' hoofs and auto trucks and there are frequent reminders of this in the accidents that happen." The Automobile Club of Hartford, of which Parker was a member, was also firmly opposed to street play, which made driving slower and more stressful. The club's publications initially complained about children as annoying obstacles to traffic, but later spoke in terms of child welfare. A 1919 article in the club's official publication lamented:

It is unfortunate that in some parts of the city it seems impossible to prevent children from playing in the streets. We realize that in some sections there is not any other place where they can play, but if they could only be taught to understand the danger of running out into the roadway, and that their safety depended upon their playing on the sidewalk, there would be fewer accidents. Only recently one of our members called at the club in regard to boys playing marbles in the streets. This is very dangerous as the boys are so intent on their play that they think of nothing else and are apt to run in front of a team or automobile.

Besides harassing children who played in the street, Hartford police in the early 1910s began trying to educate them about the dangers of traffic. This work was the responsibility of the officers assigned to crossing-guard duty at the schools. The youngest children, who had not yet developed bad habits, proved the most tractable. In a 1913 article, the Courant reported that one traffic policeman "finds the very little children, the kindergarten tots, the easiest to look after. They have become educated so that they pause the minute they reach the curb and wait for the signal that it is safe for them to cross. The older children do not always mind as well. They are thinking only of fun and forget there is any such thing as danger." In the middle of Market Street, a moderately busy thoroughfare on the East Side, one boy stood blowing a feather in the air until the officer hustled him out of the way of oncoming cars and trucks. "The boy seemed to resent the interference," the Courant reported, evidently
viewing his resistance humorously. As this boy was only beginning to learn, adults were taking away children's right to share certain streets.69

In a "Safety First" campaign in spring 1914, the Automobile Club of Hartford took traffic safety education directly into the schools, as other organizations were doing in cities nationwide. Members of the club gave speeches at schools throughout the city, telling students about the dangers of street play and urging them to cross only at the corners and only after looking both ways. The club printed placards—to be posted prominently in schools as well as in store windows—with photographs showing dangerous activities to avoid, for example, playing ball in the street. It also printed smaller instructional cards to distribute to every student.70 By 1920 the state had undertaken similar efforts. The motor vehicle commissioner, Robbins B. Stoeckel, had written a textbook about the dangers of the road and arranged for it to be distributed to public schools throughout Connecticut.71

In 1924, Police Chief Garrett J. Farrell reported that police and school officials had worked out a plan for greater cooperation in reducing childhood traffic fatalities. School children causing problems for police on crossing-guard duty would be reported to their school principal for disciplinary action. Police would speak in school assemblies about traffic safety and would show a film on the subject. School authorities would monitor children more closely as they left school to ensure that they stayed on the sidewalk until they reached the supervised street crossing. School officials would also meet with a representative of the National Safety Council to discuss ways to incorporate traffic safety training into the regular curriculum. "This plan is working out wonderfully well," Farrell wrote. "Not only is it helping to reduce accidents to the children of to-day, but it is believed that these lessons in safety will be so deeply instilled that they will continue to be effective when the boys and girls of to-day become the men and women of to-morrow." The Juvenile Commission joined the cause in late 1926 after considerable study. The commission undertook a yearlong safety campaign that included providing traffic safety posters and other educational materials to the schools, and broadcasting radio messages warning parents of the dangers of street play.72

State officials were cautiously claiming success by 1930. Child traffic fatalities had declined slightly in Connecticut in the late 1920s, reflecting a national trend, despite continuing increases in automobile use.

"Consistently better records are being made by children under 16 years of age in avoiding accidents," according to a report by the state Department of Motor Vehicles. "Child pedestrians, particularly, are increasingly becoming careful, the injury list having decreased steadily since 1927... The safety education being taught in the schools is having effect."73

Traffic may have made children more cautious, but it did not force them off the streets. Instead, it had the effect of segregating street use, creating sharply defined borders in the geography of urban play. Though the dangers and frequent interruptions created by motor vehicles in the 1910s and 1920s made play in busy streets impossible, not every street was busy. In the side streets and alleys of Hartford's tenement districts children continued to play on the pavement as well as on the sidewalks. Morris Cohen, who grew up in a poor Jewish neighborhood north of downtown, recalled how traffic affected boys' games in the 1910s: "We used to play some baseball, we played some football, and we learned to play piggy in the streets, not on Windsor Street itself because it was too busy, but we would go to Portland Street, to Pequot Street, or North Street."74

Reformers' efforts to shape children's play had evolved from an initial concern with individual sinfulness into an ideologically sophisticated campaign to change the use of urban space. From the boys' clubs through the Vacation Schools and finally the Parks Department, Hartford reformers had increasingly, though haltingly, turned away from overt attempts at moral reform. Instead, Mary Hall, Dotha Bushnell Hillyer, and George Parker placed greater faith in the influence of moral surroundings. All three hoped that play supervisors and improved play spaces could accomplish more—through the indirect influence described by Hillyer's other-than could heavy-handed tactics of the sort attempted by the earnest boys' clubs. Parker carried this trend the furthest. Though he lamented the decline in organic family life, he rejected it utterly as a model for reform. Segregation, not unity, was the answer. Drawing on new ideas of child development, Parker believed that children could be segregated with their peers into age-appropriate facilities and activities.
much as adults could be appropriately segregated by class and gender. These new play experiences would make unnecessary the earlier methods of control: striving toward the impossible goal of genteel parlor behavior or imposing the military discipline of directed gymnastics and pageantry. In a new environment of scientific nurture safely removed from the street, Parker hoped, the boys would happily let play experts help them meet their instinctual needs.

Parker failed, however, to isolate children in their own special environments. The new segregated play spaces supplemented but did not replace children’s play in the street, and not even the murderous force of the automobile was enough to dislodge them. Yet while the reformers fell short of fully achieving their goals, by the end of the 1920s, the geography of urban play had been transformed. Boys no longer treated the city streets in general as their playground but usually resorted to certain selected spaces—quiet side streets and alleyways away from adult traffic, the Goodwill Club, playgrounds, and parks. The play movement in Hartford, like the campaign against the newsboys, contributed to a partial separation of children’s activities from adults’ use of the streets.

Much to the annoyance of some members of the middle class, street peddling was inescapable throughout the entire city of Hartford in the 1890s. A woman emerging from the post office after mailing a letter would make her way past newsies, bootblacks, and a man sharpening knives. As she continued west through City Hall Square, she would pass a row of expressmen waiting to deliver packages, and might have to endure their catcalls. Once she got home, she might find the quiet of her neighborhood broken by the heavily accented cries of a peddler. To the peddlers, expressmen, street musicians, bootblacks, and newsboys, the streets were a marketplace that gave them opportunities to climb out of poverty. Middle-class reformers and city officials, however, saw street trades as nuisances to be regulated, confined, or suppressed. Changes in consumer habits were helping them, and by the late 1920s the entrepreneurial chaos of the street had been brought under control. Just as newsies had been restricted and regulated, expressmen had been banished from the streets, while produce peddlers had been pushed into the immigrant East Side.