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Introduction

Land and Landscape

In the years spent researching a book, there are always small stories that stick with you, disproportionate to their size. I found one such story in a mundane *San Francisco Examiner* clipping collected by banker David Rockefeller's New York staff. That 1970 article carried the headline "High Rises Favored by Mellon." It was filed among hundreds of other clippings documenting newspaper perspectives on Embarcadero Center, a large-scale urban renewal project of office towers and retail space under construction on San Francisco's waterfront. San Franciscans often called Embarcadero Center "Rockefeller Center West" because David Rockefeller was a lead investor and because of Embarcadero Center's design. This moniker sealed an association with the famous 1930s business complex in distant midtown Manhattan. On October 8, 1970, the city of San Francisco's chief administrative officer, Thomas Mellon, spoke to a Sierra Club audience about high-rise development at an event hosted by the San Francisco College for Women. Mellon was alone on the eight-person panel in his outright endorsement of skyscrapers. "Don't have hangups that just because a building is high, it might be ugly and can't be beautiful," he told the crowd. "Look at New York," he implored. The room erupted in "general, derisive laughter." New York had "the greatest examples of architecture in the world." Consider Rockefeller Center and the RCA building, he continued. "Look at the plazas and open spaces provided for people."¹

Why the derisive laughter? San Franciscans valued architecture and urban design, supporting one of the nation's most active, extensive networks of design and redevelopment professionals. Certainly the laughter was not directed at architecture or public space ideals. But by 1970 many San Franciscans were responding skeptically to the presumed civic and economic benefits of skyscrapers. Open-space gifts by developers had been described by local critic Karl Kortum as "green hairpieces" covering up the city's irresponsible giveaway of public land. In 1970 the city of San Francisco was a defendant in several lawsuits challenging the city's policies of closing and selling public streets for large-scale private development. Sierra Clubbers and other urban-environmentalist allies were tired of being caricatured in the press as selfishly antidevelopment and obstructionist when in practice they had proactively influenced redevelopment by fighting for the responsible stewardship of public land. Tom Mellon signaled to his crowd that he anticipated aesthetic arguments from them against skyscrapers; he hoped that attractive plazas would satisfy the San Francisco public. He believed Manhattan would be an inspiring example. That was a miscalculation.²

Designing San Francisco explores the San Francisco Bay Area from the 1940s through the 1970s as a site for bringing fresh perspective to a national narrative of redevelopment and planning. I begin with the premise that during the 1960s—an era of civic and cultural expansion, protest, and participatory ferment—the principles and practices of urban planning and design in the United States in fact narrowed. Over the next several decades, they became rigid. In 1961, Jane Jacobs’s book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* helped galvanize a new framework that pitted neighborhood preservation against the symbolic bulldozer of urban renewal, itself a reference to legendary New York City planner and builder Robert Moses. The debate sparked by her critique was so sustained that more than fifty years later her frameworks still define the period’s urban history: Jane Jacobs versus Robert Moses, preservation versus urban renewal, historic versus modern.³

This book retells the history of U.S. urban redevelopment by moving the focus west from New York to San Francisco’s north waterfront. In the 1950s, large-scale redevelopment in San Francisco sparked the speedy evolution of numerous allied arts fields that became interwoven with the era’s defining projects. The interactions of property managers, merchant-builders, publicists, graphic designers, architectural model makers and renderers, photographers, public artists, cartoonists, alternative press activists, public-interest lawyers, urban design critics, editors, and grassroots preservationists energized and structured the development contests and the ideas behind them. Such participants worked in partnership and in tension with the formal city-building professionals in the fields of planning, architecture, and landscape architecture. In the Bay Area, most of the urban-focused fields were strongly shaped by the same forces that nurtured (and resisted) the environmental movement so that the development issues of the urban built and natural environments often converged. Usually outsiders, the allied arts professionals generated critiques and conflicts that were not evident in the more intellectually homogeneous internal workings of the design and planning fields alone. The individuals at the heart of my chapters do not appear in existing urban and architectural histories except for a handful of leading architects, landscape architects, planners, and city administrators. This outside-in perspective takes some getting used to. People who are elsewhere peripheral and invisible in the history of urban design are here networked through the center.⁴

The allied design professionals knitted together the city’s redevelopment history through their sustained, simultaneous, and sequential work on the same roster of projects between the 1940s and the 1970s. The chapters of this book follow the emergence and transformation of these professionals and their businesses as tied to the growing conflicts around large-scale redevelopment. From a focus in the early chapters on preservationist sites, the book turns to consider urban renewal assemblages, skyscrapers, and other modernist, clearance-based projects. Certain iconic north waterfront complexes stood out as testing grounds for redevelopment ideas, including Ghirardelli Square, Fontana Towers, Golden Gateway, Embarcadero Center, the proposed (but not built) San Francisco International Market Center, and the Transamerica Pyramid. I follow the networks that tied suburban and rural projects to the city, such as the 1950s Village Fair in

Sausalito and the 1960s Sea Ranch on the Sonoma Coast, asking what was specifically “urban” about a flow of ideas that traveled with consultants from rural to suburban to urban locations. Significant on their own terms, these sites also illuminated the full range of participants and distilled their ideas. Seeking out a story of “development-producing-antidevelopment” misses the proactive preservationists who in the 1940s advanced historical plans for the waterfront, rooted in public ownership, before the high-rises appeared. When the skyscrapers, renewal complexes, and plazas loomed large on the waterfront, citizens’ groups organized, found lawyers, and worked with the alternative press to establish tougher standards of public interest in the city’s land disposition policies.⁵ By the 1970s, these urban-environmentalist community leaders, lawyers, preservationists, journalists, and disillusioned design professionals had formulated a now mostly forgotten critique of redevelopment. The final chapters follow the emergence in San Francisco’s large-scale redevelopment, private and public, of a moral framework for understanding the competition for urban land as more consequential than urban design controversies and public-access easements to “open space.”

As this book contributes to cleaving the preservation versus renewal binaries, along the way another binary unravels—the presumed male domination and female absence in urban design professions during the decades following World War II. At the beginning of 1971, out of 725 licensed architects in the Bay Area, 9 were women, according to the American Institute of Architects.⁶ The social revolutions of the era—civil rights protests, urban unrest, feminism, and the youth, counter-culture, and peace movements—transformed professional practice with particular intensity in the Bay Area, including in architecture and planning. Yet the second-wave feminism of the late 1960s and early 1970s layered over a potentially even more significant period of gender collaborations that had begun in the 1940s. These earlier collaborations were prevalent—sometimes dominant—in the allied urban arts and design fields. In 1952, for example, partners Virginia Green and Leila Johnston founded the “Cadillac” of architectural model-making companies in the Bay Area and the nation. Their business thrived on the large-scale commissions of urban renewal, and they built the presentation scale models for most of the city’s big projects. Marion Conrad’s public relations firm specialized in launching careers in the interrelated worlds of architecture, real estate, and politics. Conrad moved complicated projects from the stage of land acquisition and brainstorming through Board of Supervisors hearings and, over any obstacles, to completion. Beginning in the 1940s and 1950s, property managers and merchant-builders Stuart and Caree Rose carved an influential niche in redeveloping unusual, historical real estate into commercial destinations. According to this broad definition of urban design, the very nature of postwar large-scale redevelopment and urban experimentation transformed the gender composition of these allied fields before the impact of women’s liberation was felt in the 1970s. The 1968 controversy over Ruth Asawa’s mermaid sculpture and the plaza in Ghirardelli Square offers a potent example of the ways feminist concerns permeated “urban design” conflicts between modernism and historicism. Examining how women’s liberation later intersected with the earlier work of Green, Johnston, Conrad, Asawa, and the Roses will be as generative of new insights into the city’s gender and power

dynamics as probing the seemingly failed long-term impact of 1970s feminism on a field like architecture.⁷

Ultimately, this book shifts the approaches to constructing a national redevelopment narrative in several interrelated ways. It identifies the 1950s as a formative decade for retrieving alternative frameworks before the narrowing of the 1960s. It shifts perspective from the East Coast to the West Coast. It refocuses the center of urban planning and design to include core contributions by allied urban-focused fields usually relegated to the edges. And *Designing San Francisco* follows construction cranes and what might be *built* rather than bulldozers and demolition. By centering on the sustained, networked participation of allied professionals in the novel projects of the day, this account raises them to a level of interest usually reserved for architects, landscape architects, and planners. I hope to inspire the question of how gender figured in urban redevelopment work elsewhere in the United States and abroad during the 1950s and 1960s. Finally, this book traces concretely how the juggernaut critiques of urban renewal in the 1960s and 1970s—especially Jacobs’s *Death and Life* and Robert Caro’s monumental study of Robert Moses, *The Power Broker*—shouldered other influential publications and perspectives off the shelf. In so doing, *Designing San Francisco* leaves readers with a freshly dusted-off set of land-centered frameworks through which to evaluate current urban debates and policies. But before settling in to the San Francisco waterfront in chapter 1, there is more meaning to be gleaned from shifting the redevelopment story from New York to the Bay Area.

THE LONG VIEW OF SAN FRANCISCO’S ANTI-MANHATTANIZATION

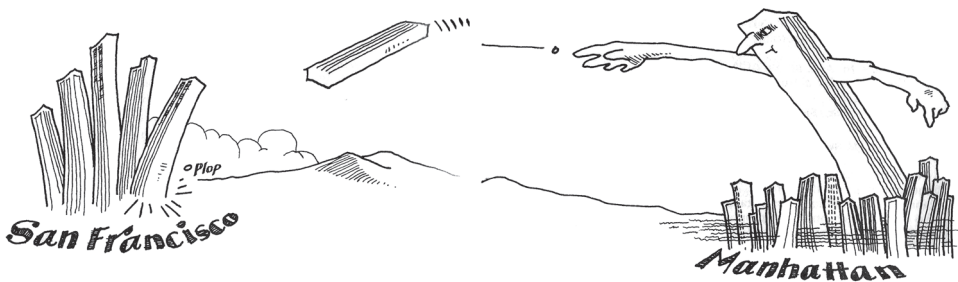
More than most U.S. cities, San Francisco has had an ambivalent relationship with New York in the postwar era, when the desire to be the “Wall Street of the West” coexisted with a fierce anti-Manhattanization sentiment.⁸ Louis Dunn’s drawing “Plop!” (fig. 1) captured San Francisco’s resentful 1960s resistance to New York’s model.⁹ The illustration propels our perspective westward. Manhattan Island, sinking under the weight of its own towers, lobs another skyscraper across the continent to stick it to the city of San Francisco. The slabs are identical, having no distracting variations in architectural form. San Franciscans disagreed often over the impact of Manhattan on their city’s aspirations during these decades. Looking back from the 1970s, one Bay Area critic recalled (with some regret): “When we were all young and dumb, it was an article of faith that there were only two Real Cities in the land—New York and San Francisco.”¹⁰ Closer to home, San Francisco warily watched the threat posed by Los Angeles during these years in almost every realm, including population growth, arts and culture, banking, tourism, the port, property values, and economic health. In the 1960s, developers in San Francisco often invoked business competition from Los Angeles in order to get projects approved.¹¹ San Francisco’s preoccupation with New York was different. It grew more from the decades-old “Wall Street of the West” motif and the two cities’ shared goals of attracting national corporate headquarters, especially those of finance and banking. Manhattan was, and San Francisco was becoming, what Lewis Mumford and others called “topless” cities, with skylines dominated by high-rises.¹² Less spectacular but

equally important were the planned plazas and open spaces that proliferated alongside the skyscrapers.¹³ Both cities were expensive, with valuable real estate—a distinguishing characteristic in an era of lamented urban blight and crisis. They were tourism and convention cities, with nightlife, bohemian neighborhoods, cutting-edge culture, and good food. They brought together diverse populations and had done so since their respective origins. In the decades after Dunn sketched the drawing, these two cities also became the United States' most gentrified metropolitan areas.

Yet New York had Manhattanized, so to speak, much earlier. In 1907 Henry James had famously bemoaned the pincushion of towers dominating his city when he returned to New York after a twenty-five-year absence.¹⁴ During the Depression, Lewis Mumford's *New Yorker* series "The Sky Line" cautioned that the skyscraper trend should be abandoned as "a blind alley and an insupportable luxury."¹⁵ Such critics represented a minority opinion in Manhattan, however. Skyscrapers did not provoke Jane Jacobs. Quite the opposite. In *Death and Life* she described Manhattan's "dramatic" and "romantic" towers "rising suddenly to the clouds like a magic castle girded by water."¹⁶ Jacobs protested the "tower-in-the-park" prototype popularized in planning circles by Le Corbusier, but she romanticized lower Manhattan's skyline (fig. 2).

In San Francisco the new problems of skyscrapers and urban renewal combined in a manner that was inherently different from what New York experienced in the 1950s and 1960s. Outside of New York City and Chicago, the skyscrapers going up during these years were novel and sometimes unnerving. When San Francisco's first steel-frame, curtain-wall skyscraper—the Crown Zellerbach office tower—topped out at 20 stories in 1960, the city's two tallest buildings were 30 and 31 stories. Thirty years earlier, in midtown Manhattan, the Empire State Building had already reached 103 stories. In the 1960s, outside of Manhattan Island, the large-scale redevelopment mix included taking a position on Manhattanization, particularly the proliferation of skyscrapers but also the triumph of business values they represented. In San Francisco that position was hotly contested.¹⁷

Of course, 1960s readers knew that New York City and Greenwich Village, Jane Jacobs's inspirations for *Death and Life*, were hardly typical America. Yet Jacobs succeeded in rising above the particularities of her case to formulate a definitive national critique of



1 Shifting the focus from Manhattan to San Francisco, postwar urban redevelopment tells a different story, in a different frame. Louis Dunn, 1971.



2 In her 1961 book *Death and Life*, Jane Jacobs described Manhattan's "dramatic" and "romantic" towers "rising suddenly to the clouds like a magic castle girded by water." Louis Dunn's 1971 drawing "Up for Grabs" evoked that romantic view of lower Manhattan's financial district but critiqued the high-rise city as overdeveloped and emblematic of corporate exploitation and public giveaways. Chester Hartman called this the "City for Sale" or "land grab" in his books about San Francisco redevelopment by those names.

urban renewal and advance the search for better models. At that time, San Francisco had several neighborhoods on the cusp of gaining international prominence through tourism and new investment. One piece of San Francisco geography triggered especially intense debates about the urban future. San Francisco's north waterfront (fig. 3) stood out as a touchstone for that city in a manner similar to Greenwich Village in Manhattan. With spectacular views of the San Francisco Bay, the waterfront concentrated pressing redevelopment questions. This was particularly true of the stretch curving around the city's northeastern edge, between Fort Mason and the Ferry Building at the end of Market Street. Where planners saw a long strip of transitioning waterfront property, most San Franciscans in the 1960s would have imagined a sequence of distinct neighborhoods and destinations, each with different personal associations. Developers saw remarkable opportunities to buy land. Dozens of acres of Title I urban renewal land were for sale, interspersed with hundreds of public acres administered by the port and, of course, the parcels available through the private real estate market (fig. 4).¹⁸

In the late 1950s, as the rest of the United States took notice of the population migration to California, the design professions oriented toward New York and Chicago began to take the West Coast more seriously. In 1960, several thousand architects descended on the Bay Area for the annual American Institute of Architects (AIA) meeting. Such conventions, especially for redevelopment-related professionals like planners, builders, property managers, city officials, and landscape architects, served as efficient pipelines for national publicity. Air travel had turned the convention business into a major tourism engine, including demand for conference hotels and convention centers. The 1960 AIA convention offered snapshots of how San Francisco redevelopment was interpreted on the national scene.¹⁹

New York Times architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable was one of the visitors who returned home impressed. Despite its "generally undistinguished commercial structures," San Francisco retained "a personal scale, a direct and pleasurable relationship to people, that is the city's greatest asset." The city had few skyscrapers, Huxtable noted. She

quickly concluded that, whatever the reason for this, the outcome was positive. The “lesson is potent,” she wrote. The gift of light, air, and human scale was precisely what she feared New York had lost. San Francisco in 1960 proved that a city could thrive “even with bad or anonymous” architecture. Yet San Franciscans took an unusual interest in “the community’s architectural future.” The architectural models for the Golden Gateway urban renewal competition had been displayed during the AIA convention, Huxtable pointed out, providing local and national exposure for these high-quality designs. She approved of the city’s “unique record of fighting the hideous, encroaching freeways that threaten the visual and physical dismemberment of every American city.” In 1960, Huxtable believed that San Francisco offered stimulating alternatives, especially to New York City. “To today’s architect, concerned almost exclusively with abstract design standards and sociologically approved planning, San Francisco is a city that breaks all the rules,” she wrote.²⁰

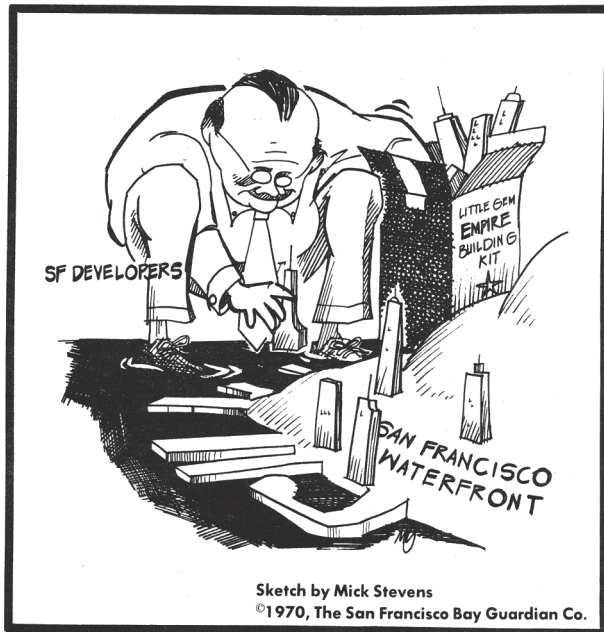


3 Aerial view of San Francisco’s north waterfront ca. 1960, from the files of landscape architects Lawrence Halprin & Associates. The perspective flattens the topography, allowing the unusual location of the residential hills pressed close to the working waterfront to emerge, as well as the “man-made” hill of the financial district and the generally low-rise character of the city. Immediately above the Ferry Terminal building is the low-rise produce market district soon to be cleared for Golden Gateway and Embarcadero Center urban renewal. Just north (to the right) of the produce district is the dark-brick warehouse neighborhood at the base of Telegraph Hill. Inspired by the adjacent government-supported projects, a private developer quietly purchased this warehouse district in the early 1960s and announced clearance plans a few years later. The Bay Bridge is in the foreground, and the Golden Gate Bridge and part of Marin County and Sausalito appear in the upper-right background of the photograph.

When the Republican National Convention met in San Francisco four years later, the national press zeroed in on a very different sort of neighborhood development. At the time the convention opened in July 1964, Ghirardelli Square—soon to introduce urban designers to large-scale adaptive reuse—was still under construction. Topless dancing at the Condor Club in adjacent North Beach, on the other hand, had been on stage for a month. Republicans scrutinized the phenomenon closely. Within weeks, Barry Goldwater’s campaign featured Condor Club performer Carol Doda in a thirty-minute film set for national distribution. Campaign strategists made North Beach symbolize the supposed moral decline of U.S. cities, which they attributed to Democratic Party leadership.²¹

One San Franciscan, Herb Caen, made it his job to write daily about the city and its transformation, always attentive to both obscure local detail and the larger world’s curiosity. His thousand-word *San Francisco Chronicle* column ran from 1938 until his death in 1997.²² Caen’s columns unhappily followed the honky-tonk influx to North Beach, but he had seen too much to make an example out of the lamentable topless fad. Caen found topless buildings more disturbing than topless dancers. The clean, well-managed Golden Gateway competition and the dirty-dancing Condor Club might seem diametrically opposed, but topless buildings and topless dancers were part of the same waterfront redevelopment story in the Bay Area. Both tapped into sentiments about the end of the city.²³

Overall, in the early 1960s East Coast cultural institutions regarded San Francisco as lagging behind New York. Typical were the comments of a philanthropic foundation officer returning from an otherwise impressive talk by San Francisco’s director of city



4 The San Francisco *Bay Guardian* critiqued developers rather than architects. The “Empire Building Kit” referred to assembling the Manhattan model on San Francisco’s waterfront. The drawing suggests that the developer’s power was unchecked. The *Bay Guardian* dismissed architects collectively for their complicity in imposing endless high-rises on the city.

planning, James McCarthy. McCarthy had not touched on “causes of the increasing middle-classness and commercialization of S.F. and why it ranks so amazingly behind NYC in the use of economic and cultural power to make it a great city in its institutions of art, publishing, and ideas.”²⁴ In the eyes of national culture brokers, the West Coast was magnetic and booming with postwar growth, but simultaneously quirky and exceptional, and thus somewhat irrelevant. Local writers, like Caen, felt compelled to defend the state of “culture” in San Francisco. “Our museums are not as bad as indicated by the nasty crack of an Eastern museum director,” Caen wrote in 1964, quoting the unnamed administrator: “San Francisco should amalgamate its three bad museums; then it would have only one bad museum.” Caen conceded, “It is principally the San Francisco Opera Company we can boast of without qualification.”²⁵ For Caen, the coexistence of the city’s conservative elite with longshoremen, beatniks, hippies, tourists, artists, and gays was transformative and liberating. He had an eye toward explaining the city’s distinctive character for the national press, which dwelled on the Bay Area’s “freaks” and “kooks,” terms (like “beatnik” and “hippie”) that he himself coined or popularized.²⁶ Boiling San Francisco down to its essence, Caen saw the strengths and peculiarities of a beautiful, pleasure-loving, diverse, humane, small Western city.

A LOST 1962 MANUSCRIPT

Near the end of my research for this book, another incidental reference buried in the immaculately kept archives of the Rockefeller Foundation led to an unexpected discovery. Chadbourne (Chad) Gilpatric, the foundation officer working in the field of urban design criticism (and with Jane Jacobs), jotted down in 1960 that Grady Clay was writing a book about redevelopment in San Francisco. Clay—a real estate editor with the *Louisville Courier-Journal*—also had a new editorial position at *Landscape Architecture* magazine. What Grady Clay book was this? I wondered. This stray comment sent me on a detour to locate the book, still an unpublished manuscript in Clay’s possession. “The Competitors: A Study of Competition for Urban Land” focused on San Francisco’s Golden Gateway redevelopment competition. Clay, a leading figure in landscape studies, had written an unknown first book about land. The manuscript featured the allied design fields of architectural model-making and urban journalism. Clay’s records from the late 1950s and early 1960s disclosed the circumstances under which he had written the manuscript, and the story’s logic began to fall into place.

Little touched since 1962, the manuscript on San Francisco proved a unique introduction to the genre of urban renewal critiques that vied for attention with but were eclipsed by *Death and Life*. Clay’s San Francisco study, with comparisons to London and Brookline, Massachusetts, confirmed that unlikely places could enter and frame the central accounts of U.S. urban renewal if New York City were decentered. Encouraged by the same foundations and publishers, Grady Clay and Jane Jacobs had begun in the 1950s from a similar position within urban criticism. Then they had diverged. This makes Clay’s unpublished manuscript on San Francisco an ideal starting point for excavating alternative redevelopment narratives rooted in places besides New York.

If Greenwich Village inspired Jane Jacobs in the late 1950s, Grady Clay's muse was San Francisco. By 1960, Jacobs and Clay were at the cutting edge of research and writing on urban renewal in the United States. Their names were among the first to come up in 1958 when Gilpatric began the Rockefeller Foundation's "talent search" in what the program manager called "civic design criticism" or, officially, "Studies in Urban Design." Rockefeller's Humanities Division, where Gilpatric worked as associate director, had supported disparate projects in this field since the early 1950s. The most successful publication he had backed before Jane Jacobs's would have been Kevin Lynch and György Kepes's path-breaking research at MIT, which resulted in the admired 1960 book *The Image of the City*.²⁷

Gilpatric's inquiries in 1958 tapped into a pervasive frustration among editors and academics over the scarcity of original, research-based analysis in universities on the topic of cities and the inadequate press coverage of the work that did exist. This mirrored an absence of creative thinking in civic design itself. Large-scale, monolithic redevelopment projects had made significant inroads into American cities, pushing total clearance and the construction of sterile towers. Urban design and urban renewal had interlocked, and few critics seemed qualified or even driven to interpret this trend. These problems in planning practice and criticism merged into what Gilpatric called "the inchoate field of how to make our cities better."²⁸

In March 1960 Gilpatric sought advice from William "Holly" Whyte, retired *Fortune* editor and author of penetrating social commentary. Gilpatric noted that Whyte "has been astonished to find how few people have interesting and sustained ideas" on these subjects. Whyte told Gilpatric that Jane Jacobs and Grady Clay were the only informed writers Whyte could track down when he assembled the 1958 collection *The Exploding Metropolis*. Symbolic of Clay's proximity to Jacobs in 1958 is the fact that Whyte inserted Clay's essay "What Makes a Good Square Good?" into Jacobs's *Exploding Metropolis* chapter, "Downtown Is for People." Three years after scoping out writers for *Exploding Metropolis*, Whyte thought the scarcity of writers had little improved. He anticipated that Jacobs's book, still a year and a half from publication, would be a "major contribution."²⁹

Jane Jacobs's 1961 *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, of course, succeeded beyond her supporters' wildest dreams. Her publication crystallized frameworks that would define city planning for the next half-century. She identified the destructive habits of monolithic urban renewal, and argued that planners and designers were "copying failure." Her book distilled a cohesive critique, offered reflection and intervention, and assessed current projects on the ground.³⁰ Because of her unprecedented impact, Jacobs's ascension is one of the best-known personal narratives in mid-twentieth-century urban history. Her *Exploding Metropolis* essay attracted attention from Jason Epstein at Doubleday, who then moved to Random House. In February 1958, Chad Gilpatric wrote in his notes that Jacobs "might be a person worth talking to soon," after he spoke with her boss at *Architectural Forum*, Douglas Haskell. By September, Jacobs had secured her first Rockefeller Foundation grant, shepherded through The New School. This gave her the opportunity to take the leave of absence from *Forum* she needed in order to write. Several letters to Gilpatric in the summer of 1959 detailed

her progress, as well as the turmoil and disarray in her thinking. Holly Whyte, she assured Gilpatric, had similarly “got himself and the work bolluxed up at one point” when writing *The Organization Man*. It would be a waste to revise her drafts, she calmly elaborated, before she rethought the entire book. She attributed her frustrations to the fact that “this book is neither a retelling in new form of things already said, nor an expansion and enlargement of previously worked out basic ground, but it is an attempt to make what amounts to a different system of thought about the great city.” Gilpatric would have to be patient. By the spring of 1960 she was back on track and circulating chapters. In March of 1961 she was “elated” by her progress on the completed manuscript.³¹

Grady Clay never published his urban renewal book, the one on San Francisco. Like Jacobs, Clay cleared the hurdle of winning foundation and institutional support for his book proposal. Whereas the Rockefeller Foundation and The New School sponsored Jacobs’s time off from *Architectural Forum*, the Ford Foundation paid for Clay’s year away from the *Louisville Courier-Journal*. Paul Ylvisaker, director of the Ford Foundation’s division of public affairs, arranged for Clay to spend the year at MIT through the new Joint Center for Urban Studies of MIT and Harvard University. The Joint Center, funded by the Ford Foundation, was a beneficiary of the same foundation initiatives to seed meaningful research and fresh perspectives to improve urban life in an era of large-scale rebuilding.

Grady Clay’s focus on San Francisco did not derive from residing there or from closely observing the streets as a visitor. It would be an oversimplification to say that Jacobs found her topic from her apartment window in Greenwich Village while Clay settled on San Francisco through research and an abstract interest in urban renewal land. Yet there is some truth in this. Instead of the “ballet” of densely populated urban spaces famously documented by Jacobs, Clay described the “brilliantly conducted performance” of San Francisco’s Golden Gateway competition.³² Jacobs’s inspiration may have been more poetic, but Clay was smitten by the administration of San Francisco’s urban renewal program. He reserved particular admiration for the city’s redevelopment chief, Justin Herman. Clay pored patiently over meeting minutes, transcripts, articles, and scrapbooks and conducted interviews. Then he wrote quickly as his fellowship year drew to a close.

Clay’s manuscript then entered its own period of disarray. He circulated chapter drafts for feedback during the fall and winter of 1961, and by 1962 he had completed “The Competitors.” After Clay’s attempts to publish the book failed, in 1964 he excerpted an article-length working paper for the Joint Center. His revised title read simply “Competition for Urban Renewal Land.” Pieces derived from his San Francisco research appeared in a few articles and speeches given at professional meetings. Other traces of Clay’s San Francisco book are buried in Ford and Rockefeller Foundation correspondence; a few copies of the Joint Center working paper filed in libraries; and the extant version of the 225-page manuscript shelved with Clay’s professional records.³³

Why did Grady Clay’s book disappear, while Jane Jacobs’s *Death and Life* thrived? Solving this mystery, one retrieves a potent critique of renewal that assumed a different

starting point from that of Jacobs. For Clay, the disposition of land was the moral core of the redevelopment problem. Clay's argument was important: Title I of the federal Housing Acts of 1949 and 1954 was first and foremost a land redistribution program whereby cities assembled and sold huge parcels of discounted land to private investors. What separated one city from another was how it sold that land, to whom, and with what kinds of strings attached. San Francisco led the new trend of incorporating design competitions into the city's choice of developer. Design competitions—an experimental means of distributing redevelopment land and shaping a city's future—had not hardened into set practices. The city's redevelopment chief, Justin Herman, questioned during the Golden Gateway competition whether the city should sell renewal land or try to retain more control over that public domain.³⁴ Clay's book captured a forgotten, fluid moment in late 1950s and early 1960s redevelopment when the rules were shifting rapidly, and the devastating consequences of urban renewal's first-generation clearance projects were widely protested, especially "Negro removal."

Grady Clay's 1962 manuscript, long predating Caro's *Power Broker*, pulled San Francisco's redevelopment director—Justin Herman—out from under Robert Moses's shadow. Clay's focus on land helped tie together what in the 1960s looked like two contrasting types of Title I federal urban renewal—building extravaganzas such as downtown's Golden Gateway and Embarcadero Center that were rising in sparsely populated districts and extreme removal projects like the Western Addition and Yerba Buena that devastated existing mixed residential and commercial neighborhoods.³⁵ Whereas City Hall anointed "Saint Justin" for speeding up both kinds of redevelopment, Thomas Fleming, editor of San Francisco's leading African American newspaper, the *Sun-Reporter*, summed up the neighborhood view in 1965: "Negroes and the other victims of a low income generally regard him [Herman] as the arch villain in the black depopulation of the city."³⁶ Clay's story, however, began after the bulldozers, at the time when cities were making decisions about how to sell the land. Land giveaways characterized both types of renewal, and the equity challenge of safeguarding the public's interest in renewal land applied equally.

In 1971, the *Sun-Reporter* was ready to back up Grady Clay's view of Justin Herman, describing Herman as a fair-minded redevelopment administrator capable of reaching across racial divides to openly address the land-grab critique of urban renewal. Responding to Herman's sudden demise, a *Sun-Reporter* editorial described how "in the last few years he showed profound dedication to racial minority participation in redevelopment." Although Herman still deeply angered many people, "approximately three years ago he [had] changed his approach from doing things—for—to doing things—with—racial minorities, and let community-based controversy find its common level before initiating the final decision-making process." Herman had responded constructively to "severe community criticism by Blacks" regarding "Black removal" and had become "interested and informed concerning the bases of racial minority protest." Columnist Emory Curtis also noted that Herman "utilized Black men in positions of responsibility in his organization" and ensured that minorities gained a "share" of Redevelopment Agency contracts. Herman, Curtis wrote, had a "sharp mind and an incorruptible ethic which kept him

fighting for what he believed was best for the public good—with ability and honesty.”³⁷ Justin Herman could negotiate land-grab debates openly because he acknowledged the competition for urban land at the heart of redevelopment. This measurement of the public good was legible (if high-stakes and painful to debate) on different sides of the building battles.

Clay’s lost manuscript on San Francisco helps explain why, although many groups competed openly for redevelopment land, only the “community” perspectives (whether those of black leadership or the organized urban-environmentalists) became identified with angry “protest.” The surge of land-centered initiatives during this period, especially large-scale renewal, pushed such discussions into the daily news. Clay recognized design competitions as new mechanisms for distributing urban renewal land, but the growing popular interest in urban design soon outpaced the public’s interest in urban land ownership. Clay’s 1962 account dramatizes the tension between landscape and land viewpoints in urban analysis. Centering the competition for urban land makes it easier to imagine how “arch villain” redevelopment chief Justin Herman and black community leadership might possibly have hammered out some mutual dialogue and respect despite their bitter disagreements.

The postwar high-rise office complexes represented, of course, more than design controversies. For one thing, they were metaphors for the economic displacement of industrial work, and many writers have tried to bridge the racially constructed divides between central city office districts and majority-minority neighborhoods. Herb Caen saw that disjuncture in 1964 when he wrote: “The Negro marching in a picket line couldn’t care less about the Fontana [Towers], and the worker who lives in Deep Mission isn’t likely to shed any tears over a freeway that nips off a corner of a Park he never visits.”³⁸ True, the *Sun-Reporter* did not usually weigh in on skyscraper controversies; regarding high-rises it focused instead on increasing the hiring of people of color for the promised construction jobs.

Like Grady Clay, the black press (in San Francisco and nationally) framed urban renewal as a program of land control. *Sun-Reporter* editor Thomas Fleming stood just behind Herb Caen as the second-longest-running journalist covering San Francisco. On the topic of urban renewal, Fleming wrote regularly about the city’s giveaways of redevelopment land to private developers.³⁹ The *Sun-Reporter’s* vigilance over public land stewardship also meant that the paper protested redevelopment decisions to build office complexes and expensive residences rather than affordable housing. The displacement of what might have been new affordable housing by new office and commercial construction “will do more to ‘Manhattanize’ San Francisco than all the Transamerica buildings, Alcatraz-based Space Needles, and Fisherman’s Wharf wax museums put together,” said the lead litigator in the citizens’ lawsuits over the city’s clearance and rehousing policies.⁴⁰ The *Sun-Reporter* pointed out that the litany of design controversies over downtown buildings distracted San Franciscans from the true Manhattanization threat—namely displacement and what would soon be called gentrification. The core decisions after the bulldozers had done their job addressed what should be built on urban renewal land and where the former residents would go next.

Why were Golden Gateway urban renewal and the Transamerica Pyramid seen as design controversies while the land stewardship controversies they provoked were forgotten? Why did the land-grab debate raised effectively by the black press in protesting the removal of majority-minority neighborhoods fail to adhere to the downtown towers? *Designing San Francisco's* focus on construction cranes rather than bulldozers helps bring answers into view, and the frame of land stewardship promises to reunite the two “different types” of renewal. The San Francisco case helps explain how, historically, the land-centered traditions of urban critique that had receptive audiences and mainstream advocates in the 1950s through the 1970s were diverted, like Grady Clay's manuscript, to the margins of civic dialogues about the urban public domain in the United States.

Finally, Clay's perspective leveraged recognition that the 1960s land-based critiques of urban renewal originated in measured professional analyses from allied design fields and from mainstream administrators like Justin Herman, not from angry antidevelopment positions. Emory Curtis of the *Sun-Reporter*, for example, was an engineer who founded his own planning and consulting firm, Curtis Associates.⁴¹ Urban-environmentalists and preservationists such as Jean Kortum and Karl Kortum or the young disillusioned designers of the Environment Workshop offered proactive urban visions based in expertise, although the press all too easily painted them as “obstructionists and cranks.”⁴² When the Black Land movement energized by Black Power found momentum in the late 1960s, it, too (like so many other planners and developers), eyed the techniques of urban renewal and saw some possibilities to compete better for urban land. The large scale of 1960s projects intensified and multiplied the debates over land and engaged many more journalists, artists, property managers, publicists, investors, editors, and activists who brought their ideas and models into the redevelopment dynamic alongside the architects, landscape architects, and planners.

How provocative that Grady Clay, a future founder of cultural landscape studies, wrote a first, unpublished book that took land—not landscape—as its starting point. In the early 1960s, Clay chose not to critique redevelopment by studying San Francisco's urban form and space. Ironically, perhaps, Clay left reading the landscape to Jane Jacobs. His fascination with the competition stage of planning, when decisions about land ownership and urban design were still unresolved, led him to study architectural models and renderings instead of finished buildings, plazas, and streets. Clay was a real estate editor, not an architecture critic. He had a newsroom view of urban renewal, and he thought constantly about land value.

Grady Clay's lost book presented a lost opportunity for galvanizing public dialogue around the question of whether cities undergoing Title I urban renewal should sell their land to private investors. The dead-filing of Clay's first book manuscript had no discernible impact on his career. That the book's arguments about land faded from public debate and published discussions, however, was a different matter.

“WHO HAVE GOT OUR LANDS?”

The task of shifting the barometer of place for urban redevelopment from New York City to San Francisco might be considered a “touchstone.” The term entered general

English language usage describing a testing point, criterion, and sometimes inspiration for establishing the fundamental meaning of a thing. The word's origins in the late fifteenth century, however, lie in the hard, black stone that measured the quality of gold or silver by the streaks left when precious metal rubbed against siliceous stone.⁴³ San Francisco in the mid-twentieth century was the Western city of the Golden Gateway urban renewal project and the Golden Gate Bridge, a place where investors saw “dollars in them thar skyscrapers,” Herb Caen wrote.⁴⁴ Excavations for the Embarcadero Center towers and the Transamerica Pyramid literally struck gold, or at least artifacts from the Gold Rush era. Reports of construction workers' finding gold slugs and buried ships in an 1850s landfill gratified treasure-hunters.⁴⁵ Accordingly, the 1960s skyscraper boom reignited interest in the Gold Rush frontier and the generations who had first built San Francisco.⁴⁶

Understanding why *Designing San Francisco* is a Western story, not just a West Coast story, requires returning to the San Francisco Bay of the 1860s. An 1871 booklet by political economist Henry George, *Our Land and Land Policy, National and State*, has the perhaps surprising effect of extending the themes of anti-Manhattanization over the longer historical frame. The 1871 essay became the basis for George's 1879 book *Progress and Poverty*, which ranked as one of the most popular nonfiction works of its day, selling millions of copies.⁴⁷ George's travels between San Francisco and New York City, juxtaposing these two cities in the late 1860s, sparked his critique of undemocratic land policies and inspired his remedy—the “single tax” on land. Primarily, his ideas were conditioned by disappointment in California's trends toward private monopolization of the public domain and his close observation of San Francisco's growth. For New York, it was too late. But young San Francisco was early in its development. San Francisco could still remember its ideals of egalitarian land allocation, and in this fact George found hope. In *Progress and Poverty* Henry George made California the foundation for a path-breaking national critique.⁴⁸

The most influential analysis in American history of “the land question” originated in the hills overlooking San Francisco Bay. Henry George's theory of land value creation came to him “like a flash,” he later wrote, one day in 1870 while riding in those hills. George made small talk with a passing teamster by asking about the price of land in the vicinity. George was preoccupied with the recent arrival of the transcontinental railroad in Oakland and the ensuing frenzy of land sales. The teamster's answer provoked George's revolutionary understanding of the relationship between land and labor. George used San Francisco to illustrate how land at the city center gained value from people settling nearby, not from improvements the owners made. George proposed a land tax to recapture this increased value, which had been created by ordinary laborers' hard work. Without such a tax, landowners would unfairly collect and concentrate the economic benefits of urbanization.⁴⁹

For George, this new way of looking at land value helped to explain why poverty persisted amid the abundance of a productive manufacturing and agricultural society. George himself came from a modest background. His formal education had ended at age thirteen. At eighteen, in 1858, he traveled from Philadelphia to San Francisco, where he struggled to make ends meet working as a printer and newspaper editor.

A decade later, George shaped the ideas from his ride in the hills into the dense booklet *Our Land and Land Policy, National and State*. As a printer, George did not have difficulty publishing a thousand copies of the essay. He sold twenty-one booklets and gave the rest away.⁵⁰

“Who have got our lands?” Henry George asked in 1871. He turned to the topic of how land had been distributed in the first place to create the inequities he observed in San Francisco. The nation was “giving away land” while simultaneously making it “dear” and beyond the reach of the ordinary citizen.⁵¹ In a poignant passage, George wrote: “A generation hence our children will look with astonishment at the recklessness with which the public domain has been squandered. It will seem to them that we must have been mad. For certainly our whole land policy, with here and there a gleam of common sense shooting through it, seems to have been dictated by the desire to get rid of our lands as fast as possible.” These developments were ubiquitous but most evident in young, Western states: “In all the new States of the Union land monopolization has gone on at an alarming rate, but in none of them so fast as in California, and in none of them, perhaps, its evil effects so manifest.” George included a map of California land grants (fig. 5) as “absolutely startling” visual testimony to the squandering of public lands, primarily the millions of acres given to the railroads.⁵²

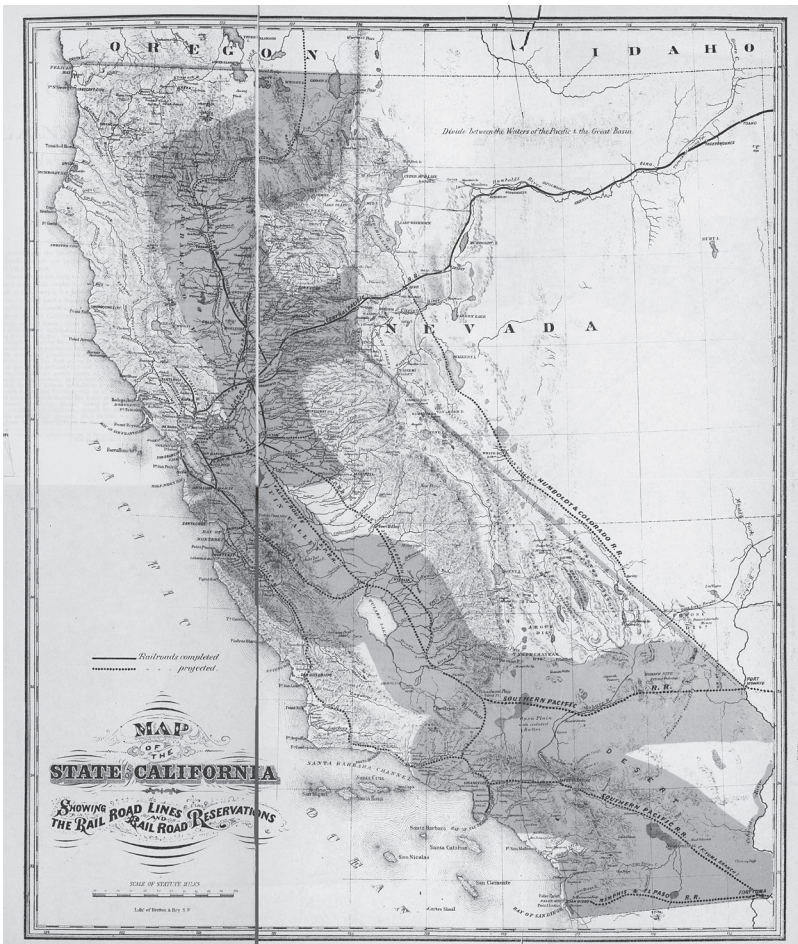
Visiting New York in 1869 gave George the foil for understanding San Francisco. New York was the “greatest of our American cities,” he thought. Yet there one had to accept palaces and stocked warehouses alongside tenements and poverty. To borrow 1960s language, George’s “anti-Manhattanization” views conditioned his protective stance toward San Francisco. In 1869, Manhattan offered a glimpse of San Francisco’s future—the wealth disparities George hoped political action could mitigate.⁵³ He drew upon the egalitarian inheritance of his adopted city. Recently a pueblo, San Francisco was now a new city of the U.S. West. George wrote:

The American city of San Francisco, as the successor of the Mexican pueblo, came into a heritage such as no great city of modern times has enjoyed—land enough for a city as large as London, dedicated to the purpose of providing every family with a free homestead. Here was an opportunity to build up a great city, in which tenement houses and blind alleys would be unknown; in which there would be less poverty, suffering, crime and social and political corruption than in any city of our time, of equal numbers.

San Francisco’s heritage of Spanish colonial settlement modeled a mid-nineteenth century vision of equitable, family-based land distribution. But, George wrote, “This magnificent opportunity has been thrown away.” In fact, California was home to the nation’s worst “land grabbers” and “land sharks.” Much had been lost, but it was not too late for California.⁵⁴

This motivation to change national and state land policy fueled George during the difficult writing of *Progress and Poverty*. In 1880 he moved his family to New York City, ultimately running in 1897 for the first mayoralty of the consolidated city. Although George died before the elections, his message was taken up and debated around the

world. George’s moral critique of capitalist economic development became one of the most influential in U.S. history. Based on what he saw in San Francisco’s hills and Manhattan’s streets in 1869, his ideas found popularity in part because they resonated with mainstream land policies such as the 1862 Homestead Act, under which Western settlers could claim 160 acres of “free” government land. As Grady Clay and others would argue about urban renewal nearly a hundred years later, there were good reasons to distinguish between land and buildings and to reconsider before selling the public domain. Henry George’s San Francisco–New York land theories enfold twentieth-century urban redevelopment in a fresh narrative arc; they illuminate why urban renewal was the land grab of the twentieth century and why *Designing San Francisco* is a Western story.⁵⁵



5 Henry George included this map in his 1871 booklet *Our Land and Land Policy, National and State* to illustrate Congress’s granting of the “public domain” to railroad corporations in the state of California. George compared San Francisco and Manhattan; in California the railroad giveaways were a live political issue at the time.

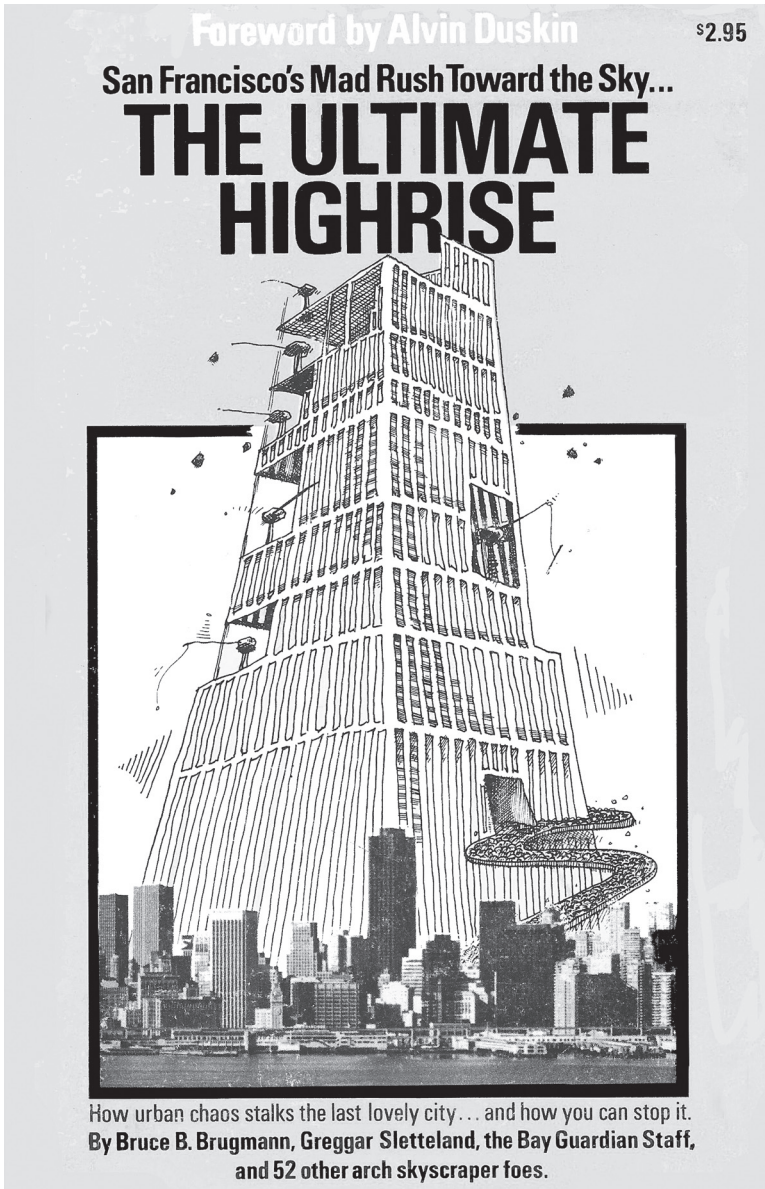
The 1950s and 1960s revolts against urban renewal in the United States opened the door to a mainstream critique of land stewardship decisions regarding the public domain. This trend was most perceptible in San Francisco, but it also seeped into contestations elsewhere in the United States. The large parcels changing hands in city centers, the drama of political machinations, public-interest lawsuits, famous corporate investors, demolition, and big-ticket construction—these conditions edged urban land ownership patterns into daily conversations. The value of land vied with the meaning of landscape in redevelopment. Yet landscape-oriented battles over urban form—especially Jane Jacobs’s small-scale neighborhood pitted against monolithic, top-down renewal—came to dominate critiques of renewal. The democratic values seemingly inherent in “open space” and good urban design—in the street, sidewalk, plaza, park, building, or skyline—became more significant to evaluating redevelopment than who owned and sold land and what those ownership trends meant. In other words, space, design, and “landscape” became the dominant tools for assessing the moral imperatives of rebuilding in the twentieth century. The 1960s, a period of expanding participatory possibilities, also enacted a narrowing of vision. After the mid-1970s, the momentum behind mainstream urban critiques based on equitable public land stewardship slowed. *Designing San Francisco*, by tapping into the networks of allied urban redevelopment fields—people embedded in the redevelopment process, usually with an outsider’s perspective, at times deeply disillusioned—provides perspective on how that happened.

Louis Dunn’s drawings “Plop!” and “Up for Grabs” (see figs. 1 and 2) illustrated the 1971 book *The Ultimate Highrise: San Francisco’s Mad Rush Toward the Sky* (fig. 6).⁵⁶ Odds are that you have never heard of this book. Most people who write about redevelopment in San Francisco have not heard of it. Yet one 1972 review in a national newsletter said of *The Ultimate Highrise*: “There has probably been no more important book on the urban question since Jane Jacobs’ *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*.”⁵⁷ San Francisco redevelopment in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s generated an unusually high number of significant written and visual works that have been forgotten. When these individual works dropped from sight, so did the relationships among them and their cumulative narratives. These include but are not limited to *The Ultimate Highrise*, Grady Clay’s 1962 manuscript on the competition for urban land, Barbara (Bobbie) Stauffacher’s memoir “Duped by Design,” the street vacation lawsuits, the San Francisco International Market Center plans, and so forth. Aligning these intellectual artifacts has the effect of suggesting different historical patterns. It becomes easier to see why some perspectives have emerged to set popular and scholarly frameworks while others remained at the margins. Historically, where have new ideas, forms, and insights originated? At its broadest and most abstract scale, this is the question I investigate regarding the small stretch of San Francisco’s north waterfront in the boom decades of downtown and suburban construction following World War II. By the end of the book, it will be clear how *The Ultimate Highrise* could possibly have earned a spot next to Jane Jacobs’s *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*.

The story begins with the north waterfront in the 1940s and Karl Kortum’s inspiration for a historic maritime district. This was long before the first of the twin seventeen-story

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Fontana apartment buildings seemed to spring up overnight among the old factories and warehouses, jolting San Francisco's Board of Supervisors to pass a 40-foot height limit. It was also long before Disneyland might have made Kortum's plans for a Gold Rush Plaza near the Ghirardelli chocolate factory seem derivative. These were Kortum's ideas, and it is possible to trace their origins and impact.



6 "There has probably been no more important book on the urban question since Jane Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*." That is what the "National Transportation Newsletter" said in 1972 of the *Bay Guardian* publication *The Ultimate Highrise*. Book cover, Louis Dunn, 1971.

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The Illustrated Pitch

“Guys with Ideas” and a 1940s Vision for a Historic Waterfront District



By 1981, when historian Randy Delehanty interviewed ten original participants in the development of Ghirardelli Square two decades earlier, the converted factory complex had established its legacy as a historic preservation landmark. Private benefactor William Roth, heir to Matson Navigation Company's shipping empire, had purchased the factory to save it from demolition and a high-rise fate. A far-sighted team of modernist architects had finessed a pathbreaking redesign combining old and new elements, producing a vibrant commercial destination. In seeking to document innovative preservationist design, however, Delehanty inevitably captured other significant stories. His interview with Karl Kortum, director of the San Francisco Maritime Museum (SFMM), opened up an older, more sweeping account of the north waterfront's transformation. Delehanty spoke with Kortum in the museum, which since 1951 had occupied the former Aquatic Park Bathhouse, a ship-shaped building sandwiched onto the thin bank of land between Ghirardelli Square and San Francisco Bay. In 1981, the museum stood at the heart of a fifty-acre national maritime park that owed its existence to Kortum (fig. 7).¹



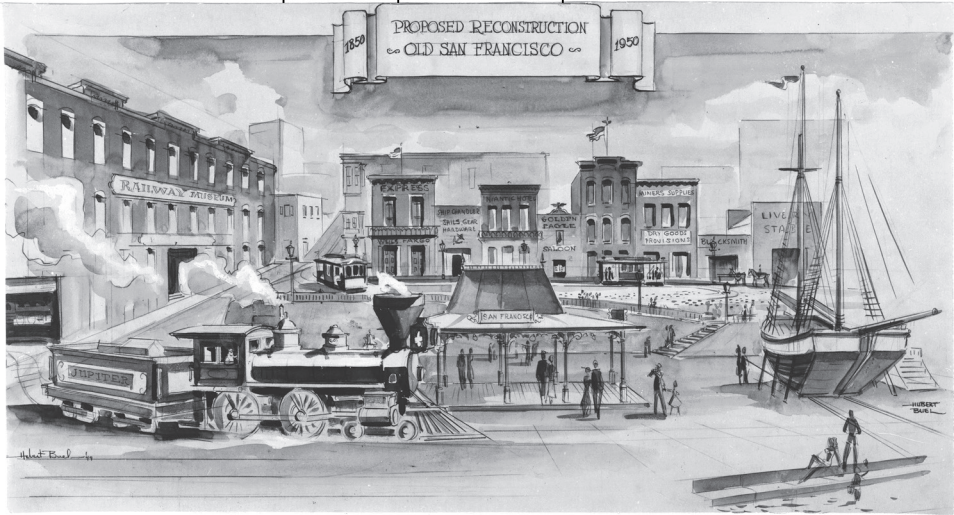
7 Aerial view (ca. 1961) focusing on what would become the maritime historic district, framed by the curved municipal pier and Hyde Street Pier (on the right). On the far left are the horizontal Presidio buildings. The first Fontana apartment tower is closest to the water, on the left. A block to the Fontana's right stands the Ghirardelli factory complex, with the rounded, white form of the San Francisco Maritime Museum looking like a ship sandwiched between Ghirardelli and the waterfront. Flat-roofed, low warehouses (including the large Haslett complex Kortum hoped would become the railway and transportation museum) and working waterfront buildings are just inland from Hyde Street Pier.

In truth, the interview was a monologue. Kortum answered Delehanty's narrow queries about Ghirardelli Square with a virtually uninterrupted narrative recalling the Maritime Museum's municipal origins, its expansion into San Francisco's first state park in 1957, and its 1978 transfer to the National Park Service. In the complex, colorful account that followed, Kortum told how in the 1940s he had sold the relevant city and state landowners his vision to develop the waterfront as a historical maritime destination; how he had lined up supporters including the newspapers, the head of the sailors' union, and city commissioners and supervisors; and how he had reached the right state legislators to ensure transfer of waterfront property into hands that would assemble and showcase historical resources. Karl Kortum had been the most vocal and tireless advocate behind saving the Ghirardelli block. Yet he saw preserving the factory as only one brief phase in a long-term campaign for a public maritime district. At some point in the interview, Delehanty gave up trying to reel Kortum in to focus on Ghirardelli and allowed the broader story to unfold.²

The dynamic postwar possibilities playing out among the north waterfront's old warehouses, factories, piers, and parks narrowed during the 1960s into a preservationist script that pitted modern high-rises against old brick buildings. There is much truth to this rescue narrative, in which demolitions fired up preservationists. Most memorably, in 1961 the construction of the first of the twin seventeen-story Fontana Towers on the former site of a factory adjacent to Ghirardelli violated the city's "unwritten" rules dictating a low-rise waterfront.³

Yet Karl Kortum's 1949 civic vision of creating a historical maritime district significantly preceded the skyscraper panic of the 1960s. Kortum prioritized public ownership as a means to plan the waterfront neighborhood. He built upon the city's parks initiatives, including a troubled municipal-federal partnership that gave San Francisco the Works Progress Administration's Aquatic Park in 1939. Kortum endorsed the parallel private planning initiatives, such as the Jackson Square wholesale home furnishings district where entrepreneurs began revamping nineteenth-century buildings in the early 1950s. But he did not wait for the private sector to "save" old buildings. In the mid-1950s, for example, Kortum laid the groundwork for the state to purchase the Ghirardelli factory and the Haslett Warehouse and incorporate them into the public domain.

Later, Karl Kortum would fight high-rises, adopting new tactics in the late 1960s and 1970s as the buildings got taller and the threatened loss of public land took new forms. But he had formulated the core land stewardship critiques of his career in the 1940s and 1950s. During that time he had learned how to "pitch" ideas, as he said, so that they were seen and heard by those with influence over public purse-strings. In addition to having a talent for drafting hard-hitting prose, Kortum was a photographer and a visual thinker who enlisted the power of renderings to promote planning concepts. He left behind not only voluminous business correspondence and diaries but also a closely curated archive of watercolors, drawings, and models tracking the evolution of his historic maritime district proposals since the 1940s. In these earlier plans, the roles of the city's museum and parks advocates, maritime buffs, newspaper editors, and politicians in drafting blueprints for a historical waterfront emerge from the long shadows later cast by the high-rises.



8 Karl Kortum's 1950 vision of a reconstructed Gold Rush Plaza, also called Argonaut Square, depicted by Hubert Buel. The Haslett warehouse, on the left, would house a railway museum, and modern retail would occupy the new nineteenth-century-styled buildings at the back of the square. The Ghirardelli factory faced the square to the right, out of the frame. This perspective from the water included a shipyard and the effect of bringing the Hyde Street cable car line down to the bay. Kortum's inspiration for this unused eastern end of Aquatic Park came more from the Gold Rush centennial celebration than from threatening high-rises. The reconstructed businesses included Wells Fargo Express, Ship Chandler, Niantic Hotel, Golden Eagle Saloon, Miners Supplies, a blacksmith, and a livery stable.

One 1950 rendering opens up a vista that places the singular preservation of the Ghirardelli factory within Kortum's wider view of the waterfront district (fig. 8). "Proposed Reconstruction of Old San Francisco, 1850–1950," by artist Hubert Buel, projects a cohesive historic waterfront plaza onto the unused, undefined eastern edge of Aquatic Park.⁴ An invented row of nineteenth-century retail buildings completes the enclosure of "Argonaut Square," framed on two other sides by the extant Haslett Warehouse to the left and the Ghirardelli factory to the right (but out of the frame). Kortum's vision of an integrated historical district—incorporating two proposed museums, piers, ships, cable-car tourist transit, and modern retail—was inspired by the occasion of the Gold Rush centennial rather than by high-rises. The story of Argonaut Square shifts the preservation drama from benevolent private rescue by a wealthy, civic-minded San Francisco family to an independent activist vision paired with public ownership of the waterfront. Taking its cue from Kortum's interview with Randy Delehanty, this chapter begins with competing visions for the same narrow stretch of land and then reveals an older, deeper, and more sweeping story.

"A MAGNIFICENT ACT OF CIVIC RESCUE"

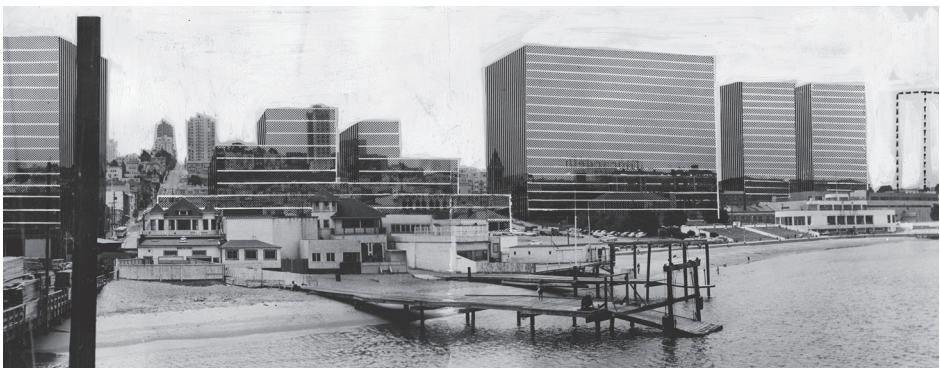
A 1961 rendering of a gleaming residential high-rise, "Ghirardelli Center," launched the preservationist script for the Ghirardelli block (fig. 9).⁵ The rendering, in which San Francisco's brick waterfront factories and warehouses had disappeared, substantiated

newspaper reports that investors intended to tear down the factory. Early in 1962, the *San Francisco Examiner* confirmed the Ghirardelli family's "tentative negotiations" with a suburban developer to "sell the property as a site for an apartment house."⁶ Karl Kortum bumped into Harvey Ghirardelli in the neighborhood. Ghirardelli told Kortum that he hoped to sell the property for \$5 million but that he would accept \$3 million from the state in condemnation proceedings. Kortum and others approached private citizen Bill Roth about "saving" the buildings. The prospect of Ghirardelli Center appalled Roth. Kortum described the 8-by-10-inch glossy as "pure horror." He warned Roth of the Fontana's symbolism: "Like a pair of enormous tombstones, side by side, these structures will signalize a dead chance that the city once had." With his mother Lurline Roth's financial backing, Roth preemptively purchased the factory. Kortum suggested using the distinctive buildings for an extension campus of the University of California, where Bill Roth served on the Board of Regents. Roth had another experiment in mind (fig. 10).⁷

And so the wrecking ball was stopped, and Maritime Museum archivists would one day label the image "Scuttled High Rise Plan for Ghirardelli Center."⁸ Responsible private ownership promised to secure the old factory buildings, and the newspapers lauded Roth's "magnificent act of civic rescue."⁹ The real estate brokers assured the public that even if the current 40-foot height restriction was overturned, the new owners had "no intention of building high-rise structures on the land." They valued historic character "rather than just investment for profit" (fig. 11). Roth explained, "Our plan is not for the highest economic use of the property . . . but what would be of most value to the people of San Francisco." No ordinary piece of real estate, the bay-front parcel counted as "one of the most magnificent properties in San Francisco," architect Robert Anshen advised Roth. Kortum agreed: "The view—always a subject of discussion and an intrinsic value on this face of San Francisco—is incomparable." It took in "the bay, passing ships, purple [Mount] Tamalpais and the lights of Sausalito."¹⁰

Bill Roth's investment was hailed as "intelligent and thoughtful" private planning of the type encouraged in 1950s urban renewal circles. His ties to Matson Navigation Company steeped Roth in the maritime industries and made him a leader of one of the city's most influential families. The Roths enjoyed the gratitude of San Franciscans for the "gift" of saving the bay view and factory buildings. Instead of cashing in, Roth's "public spirited" development of Ghirardelli Square energized a new urban design model that blended historical and modern, local and tourist (fig. 12).¹¹

Another recently vanished city landmark haunted Roth and deepened the public's appetite for Ghirardelli as a civic rescue story. Roth regretted his failure in 1959 to stop the demolition of the 1853 Montgomery Block. Known locally as the Monkey Block, by the late nineteenth century the building was associated with writers, artists, actors—what one reporter called San Francisco's first bohemians. By the 1950s, the building occupied the border between the financial district and low-rise Jackson Square, which included the faded Barbary Coast red-light district. Once cleared, the Monkey Block site moldered and rankled as a parking lot for ten years. In 1969, Transamerica Corporation announced plans to build the city's tallest skyscraper at this prominent



9 A rendering of the proposed yet unbuilt “Ghirardelli Center” that would have replaced the factory complex, ca. 1961. Ghirardelli Center aligned with the vertical hillside towers behind it and with the horizontal bands of the Maritime Museum Aquatic Park building below. Coit Tower appeared as a remote floating island on the left. The Mooser architectural firm behind this high-rise also designed the Ghirardelli factory’s signature buildings, as well as the modern Aquatic Park Bathhouse. Karl Kortum and others circulated this rendering to galvanize interest in buying the factory to prevent this fate.

10 Not the Ghirardelli Center design by the Mooser firm but a composite portraying the threat to the historic waterfront posed by new glass boxes. The Maritime Museum is on the right. Published on March 7, 1962, the news copy read: “How apartment group in Aquatic Park area would appear from the bayside.” At this time, Bill Roth was collecting development ideas from Bay Area architects.

intersection, which aggravated critics even more. Later, Roth lamented what he called the “planning effects” of losing the Montgomery Block. Not only had the city missed an opportunity to extend the impact of a unique Gold Rush–era structure but the subsequent void also allowed Transamerica to build its Pyramid and set a precedent for further encroachments into Montgomery Street. In 1959, however, one could pardon San Franciscans for thinking that threats to the Monkey Block lacked teeth. The city’s papers had regularly proclaimed the building “doomed” since the late 1940s. Roth actually hired an architect to review the structure’s potential in 1959 and declined the purchase because of the architect’s ambivalence.¹²

Even a cursory consideration of Bill Roth’s role, however, suggests a more complex picture than a one-man stand against high-rises that obliterated history. Roth stood on both sides of the preservation/tear-down divide. Roth was an insider intimately familiar with city planning and the waterfront. He led the San Francisco Planning and Urban Renewal Association (SPUR), a business-backed citizen’s advocacy organization behind



11 Undated photograph of the waterfront Ghirardelli factory complex, circa 1961, before demolition of the large box factory filling the lower left of the photo. Encroaching residential high-rises dominate this view from the municipal pier.

opposite

12 Groundbreaking for Ghirardelli Square, November 1963. Lurline Roth, Bill Roth’s mother, was a major backer of the project and was featured in this news photograph as “a principal stockholder.”

judicious redevelopment. Roth did not want a wall of Fontana high-rises to replace brick factories and cut off the waterfront, but he did not object to skyscrapers or clearance on principle. At Ghirardelli, he quietly reserved the right to decide whether the income from a few towers might profitably preserve the rest of the site. As an executive in his family's shipping business, Roth helped introduce revolutionary container technology in the late 1950s at the Port of Oakland. In the longer historical view, Bill Roth ultimately contributed more to rendering San Francisco's port facilities obsolete and modernizing the regional port economy than he did to preserving its seafaring past.¹³

In the years after Ghirardelli Square opened, the site's property managers kept the rescue story alive. Whenever hillside neighbors complained about intrusive bright lights or loud noise, the managers pulled out the rendering of the high-rise Ghirardelli Center "as a weapon." The rescue narrative—by starkly pitting modernist high-rise against historic factory as competing rebuilding models—elevated themes of architecture, urban design, and private benevolence in the waterfront's renewal. Architecture was



Mrs. William P. (Lurline) Roth, (dark coat) participated yesterday in the ground breaking ceremony of the Ghirardelli Square Co., of which she is a principal stockholder. Shown, left to right, are: Stuart Rose, project developer; Warren Lemmon, president of Ghirardelli Square Co.; Mrs. Rose, Architect William Weoster; Bill Coleman, general manager, Trader Vic's, Inc., and William Swinerton, president of Swinerton and Walberg, contractors for the new garage and building.

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