“A symbol of the city’s wellbeing”: Frederick Law Olmsted, Public Health, and Central Park, 1858-1893.

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Abstract

Industrial cities throughout the second half of the 19th-century experienced rapid growth leading to the development of overcrowded and unhealthy living conditions for many residents. To combat these issues, the sanitary movement led by reformers, physicians, and administrators sought to educate urban residents about personal and domestic cleanliness, called for the construction of sewers to remove organic waste, and advocated for the preservation and creation of open space to purify noxious air. Notably, reformers like Frederick Law Olmsted viewed the creation of large and publicly accessible parks as a key urban planning technique to create disease-fighting spaces. According to Olmsted and his like-minded contemporaries, municipal parks not only purified the air of adjacent neighborhoods, but also provided residents with a physical escape from unhealthy urban environments. This paper seeks to illustrate how the sanitary movement and its concern for the health of urban populations influenced the design principles that Olmsted integrated into what is arguably known as his most notable urban project: Central Park in New York City. By analyzing historical documents ranging from public health reports, contemporaneous newspaper articles, planning documents, and the personal writings of Olmsted, this paper examines the relationship between 19th-century public health objectives and the specific design elements of urban parks. It does so by tracing the ways in which Olmsted parsed the sanitary movement's ambiguous call for open space in cramped cities into actionable goals, which include (1) leisure and recreation, (2) safety, and (3) psychology. This paper also goes on to investigate how urban residents reacted to the alleged health benefits attributed to city parks. As a result, this paper highlights how key aspects of the sanitary movement inspired design choices that can be observed in the park today, and observed in other urban parks later on in the future.

Introduction

Parks, estates, and university campuses designed by Frederick Law Olmsted (1822-1903) can be found across the United States. Designed and built over 150 years ago, these spaces remain beloved and central to the urban experience of the cities in which they exist. One of the most significant aspects of these parks is how they reshaped urban health over the past century. Olmstead's beliefs about public health influenced the decisions he made in the parks' designs from the most macro level to the smallest detail. Olmsted's attention to detail when creating healthful public spaces was key because he worked at a crucial inflection point in the history of cities and public health. His position, and the position of his parks, in history is something around which discourse on public health and the built environment discourse continues to revolve. But little scholarship has delved into how Olmsted specifically brought the questions of urban health to life in his designs. This means that understanding Olmstead's ideas about public health and their connection to the sanitary movement not only offers a way to understand your local Olmsted project, but it also offers an understanding of why urban space looks and works the way that it does today and how it may continue to evolve.

This became all the more apparent since the recent COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for public health to be a central design concern for functional open spaces in our cities. This historical investigation into Olmsted's urban parks offers us a glimpse into a similar moment in which illness seemed to lurk around every city corner, and how ambitious reformers, in search of a scientific panacea for such diseases, successfully reshaped the city itself. This project examines what influenced Olmsted, his designs, and the responses to the parks he designed during the second half of the 19th-century in order to grasp the full value of what Olmsted and his works offer us. In this paper, I will argue that Olmsted designed parks in response to the perceived

dirtiness and unhealthiness of cities in order to make them more livable. I will show how Olmsted designed the park using the realms of leisure, safety, and psychology to further public health. More specifically, I will show how Central Park's accessibility, sightlines, and topography promote easy but healthful recreation and leisure, how road design and police deployment ensured the parks reputations in the city as a safe place to visit, and finally how layout and horizons offered a stress relieving psychological break from the anxiety of the dense city.

Historical Context

A Brief Introduction to Frederick Law Olmsted

Olmsted is best known for designing Central Park in New York City. Born in 1822, Olmstead explored many careers like farming and journalism before he eventually settled on landscape architecture—a field of which he has been deemed the "American father."[1] But his many escapades in other fields helped shape his vision as a reformer and landscape architect.

Olmsted attained an important perspective and position through his unique experiences, skills, and connections that helped him execute these hundreds of projects across the United States. He worked for the U.S. Sanitary Commission during the Civil War, where he honed his skills for public health management. In that role, he managed the union relief effort, where he directed large logistical operations to deliver medical supplies to the frontlines, oversaw field hospitals, and perhaps most importantly (taking lessons from the British Sanitary Commission in the Crimean War) tried to address health concerns preventatively by fighting to ensure soldiers had good meals, clean spaces to live, and enough time to rest between marches and battles.[2]

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[1] Huberdeau, "Frederick Law Olmsted — the 'father of American landscape architecture' — to be celebrated in Stockbridge."
[2] Martin. Genius of Place: The Life of Frederick Law Olmsted, 199-201.

His work in journalism and literary circles helped him build strong relationships with other like-minded reformers. He worked for the New York Daily-Times as a traveling reporter in the antebellum South, writing about plantations and the dire conditions of enslaved people. As his articles grew increasingly critical of the Southern social structure, he forged strong professional relationships with other reform-minded progressives in New York City, including public health reformers like Andrew Jackson Downing and William Cullen Bryant, who both argued the city needed more open space.[3]

Finally, Olmsted gained a very strong understanding of agriculture through his "scientific farming" work. He took classes at Yale and read the latest literature on new practices in horticulture and farming. He drastically redesigned the farm he had on Staten Island in New York, in what would later be called his first "landscape architecture project."[4] As a part of this quest for knowledge about horticulture and landscape design, he toured Europe, where he encountered grand palatial estates for the nobility that would also influence his thoughts about parks.[5] From all of this, it is easy to see how Olmsted could later design Central Park. Olmsted's experience, skills, and connections became very useful tools in combating the public health concerns of urban residents that had grown in the 19th-century in America.

Urban Health in 19th-Century New York City

American cities in the second half of the 19th-century experienced rapid growth because of urbanization, industrialization, and immigration. The fast pace of this growth led to overcrowding in many urban neighborhoods, where many families lived in the same apartment.[6]

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[3] McLaughin, "The Environment: Olmsted's Odyssey." 83.
[4] Martin. Genius of Place: The Life of Frederick Law Olmsted, 56.
[5] McLaughin, 71.
[6] Snowden, The Sanitary Movement and the "Filth Theory of Disease."

These tenement neighborhoods did not have the infrastructure to care for the amount of people who lived there. (See Figure 1). Even the conservative newspaper the *Morning Courier* wrote that landowners "had no right to allow these wretched houses to be human habitations."[7] Landlords and investors began to see unregulated tenements as potentially more profitable than middle class housing because they could define their own "essentials of dwelling," believing "light, air, plumbing, sewerage, and Croton water were not necessities for the city's wage-earning families."[8]

Yellow fever and cholera broke out regularly, and these inner-city neighborhoods became seen as places where disease was common. The death rates in tenement districts were three times higher than the average in New York City in the last half of the 19th-century.[9]

As periodic epidemics broke out in the packed neighborhoods of the city, many urban residents fled the city. At one point, early in the 19th-century, over one-third of the city's population left from the port during the epidemic months. This was all while homes were marketed in other neighborhoods to wealthy New Yorkers with those amenities explicitly described as 'healthful.' Homes along Broadway promised those who could afford them a "healthy and airy" abode that made "retirement to the country unnecessary during the summer." "By the second decade of the 19th-century, to propertied New Yorkers, a 'respectable' neighborhood was by definition healthy."[10]

Apart from disease, wealthy residents also had other safety concerns: crime and raucousness. Earlier in the 19th-century, "polite society," dressed in their finest clothes, "conducted their daily promenade every evening at six o'clock, a public confirmation of their

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[7] Blackmar, Elizabeth. 1989. *Manhattan for Rent, 1785-1850*, 211.
[8] Blackmar, 209.
[9] Levine, Lucy. "'The Lungs of the City': Frederick Law Olmsted, Public Health, and the Creation of Central Park."
[10] Blackmar 85.

elite status." These pompous rituals, the very image of law and order, began to disappear as tenements grew in the 1840s. First, the promenaders retreated from the Battery in lower Manhattan and then from Broadway. These locations became the "target" of brazen youth, "often traveling packs of thirty or forty, who would overrun the sidewalks, driving respectable people into the gutters.'" Eventually, "the fear of lawless public spaces led New Yorkers, particularly women, to retreat to the safety and sanctity of their private drawing rooms."[11]

It was becoming increasingly clear to residents and reformers alike that the growth rate and development pattern of cities like New York resulted in untenable living environments. The English economist Thomas Malthus famously questioned the sustainability of this population growth in cities. Malthus persuaded some to think these urban ills were not worth solving because Malthusian population limits would be reached soon enough. The urban health crisis of the late 19th-century posed an existential threat to cities. If living conditions in industrial cities continued to get worse, how much longer could urban life persist? It was under these circumstances that the sanitary movement grew to try and make cities healthier and save urban lives in the process.

[11] Miller, *Before Central Park*, 319-21

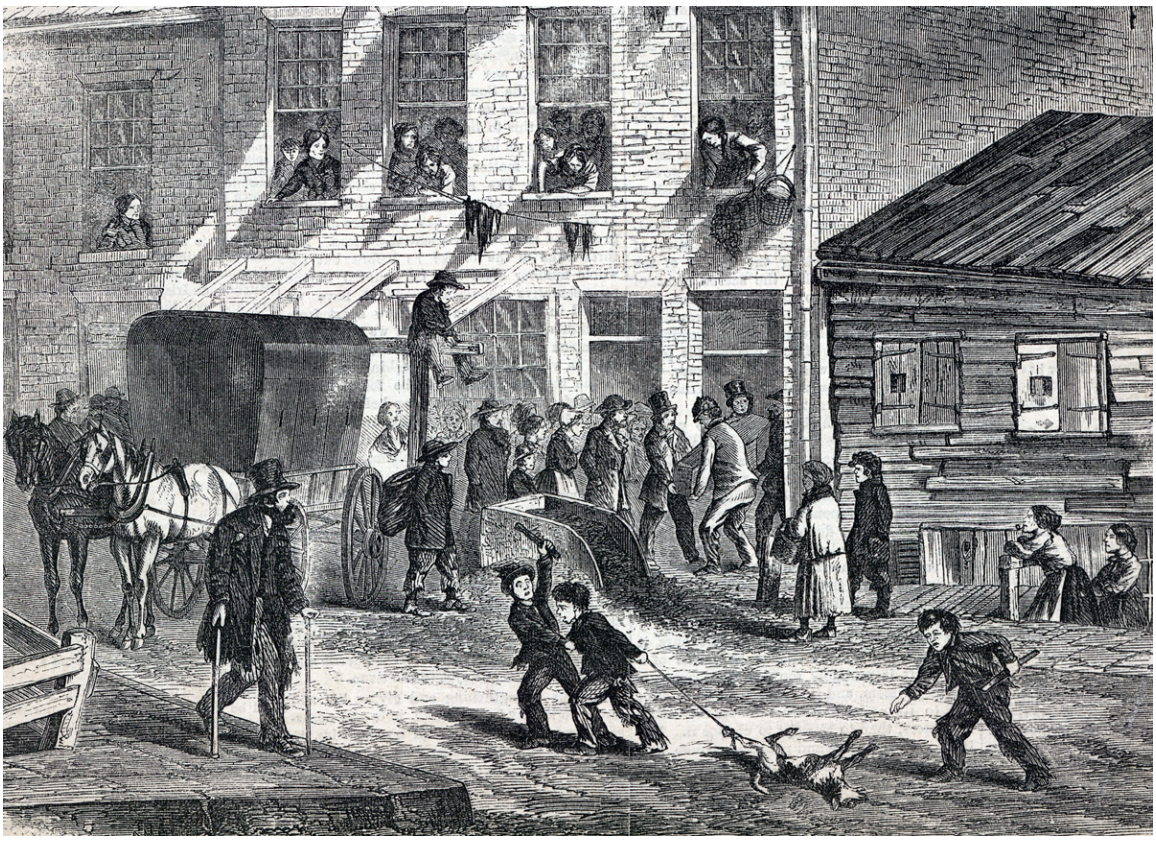

Figure 1. Tenement Houses, Five Points, New York— 1865.

(Photo: "Poor person's funeral, Five Points, New York City, July 1865, artist's impression, detail," House Divided: The Civil War Research Engine at Dickinson College.

The Sanitary Movement

The Sanitary Movement advocated for the construction of sewers to remove waste from these neighborhoods, worked to educate people on domestic hygiene practices, and ascribed to the miasma theory of disease.[12] The miasma theory of disease blamed 'bad air' from decaying organic matter for the spread of illness. This theory proposed, as a countermeasure, the removal of these decaying sources of 'bad air' and the circulation of fresh air throughout the city. The sanitary movement gained support from many reformers, each with their own specific issues and

[12] Snowden, The Sanitary Movement and the "Filth Theory of Disease."

concerns. To combat cramped space with open space, in Paris, the miasma theory helped inspire the demolition of crowded districts to replace them with wide boulevards that would allow more air to circulate through the city. In New York, physician-reformers advocated for the creation of Central Park, which, at the most basic level, acted as a giant cut out of the city that allowed for air to move through the city and be cleaned.[13]

From the departure of many wealthy residents, there was dramatic pressure to address these issues. The city had changed so dramatically so quickly, that it was ripe for reimagination. And Olmsted was there, ready to use his experience, skills, and relationships to redefine urban space around health concerns.

Literature Review

Olmsted was an important American figure who ascended to influential positions in the midst of a growing public health movement that scholars refer to as 'the sanitary movement.' Because this paper seeks to use Olmsted's work to illustrate the impact urban health ideas had on early urban parks, this literature review investigates Olmsted's life and work, as well as the contemporaneous sanitary movement of his lifetime. Key themes include: (1) the observations made about unhealthy space, (2) the desire to create healthy space as a countermeasure, and (3) public health-infused design principles that were applied to the development of Central Park.

<u>Unhealthy Space</u>

Modern scholars observe an intuition that urban residents and reformers had that people get sick and are less healthy when they live in tight spaces, which were common in cities of the

[13] Snowden, The Sanitary Movement and the "Filth Theory of Disease."

late 19th-century. Discussions of public health and identifying these unhealthy spaces and their problems developed rapidly as urbanization boomed due to industrialization. Populations exploded in cities. More and more people were living closer and closer together. Concern grew that these cramped neighborhoods were becoming epicenters of disease. Historian Jon Peterson claims that "scientific understanding of infectious disease which made headway in the United States" as it those diseases become associated with the "experience of urbanization" and the "socially intolerable conditions" that came with it."[14] Historian Lucie Levine furthers this association between disease and urbanization by pointing out that out of "fear of infection, disease. . . the city's wealthiest citizens to [left] New York" for the open countryside.[15] From this dynamic, we can derive from scholarly sources about public health beliefs from the mid 19th-century a simple observation that was made about space: there is 'healthy space' and there is 'unhealthy space.'

With this dichotomy in mind, the focus of civil servants on studying and identifying characteristics of these unhealthy spaces specific to their cities follows. Peterson notes that many similar projects were undertaken to identify specific responses for communities with the wealthy in the city funding organizations that "[investigated] the diseases of a locale and the associated physical conditions and then [formulated] solutions. . . to fit remedies to a specific setting."[16] Peterson's description of early sanitary reform projects highlight how they were assessing how healthy particular spaces in cities were and formulating plans to change physical space in order to improve the health of urban residents. The Historian Frank Snowden also discusses specific

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[14] Peterson, "The Impact of Sanitary Reform upon American Urban Planning, 1840-1890," 83.
[15] Levine, Lucy. "'The Lungs of the City': Frederick Law Olmsted, Public Health, and the Creation of Central Park."
[16] Peterson, "The Impact of Sanitary Reform upon American Urban Planning, 1840-1890," 90.

concern 19th-century physicians and public health thinkers had for "decaying filth in the microcosm of a specific neighborhood, community, or village" that made that particular space unhealthy. That concern came from the miasmatic theory of disease.[17]

Miasma is an illustration of the dominant explanatory reasoning for why this unhealthy space existed. Prior to the germ theory of diseases, miasma was the prevailing theory among sanitarians. It posited disease was spread through "miasma," or bad air.[18] As hinted above, this miasma was believed to come from decaying organic matter like corpses and waste. In these dark, overcrowded, tightly built-up areas, the production of this bad air was significant, and it had nowhere to go. Therefore, cleaning up sources of miasma and opening space for clean, purified air to properly circulate through cities became essential steps for remediations, according to sanitary thinkers. This clearing of miasmatic sources worked to create healthy space with the clear goal of combatting unhealthy space. This is exactly why historian Karen Jones notes that reformers began calling Hyde Park (a former royal hunting ground) the 'lungs of London,' and "situated the park as a healthy space, marked by open ground, verdant greenery and fresh air."[19] It was described explicitly for its role in clearing the air of bad contents. It was the antithesis to unhealthy space.

Of course not everyone subscribed to the miasma theory of disease. Even by the 17th century some physicians speculated that disease was something more akin to germ theory. These proponents are often referred to as contagionists. English physician Thomas Sydenham "promoted the idea that diseases are specific entities rather than a generalized dyscrasia," and he

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[17] Snowden, The Sanitary Movement and the "Filth Theory of Disease," 190.
[18] Snowden, The Sanitary Movement and the "Filth Theory of Disease."
[19] Jones, "'The Lungs of the City': Green Space, Public Health and Bodily Metaphor in the Landscape of Urban Park History," 49.

believed that one day "they would be classified according to the principles of Linnaeus,"[20] which scientists use to assign descriptive Latin names to plants and animals. Another prominent opponent to the miasma theory of disease was the physician John Snow who, using painstakingly collected statistics, correctly identified a polluted well as the source of cholera outbreak in London. But despite his efforts, he "failed to persuade the medical profession" and "miasmatism persisted as orthodoxy with regards to cholera."[21]

Healthy Space

It was this concept of unhealthy space that motivated urbanites and reformers to push for the creation of more 'healthy space.' This came in the form of regulation and sanitary officers trying to reclaim space from the unhealthy realm, but also in the establishment of brand new areas of the city designated to be open and spacious.

The miasma theory of disease helped inform decisions for reclaiming unhealthy space to make it healthy. There were a lot of ideas about how to go about doing this across the United States, and different cities tried different things. Historians Perkins and Magill illustrate how, in New Orleans, residents of cramped neighborhoods rife with disease systematically set buckets of tar ablaze to try to burn off the miasma.[22] By burning off miasma, residents hoped to turn their unhealthy, miasma-filled space into healthy, miasma-free space. This was against the advice of some reformers, but "the general public clung to theories of miasma... and remained unaware of the connection to sanitation."[23] This disconnect in scholarship indicates the possibility for the

[20] Snowden, Frank. "The Sanitary Movement and the 'Filth Theory of Disease'," 177.
[21] Snowden, 221.
[22] Perkins and Magill, "In the Late 1800s, Devastating Yellow Fever Epidemics Forced New Orleans to Confront Its Sanitation Problem," The Historic New Orleans Collection Quarterly, Winter 1986.
[23] Perkins and Magill.

further focus on the basic healthy vs. unhealthy space existing both with and without emphasizing miasma and how that impacted the scale at which solutions would be proposed.

Medical historian John Duffy, in his book *The Sanitarians*, describes how Union army officers in occupied New Orleans also tried to turn unhealthy space into healthy space. Wishing to fight outbreaks of yellow fever, they rigorously enforced cleanliness rules and "employed a labor force of two thousand men... to clean and drain the entire city; stables, slaughterhouses, and nuisance industries,"[24] and generally bring unhealthy space into a state of being healthy. Peterson hails the efforts of Sanitary engineer George E. Waring, Jr., who advocated for and designed collective sewers in cities across America to replace household cesspools. His efforts sought to "remove effete substances from immediate human surroundings"[25] in order to create healthy spaces out of the densely inhabited neighborhoods. This was a shift away from a legally enshrined system of individual responsibility for waste. In Britain draining waste into collective sewers was explicitly banned by law until the early 19th-century.[26]

"Cleaning up" unhealthy space in order to reclaim healthy space was not the only way to fight the problem of unhealthy space. Historian Lucy Levine claims that "a growing consensus [of public health officials and urban residents] saw open space as the key to improving public health in the city." Reformers also believed merely having access to healthy space would positively contribute to urban health. So some reformers, like poet and journalist William Cullen Bryant in New York City, would push for the carving out of new healthy space in the center of the growing city in what would eventually become Central Park. It is clear from the discussions

[24] Duffy, The Sanitarians: A History of American Public Health, 114.
[25] Peterson, "The Impact of Sanitary Reform upon American Urban Planning, 1840-1890," 89.
[26] Peterson, "The Impact of Sanitary Reform upon American Urban Planning, 1840-1890," 87.

of the sanitary movement that open space as a proxy for healthy space being carved out in urban areas was a key goal of theirs.[27]

Similar, but perhaps more drastic attempts to remake the urban fabric with entirely new healthy spaces were inspired by the miasma theory of disease in Europe. In Paris, for example, Frank Snowden notes that similarly cramped neighborhoods were leveled to make room for the wide boulevards that we now find in the city.[28] He claims that the intention was directly the result of the sanitary movement's belief in miasma. In Naples, the streets were raised to try to move people away from the miasmatic sources at ground level.[29] Similarly to these European examples, Peterson asserts that Olmsted believed parks "opened up the city and also offered sufficient trees and space to permit the disinfecting power of sunlight and foliage to modify the city's air."[30]

Within this dichotomy of unhealthy and healthy space, there exists a tension between large structural changes and small scale, piecemeal changes to create healthy space that one can observe in the literature. Sewers and new parks are examples of larger, structural changes to the fabric of a particular city. Sanitary officers, inspections, and local specific plans are examples of the smaller, piecemeal changes. Central Park lies undoubtedly in the former category, and this project will demonstrate how such a large undertaking goes beyond "opening up the city," as Peterson describes, and was tackled with many different specific individual health-focused decisions.

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[27] Levine, Lucy. "'The Lungs of the City': Frederick Law Olmsted, Public Health, and the Creation of Central Park."
[28] Snowden, Frank. "The Sanitary Movement and the 'Filth Theory of Disease,'" Lecture 11.
[29] Snowden, Frank. "The Sanitary Movement and the 'Filth Theory of Disease,'" Lecture 11.
[30] Peterson, "The Impact of Sanitary Reform upon American Urban Planning, 1840-1890," 93.

Design Principles in Central Park

Scholars have examined Olmsted's influences, design principles, and how they manifested themselves in specific design elements. Although Olmsted had many influences, because he was inheriting this project from sanitary reformers when he was hired to lead the construction of Central Park, he was forced to reckon with this question of healthy and unhealthy space. Many scholarly sources identify his wish to separate the experience of the park from the city, going along, at least partly, with the city-country dichotomy. In "Lungs of the City," Jones notes that Olmsted said, speaking as a New York resident, that he wished to "shut out the city from our landscape,"[31] but also that Olmsted wished to enliven the city with democratic space and enable people to enjoy the benefits of a city. According to Charles Birnbaum's *Experiencing Olmsted*, much of his early survey work for a project included identifying unhealthy elements of the area and generating ideas to combat and mitigate them.[32] According to historian Jon Peterson, "Olmsted believed that his parks, parkways, and suburban neighborhoods extended the historic trend towards more healthful cities."[33]

Biographical accounts of Olmsted during his time running the Sanitary Commission during the Civil War also indicate this division between healthy space and unhealthy space was central to how he planned and managed camps and field hospitals for soldiers. In *Frederick Law Olmsted — Partner with Nature*, Johnston showcases as Olmsted toured union army camps early in his stint at the U.S. Sanitary Commission, he was thinking about healthy and unhealthy space.

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[31] Jones, "'The Lungs of the City': Green Space, Public Health and Bodily Metaphor in the Landscape of Urban Park History," 53.
[32] Birnbaum, Experiencing Olmsted: The Enduring Legacy of Frederick Law Olmsted's North American Landscapes, 43.
[33] Peterson, "The Impact of Sanitary Reform upon American Urban Planning, 1840-1890," 93.

She cites him witnessing soldiers who "slept in mud and dirt" and therefore concluded there had been "enough of misused and poorly chosen land"[34] in the union army's field hospital system. To carry the discussion of scale forward, Olmsted's solutions fit firmly in the large, structural changes that sought to reshape hundreds of acres of the urban fabric through his massive park designs.

Biographical accounts' discussion of Olmsted's park design often focus, however, on his "unusually high intelligence,"[35] his eclectic experience throughout his life, and the odd set of skills he learned from those experiences, to explain success and his decision making. This leaves a gap in the literature about the role urban healthy ideology played in his design principles and the elements derived from them. By looking at literature from across Olmsted's working life (until 1893), we can begin to understand how urban residents reacted to it. Defining and carving out healthy space in New York City for Central Park necessitated one thing, while figuring out where healthy space could be made on Civil War battlefields was another question.

Many scholars have also explored Olmsted's work and legacy by explaining an aspect in which Olmsted's design philosophy and the elements he included in his parks had positive impacts on urban health. This literature tends to explain that Olmsted had a good understanding of how important the immediate environment was to one's health. It offers the most clear reflections on the successes and failures of Olmsted when it comes to the longevity of his different ideas and projects. The literature, while pointing out the parallels about environmental health concerns today to the ones Olmsted was dealing with,[36] also laments the fixation on treatment of the individual, which replaces the more holistic medical concern for the physical

[34] Johnston, 97-98.
[35] Duffy, The Sanitarians: A History of American Public Health, 112.
[36] Fisher, "Frederick Law Olmsted and the Campaign for Public Health"

environment. This points to the significance of answering the question of this thesis, because it highlights another historical approach to improving the health of urban residents that could still be useful today. In his essay for the American Society of Landscape Architects Dr. Richard Jackson points to the fact that "there is increasing evidence that contributing to the obesity epidemic is the lack of safe and healthy places to pursue even the most basic physical exercise, walking."[37] And within this lament, there is an acknowledgement of the hurdles facing today's society where this split exists. But there is also a hope that Olmsted's success offers a model to be learned from.

Conclusion

Olmsted's contemporaries, particularly those from the sanitary movement, had presented a particular public health framing for the issues that Olmsted was facing. My research examines Central Park in New York City to understand how those ideas manifested themselves in his park design. This case study illuminates the direct specific decisions derived from the healthy vs. unhealthy framing promoted by sanitarians, and explains how a simple, holistic approach to bettering the health of urban residents garnered positive reactions from Central Park's 19th-century patrons.

Conceptual Framework

This analysis seeks to answer two main questions: First, how did contemporary ideas about public health and sanitation shape the design and management of Olmsted's urban parks?

[37] Jackson, "What Olmsted Knew."

And second, how did these public health influenced design choices impact the park's public reception to it?

In this paper, I ultimately argue that Olmsted was influenced by the general ideas of the sanitary movement like miasma and the healthy and unhealthy space dichotomy, but he used his own actionable principles derived from those ideas to create an inclusive, healthful space. These manifested themselves in clear design choices, which in turn allowed for a lasting impact on parks in the American urban landscape.

These focuses succeeded in making crowded cities healthy and manageable for people with concerns about the effects of urban habitation on health, and thus these focuses became a staple of urban life, with subsequent city expansions and public works trying to emulate Olmsted's efforts. To understand Olmsted's work and its impacts, I will present my findings through the following ordered framework for the sake of clarity: First, I will clarify the influences that exist at the time, whether societal or from Olmsted's personal experience. I will then go on to extrapolate a design philosophy from these influences, taking care to show how both health-based & non-health-based influences interacted in these philosophies. From there, I will provide design choice examples that showcase these philosophies and thus are responding to the concerns about urban health. To do this, I am using Central Park in New York City as a case study to this end. Central Park makes for a good case to study because of the scale of the project, the clear public health issues that New York City was facing in the mid-19th-century, and the advocacy from reformers for its construction. Finally, I will provide accounts of historical reactions (both through media and analytical means) that demonstrate the extent of a particular philosophy's success, and its contribution to an enduring understanding of American urban space.

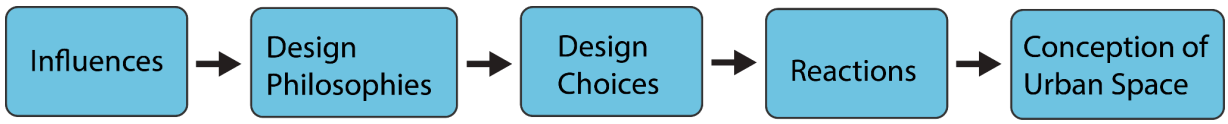

Figure 2: Outline of conceptual framework

Data & Methods

The goal of this research was to understand how the societal and personal concerns for the health of residents in the cities in which he designed parks influenced Olmsted's design work, and then, in turn, to understand how this impacted discourse about the urban experience and urban health from 1858 until 1893. I used existing literature on the history of public health, the history of urban planning, and on Olmsted's life to construct a clear picture of the context in which Olmsted was working and how current scholarship understands his work and significance. In order to do this, I analyzed historical documents to ascertain the physical conditions of urban residential space as well as understand how observers, government officials, and reformers wished to improve those conditions through urban park design. These two sources contribute to using Central Park in New York City as a case study for analyzing the characteristics of the park design and then seeing how its design was received by the nearby community.

Establishing Context (with Existing Literature)

I used existing literature to establish the context of scholarly discussions about Olmsted, public health, and parks. I have separated the existing literature into discussions of public health contemporary to Olmsted, public health today, and biographical information about Olmsted. These three groups of literature help see the different influences on parks. Early in American

history, urban parks did not exist in the way they do now, and they began to be constructed during Olmsted's career. The existing literature helped me answer the following two questions: What motivated the desire to build urban parks? And what influenced the decision to make them and how they were going to be built? In the contemporaneous public health secondary literature, I identified beliefs about the causes of disease and illness at the time and connected them to beliefs about the city. I enter these observations into a database to quickly be referenced for my analysis of the park designs. In the Olmsted biographical sources, I found hints at personal motivations for design decisions. I focus my analysis on his concerns for public health. Finally, modern public health secondary sources highlighted elements that scholars deem as being successful over time. I entered these into a separate database, to establish a connection between intention, maintenance, and success.

Historical Documents

i) Letters

By virtue of his work, Olmsted had a lot of correspondence with others where he had to make clear his perspective on a particular design element or philosophy of space. His letters revealed the value Olmsted placed on elements of the park, transition points between areas, or the process by which the park was constructed. What he advocated strongly for and how he wanted things to be done showcase a hierarchy of concern. He often wrote to people politically above him and had to make the case for the inclusion of some element or the hiring of a particular person. He also managed a large bureaucracy and had to defer and delegate to subordinates. Seeing that structure in his letters revealed his thought process. Finally, he wrote letters in less professional contexts as well, where he expressed his beliefs about certain ideas or

responded to particular concerns. Ultimately, letters offered earnest insight into his values about his design and helped me understand why he made a particular decision. Some examples of useful letters include those between Olmsted and George E. Waring, whom Olmsted hired to manage the drainage of Central Park.

ii) Park Plans

Park plans offer a clear idea of how Olmsted envisioned a space as a park. Through his plans we can see what he felt was important to convey and include about the space he wanted to create and the contextual space around the project. The many iterations that plans go through before finalization also offers an opportunity to see how a goal might have been refined, altered or dropped due to other priorities. This iterative process could also be directly compared with other historical documents like letters, where design ideas are discussed after one plan was made, and how the subsequent iteration of the plan included the changes discussed in the letters. Plans that were examined include Olmsted's initial Greensward proposal for the Central Park competition and his revisions thereto based on feedback from the Central Park Commission.

iii) Newspapers

I used the Chronicling America database from the Library of Congress and the New York Times Archive to search for local newspapers reporting on the parks or about nearby neighborhoods. I began by narrowing the search to either New York State or Illinois. But even after that, because of the sheer amount of results, I often filtered based on time period, and set the “words must appear in __ of each other” option to 50 in order to home in on the most relevant articles.

I used a pre-compiled list of neighborhoods near the park (see figure 3.1) and searched for those neighborhoods along with keywords about urban health and found articles both before and after the construction of the park, to see if anything has been reported and I note this down. This data contributed to the analysis of the change over time so as to make clear how Olmsted's park design influenced urban health and urban life. The results from these historical New York City newspapers showed the changes in how sanitation, crowding, illness, recreation, and general perception for the target neighborhoods have or have not changed.

New York	Hell's Kitchen	Garment District	Diamond District	Five Points	Tribeca

Figure 3.1: Nearby neighborhoods to park being used for searching newspaper databases. The neighborhoods were selected to represent different proximities to the park. Hell's Kitchen is relatively close to the new urban park, while Back Tribeca is further away. This selection offers a more holistic perspective on the impacts the park had on the city around it.

iv) Reports

Olmsted and his colleagues produced many reports for the city before embarking on his work and once it was well under way. Reports offered more quantitative data and official qualitative data from Olmsted's time period. These reports included studies of urban space to prepare for a park design, but also reports that were produced under Olmsted's tenure at the US Sanitary Commission. More specifically, I analyzed Olmsted Firm topography and health surveys, construction reports from subordinates, citywide reports from the park departments of New York City. These reports identified key aspects of the pre-project conditions that Olmsted was concerned with, what and how he attempted to address them in his parks, and the reactions to decisions that were made.

v) Olmsted's Writings

Olmsted published many writings throughout his life, both as articles and as books. Examining these texts offers an opportunity to get a chance to see Olmsted discussing his beliefs with the public. These writings showed him at his most intellectual, working in a polished format in which he has the time to think through his ideas (without the pressure of managing a massive project) and reflect on his work. The way he argued for or against ideas in his published works can shed light on what he thought was important to explain to general audiences and also what he thought was important to be an advocate for.

Data Analysis (Historical Analysis)

Olmsted routinely discussed the concern for health in the letters, reports, and writings that he authored during his time as director of Central Park, from his time traveling in Europe to study garden, estate, and park designs all the way up until the completion of the park.[38] There were many ways in which he promoted the health of urban residents during this period. This data analysis will suggest that when parsing the many amorphous ideas of the sanitarians, as well as his own beliefs about city health in order to make clear design decisions for Central Park, Olmstead used three principles. The first principle was *leisure and recreation.* This could be supported through easy entrance to the park, appealing outlooks and destinations, and minimal resistance as one moves through the park. The second principle is *safety*. Olmsted supported safety by working to prevent traffic collisions, commanding police, and controlling entries and exits to the park. Finally, the third principle was *psychology*. The psychological element is present across Olmsted's writings. He emphasized the great effort that should be expended to

[38] Martin. Genius of Place: The Life of Frederick Law Olmsted, 120.

create particular psychological realms for people to enjoy in the middle of the city that will free them from what he believed was the anxiety and stress on the body induced by city life.

Leisure and Recreation

This is perhaps the most obvious goal that one can see when reading Olmstead's writings: creating a pleasant place for the people of New York to find leisure and recreation in. Leisure and recreation are answers to many of the concerns that sanitarians had. This was apparent before he even presented his plan for the park, and was sharpened by his desire to create 'unconscious recreation,' and his aesthetic decisions regarding vistas and perspective. In the cramped unhealthy-space neighborhoods, it was hard for residents to relax, breathe clean air, and simply have the space to move freely and exercise. The ways in which he designed the park with this in mind included the ease of entry to the healthy space from unhealthy spaces and encouragement of healthful activity while there.

Nature eventually became, from Olmsted's point of view, a space conducive to recreation. After Olmsted was hired to be the superintendent of the unbuilt Central Park, he embarked on an ambitious journey across Europe to study the design and management of European parks, gardens, and palatial estates. He noted that "basically every large town in the civilized world now has public pleasure grounds in some form."[39] In his essay, originally published by the *New American Cyclopedia*, he focused on the pleasure aspect and painted a picture of well curated nature across these many European parks and the social life that these parks were able to inspire in the visitors. He ultimately concluded that he believed the English model for capturing the essence of nature was the best, saying "all in imitation of nature, is to

[39] Frederick Law Olmsted, "Park"*, The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted; v3.*

this day the particular of England."[40] The Greensward plan that he submitted in the design competition for Central Park stands in stark contrast to other plans that sought to impose formal arrangements onto the rough and rocky terrain of Central Park's site that made human involvement very obvious.

John. J Rink's submission, for example, took inspiration from the formal French gardening tradition, including many trimmed planters and symmetrical paths (See figure 4.1). Entering Rink's proposed park would have taken visitors from one realm obviously created by human society (the city) into a different, but still very obviously human designed and maintained space (the park). The paths along which visitors would stroll would have been harsh and geometric, highlighting only a slight break from the gridded streets of the city. The greenery and open space around the visitor would surely have, by sanitarian standards, helped purify and ventilate the city with clear air. But plantings would have been arranged in such a curated manner that the visitor would undoubtedly feel the power of civilization and the constant employment of many gardeners and caretakers to maintain the man-made gardens. Not only that but Rink, like the 31 other losing proposals, would have weaved in traffic from surrounding streets, further obstructing the visitors' recreation and sense of escape from the city. Just like the rising industrial metropolis around it, Rink's Central Park would have been a triumph of man over nature. But, from Olmsted's point of view that would hamper the recreation that the park could offer to visitors.

Olmsted, thus, went to great lengths to make his design resemble nature because he felt it would best serve recreation. In his submission (see figure 4.2), the paths wind largely in line with natural topology of the land (which he was able to do thanks to civil engineer Egbert Viele's— his professional rival throughout his tenure working on the project— surveying work, for which

[40] Olmsted, "Parks", 360.

the city was sued).[41] In contrast to Rink's largely flat plan which would have allowed for the growing city around the park to easily catch visitors' attention, Olmsted focused the attention of the visitor inward towards the center of the park. Most of his paths begin at the corners of the park and work inwards trying to quickly move visitors between hills, large boulders, and forested areas, while Rink's design welcomes visitors at the center and moves in a direction looking back outside of the park. Olmsted writes in the accompanying explanation to the Greensward plan, that "the planting generally is designed to give the greatest number of points of view" and "to produce the impression of great space and freedom." It is this sense of freedom that he contrasts with "walled-in floors or pavements to which [urban residents] are ordinarily confined."[42] And as mentioned above, Olmsted's paths not only weave through the topography of the park site, but they also weave over and under the roads made for crosstown traffic as well as for leisure carriages. Olmsted designed the park to immerse the visitors in nature so as to support the recreation he believes happens easily and often in the countryside.

[41] Miller, *Before Central Park*, 369.
[42] Olmsted, "The Greensward Plan," *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted; v3, 154.*

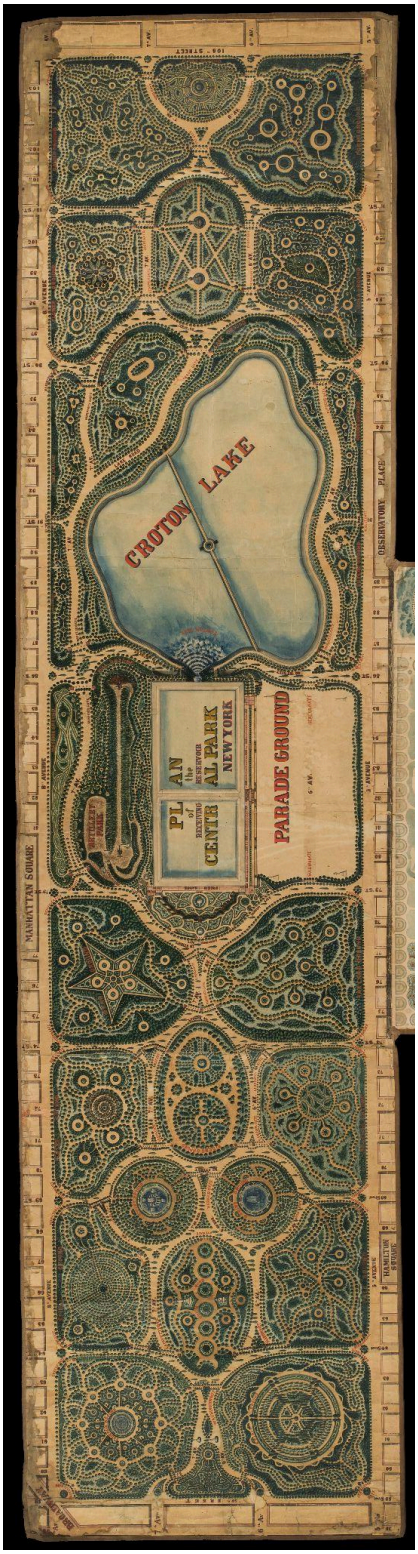

Figure 4.1: John J. Rink's submission to the design competition
(Photo: Rink, J. John, Plan of the Central Park, New York: Entry No: 4, March 20 1858, New-York Historical Society.)

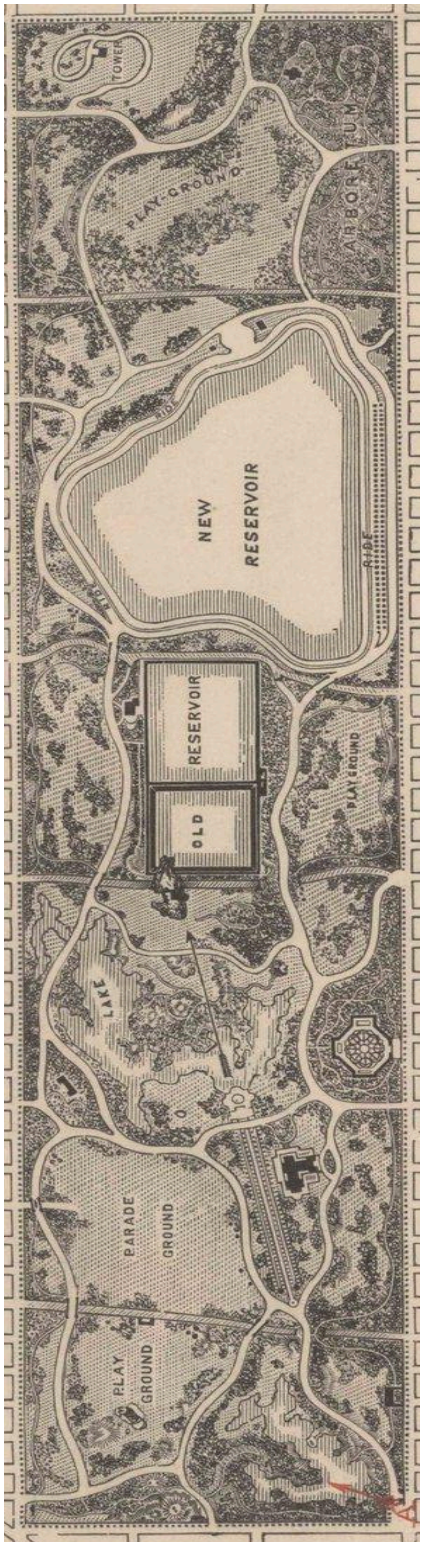

Figure 4.2: Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux submission to the design competition Greensward Presentation board no. 2., 1858. Department of Parks and Recreation Drawings Collection, NYC Municipal Archives

More directly applicable to the design of Central Park is Olmsted's insistence on ensuring 'unconscious recreation' for the park visitors. Olmsted himself believed that recreation is good for one's health. And if recreation meant getting people out of the unhealthy space and moving around in open, healthy space, many in the sanitary movement would have found it healthy too. Before visitors had even arrived, Olmsted wanted to ensure that they could cross the boundary into the park for "which there are gates at convenient intervals."[43] By "unconscious," Olmstead meant that the visitors would have the "least exercise of judgment as to the course to be pursued, the least possible anxiety or expense of skill in regard to the collision or interruption."[44] He stressed the importance of drainage to ensure convenient use of paths in all weather, and hired the renowned drainage engineer George Warring to make sure this was done correctly from the outset.[45] The more the park could get people into healthy space and perform some kind of recreational activity, the better– and weather should not be a barrier for city residents either.

Olmsted also articulated his belief for how to move people through the park with minimal impediments. This included ensuring wide paths for groups of couples to comfortably stroll with each other without interfering with other group's movement, while restricting the width of promenades and roads such to promote "recognition of acquaintances" and a "neighborly" feeling.[46] Olmsted encouraged the crossroad to occur on level ground so as to maintain the natural wandering sensation and to not incentivize the exploration of one direction over the other.[47][48] He also advocated for avoiding sharp turns because he believes that moving along a

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[43] Olmsted, "The Greensward Plan," *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted; v3, 203.*
[44] Olmsted, "Walks and Talks," 2: 155.
[45] Olmsted to Andrew Green, November 15th 1860, 284.
[46] Olmsted to Brooklyn Park Commissioners, January 1871, *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted; v3*, 414.
[47] Charles E. Beveridge & David Schuyler, Introduction to *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted; v3*, 23.
[48] Olmsted, "The Greensward Plan," *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted; v3, 119.*

curved path causes “the play of light and shade” to never become monotonous and is instead “never wholly without interest”[49]

Beyond simply making the movement of already engaged visitors go seamlessly, Olmsted wanted to encourage people to move across the park and suggested particular vistas that would create curiosity and a goal for visitors to move towards. For instance, he wrote in the Greensward plan that the elevated Vista Rock is “the most prominent point in the landscape of the lower park” and that a visitor “will most naturally pursue” it.[50] He further suggested the addition of a tower to make the destination even more intriguing for the viewer to move towards.[51] And as people made this journey across the park, Olmsted wanted to arrange it so “as to avoid bringing the pedestrian in contact with the drives or the rides.”[52] But this concern for pedestrians coming into contact with horse drawn carriages was not limited to the breaking of the visitor’s leisurely experience— it also came from a concern for safety.

Speaking to the common city-country dichotomy that many sanitarians embraced, Olmsted wrote that the park ought to serve the purpose of the countryside for the urban residents who cannot so easily retreat there: “because it is one great purpose of the Park to supply to the hundreds of thousands of tired workers, who have no opportunity to spend their summers in the country, a specimen of God’s handiwork that shall to be them, inexpensive, what a month or two in the White Mountains or the Adirondacks is, at great cost, to those in easier circumstances.”[53] Bringing the countryside to the city offers up plenty of opportunity for relaxation and exercise

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[49] Olmsted to Brooklyn Park Commissioners, January 1871, *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted; v3*, 411.
[50] Olmsted, “The Greensward Plan,” 125.
[51] Olmsted, “The Greensward Plan,” 132.
[52] Olmsted to the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, May 31st 1858, *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted; v3*, 196.
[53] Olmsted to the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, May 31st 1858, *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted; v3*, 196.

that was not possible before this healthy space was carved out in the city grid. Olmsted made reference to the popular miasma theory about the role of clean air in disease prevention. He explicitly mentioned that the park is "chiefly valuable as furnishing a place" for "taking the air."[54] In a letter of advice to the Commissioners of Mount Royal Park in Montreal, Olmsted continues this discussion of the city-country dichotomy in how a park enables physicians to weigh "what is likely to be gained through quiet, pleasurable recreation while moving or resting in the fresh air of a mountain" against what will be neutralized "through fatigue, worry and excitement," as well as the monetary cost incurred.[55]

In recognizing the health benefits that country can bring an individual, Olmsted was also able to see the limits that most urban residents faced in ever receiving those benefits because of their station. He designed Central Park to feel natural like the countryside because he felt it was the most conducive to healthful recreation. But he did so in a careful way to enable mass use by the hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers. And he did this by trying to facilitate "unconscious recreation" to further decrease the potential resistance that visitors may feel in a park. He made sure it was easily accessible to people, and the natural elements always remain somehow a little bit new and interesting for visitors to continue their recreational habits. By designing for leisure and recreation, Olmsted worked towards his vision of a more healthy urban environment.

Safety

Throughout Olmsted's writings about Central Park, he maintained a major concern for the safety of the visitors. This exemplified his concern for the health of the visitors (that they would not actively be hurt in the park) and it created an enduring reputation for the park, which

[54] Olmsted, *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted; v3,* 216.
[55] Olmsted to the Board of Commissioners of Mont Royal Park, November 21st 1874, *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted; v7*, 85.

ensured that residents would continue to visit the park and enjoy the other health benefits it could offer.

To begin with, Olmsted used the physical management and separation of modes of transportation within the park to combat injuries (which are inherently unhealthy) and keep visitors safe. He believed mixing modes of traffic was a bad idea, because he saw the potential for injury. Not long before he began designing the park, Olmsted himself had been seriously injured in a carriage accident, so he knew all too well how dangerous vehicles could be for visitors.[56] Put simply, "a carriage coming directly upon the course of a pedestrian or of a man on horseback is... positively dangerous."[57] Consequently he proposed the complete separation of traffic types. A series of bridges and tunnels would keep pedestrians away from horses and carriages. His plan dropped crosstown traffic into sunken transverse roads[58] and created grade-separated pleasure carriageways for intra-park leisure traffic.[59] No other plan submitted for the Central Park design competition suggested this. As superintendent, but before he submitted his own plan for the park, he was critical of a submission that sought to build a wide, straight drive running the length of the lower park.[60] He said most clearly in his own Greensward plan submission, "it will be perceived that no long straight drive has been provided on the plan; this feature has been studiously avoided, because [the safety and atmosphere of the park] cannot be preserved if a race-course, or a road that can readily be used as a race-course is made one of its leading attractions."[61] Outside of Central Park, during his work surveying the northern tip of

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[56] Olmsted to the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, January 22nd 1861 (resignation letter), *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted; v3*, 319.
[57] Olmsted, 216.
[58] Olmsted, "Greensward Plan," *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted; v3*, 121.
[59] Olmsted, 216.
[60] Olmsted to the Board of Commissions of the Central Park, May 20th 1858, *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted; v3,* 191.
[61] Olmsted, "Greensward Plan," *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted; v3*, 151.

Manhattan, he also proposed inconvenient, curved streets for that area in order to discourage unwanted traffic, which also speaks to how he chose to design roads and paths to keep vehicles of the time away from people. In the annual Central Park Commission, Olmsted submitted reports of arrests for traffic violations. Olmsted kept traffic separate and slow in order to save park visitors from vehicular injury.

Going beyond traffic dangers, Olmsted also had an ever-vigilant attitude to controlling crime in Central Park. Many, but especially the wealthy, did not consider the streets of New York City safe to stroll along.[62] Olmsted sought to ensure that Central Park was a safe haven free of crime within its walls. He specifically noted the purpose of the walls, and contrasted the park with the city beyond walls in the Greensward plan, suggesting "a mere parapet-wall three or four feet high will, in such cases, be all-sufficient for the safety of promenaders and the protection of the park from interlopers."[63] In a letter to the Board of Commissioners in 1860, he lamented the robbery of a child and blamed inadequate policing of the park. He feared that continued issues with crime in the park would damage its reputation, cause fewer residents to visit it, and as a result the park would fail to serve as a place of healthy leisure and exercise for people. For this reason, he asked the commission to hire more gatekeepers and policemen, and to look into the possibility of using mounted police units on horses to help the policemen patrol the large park and to prevent criminals from fleeing.[64]

To further clarify how important Olmsted thought it was for the park to be safe, he wrote, operating under the belief that the *leisure and recreation* afforded by the naturesque park discussed above is beneficial to the health, that not just "invalids and convalescents, but numbers

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[62] Miller, *Before Central Park*, 321.
[63] Olmsted, "Greensward Plan," *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted; v3,* 124.
[64] Olmsted to the Board of the Commissioners of the Central Park, November 13th 1860, t*he Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted; v3,* 280.

of school girls and children in delicate health were induced to spend much time in the park, and they did so without annoyance or any feeling of insecurity." After being relieved of his duties managing the park the previous year, Olmsted wrote to the Board of Commissioners member Henry G. Stebbins about the new security practices implemented by the new superintendent. He stated the new practices have led to that sense of security for the ill to disappear, leaving them with fewer options for recreation, and thus treatment for their condition. He warns Stebbins and the Board that if the new superintendent and police cannot stop those who display "insolent, cruel, lewd, and dishonestly selfish propensity" then "the value of this costly recreation ground will have vanished."[65]

Park safety and the construction of the Promenade, which later became known more democratically as "the Mall," was meant be a place for polite society to return to their practice of promenading. Previously residents had increasingly stopped promenading, withdrawing to their homes instead. This was especially true of women. Olmsted felt that this homebound retreat, even if surrounded by nature, meant that these "women living more confined, dull, and dreary lives than in any barbarous country." Olmsted wanted to draw these couples back out of the home to his promenade. The promenade was one of the first sections of the park that opened to the public,[66] and Olmsted estimated that he placed it perfectly at the center point of New York's population, such that it could most easily be accessed and enjoyed by the maximum number of urban residents.[67]

For Olmsted, the Park was designed to ensure the safety and comfort of visitors because he imagined the park as a designated refuge of security for the city. The system of separation

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[65] Olmsted to Henry G. Stebbins, August 27th 1874, *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted; v7,* 75-76.
[66] "The Central Park. Progress of the Work— Its Present Condition and the Prospects of its being Opened to the Public," *The New York Times*, November 11, 1858.
[67] Olmsted to Henry G. Stebbins, December 3rd 1875, ed. Beveridge, *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted; v7,* 168, n. 6.

between the park and the city, and between activities and movement throughout the park ensured the park was a contiguous space of safety. This, along with the system of park keepers and police, further showed city residents that recreation, whether they are casual strolls 'taking in the air' or "manly" ball sports, was safe to do in the park.

Psychological Health

Olmsted believed in the value of the pleasure parks as places of psychological rejuvenation. The bustle of the growing city was the source of many possible ills, from Olmsted's point of view. He noted "the effect on their nerves and minds of the street contact—[with people] often complaining that they feel confused by it." He lamented the anxiety people endured as they navigated the chaotic and crowded streets where they must always be on guard, "to merely avoid collision... and to guard against [others'] movements." [68] Olmsted explicitly aimed to make Central Park a refuge from those psychological ills and knew that Central Park might be one of the only places someone could find that refuge in the city. He said everything outside of the park will be built up to be straight, angular, and alienating.[69] He felt that during his visit to a South American rainforest the tropical plants had a positive psychological effect, and therefore did his best to include tropical plants into the garden arrangements, despite New York's climate.[70]

Olmsted insisted on not calling attention to man made structures in the park, and he used perspective tricks with the color of different plants to make the space seem larger and to obscure the reality of the city around the park.[71] And his fight to sink and hide the crosstown traffic from

[68] Olmsted, "Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns," 65-66.
[69] Olmsted to Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, May 31st 1858, *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted; v3,* 196.
[70] Olmsted, *Introduction to The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted; v3,* 14.
[71] Olmsted, *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted; v3,* 364.

visitors to the park not only kept them safe, but further built the illusion that the park is removed from the city. He explicitly mentioned the deleterious psychological effect that he sought to avoid in the minds of visitors: he thought "the mere consciousness that one's path may be crossed by a horse or carriage, causes a feeling of anxiety."[72] In addition to the leisure, recreation, and safety the park offered urban residents, Olmsted used his designs to cordon off the park from the stressful world of the urban environment and create a new healthy psychological space in the city too.

Historical Reactions

In order to further understand Olmsted's attempt to use these sanitarian and public health principles to create healthy space, reactions from urban residents and health reformers can provide important insight. These historical reactions can be found in letters to Olmsted and newspaper articles from the time period 1857-1893 and hint at the possible successes and failings of Olmsted's health-minded design principles.

Physicians began to perceive Central Park as a reasonably healthy space for patients whom they believed needed retreats to the countryside, which was a common prescription at the time for ill and recovering patients. One physician wrote to Olmsted that he "once formerly ordered patients of a certain class to give up their business altogether and go out of town" but that he "now often [advises] simply moderation, and prescribe[s] a ride in the Park before going to their offices and again a drive with their families before dinner." And another doctor noted that "the lives of women and children too poor to be sent to the country, can now be saved in thousands of instances, by making them go to the Park."[73] These patients, from the doctor's

[72] Olmsted, "Greensward Plan," *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted; v3,* 116.
[73] Olmsted, "Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns," 93-94.

perspective, are able to get important clean air, exercise, and stress relief while in Central Park. Before Central Park, it would have not been possible to do this inside the dense urban core of New York City. The endorsement of Central Park by working physicians as a place conducive to recuperation from illness for both the wealthy and the poor points towards how the park meaningfully changed the way health professionals thought urban residents in New York City could live.

Central Park quickly became very popular and newspapers offered reactions from the general public. The New York Times commented on the German community's adoration for its psychological benefit to them as an escape from the alien urban environment of New York City and as a place for exercise. The Times made the case that, because German immigrants were "coming from a country where out-door life and rural enjoyment are matters of course, they had for years found in our Central Park, not only a thing of beauty, but a joyous memorial of their early homes... and partook in open-air exercise."[74] That the German community supported and used of Central Park as a psychological escape from the city fits in well with Olmsted's intention to create a refuge from the urban environment that he believed was difficult and stressful on the body.

Some other newspaper articles from the time, however, were more critical of Central Park and Olmsted. The New York Herald criticized Olmsted in December of 1860 for failing to prevent unsafe conditions on the skating rink after an estimated "ten to fifteen thousand skaters" visited the park and the ice had not been resurfaced. The Herald wrote "everybody was disgusted, and used very strong language all of which we endorse." [75] This speaks, in some ways,

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[74] "One Cause of German Discontent," *The New York Times*, September 18, 1871.
[75] *The New York Herald*, December 16, 1860.

to the success of Central Park. It was able to attract that many visitors for a form of leisurely exercise that it provided only two years after construction began. The criticism even seems to support the park's implicit ability to offer leisurely exercise to a large number of residents, and merely thinks that more should be done to accommodate that activity and make it safe— as Olmstead would have wanted.

On a similar note regarding safety and health, Olmsted was praised at an 1865 meeting of sanitarians in London for his work on Central Park. A correspondent for the New York Times article writes that Olmsted, "if put at the head of a bureau of streets, could keep our city thoroughly clean, and at much less expense than, the present dirt entails."[76] They referred specifically to his command of the park keepers/police. The reformers had met to discuss legislation for cleaning up and de-densifying tenement neighborhoods, which they believed would require "health officers to be appointed, and a police to aid and judges to sentence." They referred specifically to how the police in Central Park had been arranged by Olmsted as a potential model because of the public's belief in their efficiency and trustworthiness. The praise Olmsted received at this meeting of sanitarians hints at agreement among some reformers that authority figures were essential in the process of creating safe, healthy space.

In his 1866 "Guide to Central Park," landscape artist Richard T. Addison wrote positively about the park's ability to provide a consistently interesting naturally appearing place for recreation. He noted that, even as the park is still under development in some areas, visitors would find "a devious and ever-changing stroll of twenty-seven miles" available to them. And he praised "grateful shade of its dense vegetation, with its quiet walks and pleasant resting-places" that the forested area called 'the Ramble' offered. Finally, he pointed out that the transverse

[76] "European Social Reforms; The Cholera Measures to Prevent It," The New York Times.

roads the Olmsted fought hard to include to preserve the naturalistic feeling of the park for the visitor more-or-less do their job because "they do not concern the visitor at all."[77] The crosstown traffic does not break the immersive experience within the park. Coming from a landscape painter, Addison's guide to the park shows that Olmsted's painstaking attempt to create a quasi-natural landscape in the city was satisfying enough for him to praise the recreational possibilities in the park. His note specifically about the "ever-changing" nature of the stroll through the park also speaks to Olmsted's effort to ensure an experience in the park is "never wholly without interest"[78]

After Olmsted was no longer in charge of Central Park, more critiques and attempts to change the park began to arise. In a letter to the editor published in the New York Times entitled "A Plea for the Riders," the author protested the state of the bridle paths for horseback riding in the park. The author claimed that "all riders in the park are vividly aware of the inadequacy of the bridle path" and implored the Board of Commissioners to widen the paths and not rely on "stay on right" and "go slowly here" signs to regulate riders. They argued against Olmsted's attempts to control horseback riders for safety reasons by pointing out that "everyday [one] sees on the path those who veriest novices in horsemanship" who cannot be relied upon to carefully navigate the narrow paths. Ultimately, the writer of the letter claimed that Olmsted's design choices need to be altered because "the pleasure and safety of people are necessarily imperiled and many more are deterred altogether from riding."[79] Although reformers give credit to Olmsted for his management of security within the park and the building up their reputation as

[77] Richards, Guide to the Central Park, 15-18.
[78] Olmsted to Brooklyn Park Commissioners, January 1871, *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted; v3*, 411.
[79] "A Plea for the Riders," The New York Times.

"trustworthy and efficient,"[80] many urban residents felt his designs were too restrictive for certain activities. They inhibited their preferred form of recreation and dissuaded them from enjoying the park in the first place. If a novice could only learn horseback riding on expert level paths, the promise of bringing the countryside to the urban core falls a bit short.

In the 1890s, other reform and charity groups lobbied the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park to do more to make the park "attractive to the poor of the city." Although the leaders lauded the park's offering of "fresh air excursions for the poor," just as Olmsted had wanted, they also suggested that the park "provide places of refreshment at which break, milk, butter, eggs, and other simple articles [to] be furnished." This proposal makes a potential blind spot of Olmsted's principles more clear.[81] As he sought to merely create this safe, open, healthy space that could cater to all (including and especially wealthy), it meant Central Park left behind many other health concerns of the city's poor. Their nutrition and ability to wash themselves were clear gaps in Olmsted's original formulation of Central Park as a healthy space.

This survey of historical reactions demonstrates that Olmsted's principles for creating a park that would provide health benefits to the urban residents of New York did bear fruit, but not without feedback and resistance from urban residents. Physicians prescribed leisure in the park to the ill. An artist focused on the natural environment believed it offered ample opportunity for natural recreation. Sanitarians praised Olmsted's security regime in the park. But others expressed their belief that the park failed to provide for other conditions of health. A horseback rider criticized the design of the paths. A charity organization pointed out a hole in the park's provisions for the poor. And with these critiques, some aspects of the park changed. The paths

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[80] "European Social Reforms; The Cholera Measures to Prevent It," The New York Times.
[81] "Outings in Central Park," The New York Times.

were widened.[82] Similarly, Olmsted's original rules on active sports were loosened to allow for more forms of recreation.[83] and the Board of Commissioners agreed to be more inclusive of the poor in the park.[84] The reactions discussed above all contributed to a larger conversation about the park that continued to shape it past Olmsted's tenure and shows how the public health nature of the park evolved beyond Olmsted's vision and his principles.

Conclusion

Olmsted left an indelible mark on the American urban landscape, and his parks helped make the modern city. Millions of people visit his parks across the United States each year and he remains an inspiration for landscape architects today. He worked at a time when New York City and other American cities had not come up with a lot of concrete solutions to the new public health crises of growing tenements and disease-ravaged neighborhoods that they were facing.

Most scholarship revolving around early urban parks and Olmsted's parks do not focus on the principle of health in their creation. Past research has not delved into how these urban parks attempted to fight illness and promote health in the city, nor have they assessed the reactions to those methods.

By investigating the design history of Central Park in New York City, this thesis shows how the ideas behind sanitation and public health ideas informed and inspired reformers to create American urban parks through their specific design elements and thus helped create the American city as we understand it today. When walking around Central Park, or any great urban

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[82] "Central Park Drivers— Improvements Suggested with an Eye to Future Needs," The New York Times.
[83] Levine, Lucy. "'The Lungs of the City': Frederick Law Olmsted, Public Health, and the Creation of Central Park."
[84] "The Poor and the Parks," The New York Times.

park, perhaps you will notice the small minutiae that keeps you exercising, the structural choices that keep you out of harm's way, and the attention to detail that hides the anxiety of the outside world. Despite the advances made in medicine over the past 150 years, the degree to which the spaces that dominate our lives are designed with our holistic health in mind are few and far between. But Olmsted's spaces are designed for this. Understanding the public health roots of Central Park reminds us that through the creation of healthy space we can work towards a healthier city.

This paper's investigation focused specifically on New York City's Central Park, and as such its insights are limited to the resources and needs of that one city at that one moment in time. I believe the many primary source documents directly written by Olmsted, from letters to essays to design plans, all allow us important insights into his thought process, and the New York Times archive provides important specific context and responses to Olmsted's work from the residents he was hoping to serve. Other cities in other time periods have faced other challenges and therefore met them with different responses. This paper offers insight into how Olmsted thought about public health in New York City, as it relates to Central Park in the mid 19th-century.

But these limitations leave the door open to further study of public health influences in Olmsted's many parks across the United States and also the many parks and functional urban spaces that were built by his sons and by those influenced by his work. With Olmsted as a solid foundation for early American urban parks, I can imagine a thorough investigation into the public health throughline between many, many landscape architects over the decades, from the 1850s until present. Ultimately, this paper could fit into this new body of literature tracing this history and informing our current relationship with urban space and health.

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