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Patriotism and Protest

Union Square as Public Space, 1832–1932

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Central Park and the enveloping Manhattan grid have long been seen as quintessentially American urban forms, symbolic of the nation that emerged in the nineteenth century. The powerful rectilinear grid—an informing idea made physical—was dedicated to making settlement and development convenient without regard to class or social status. Breathtaking in its scope, the grid predicted a giant future metropolis that would service a global marketplace. Central Park was equally ambitious, a universal open space designed for the use of all citizens, preserving some contact with the agrarian pastoral ideal on which the nation was founded. While these symbolic urban forms were not as different from European models as the rhetoric surrounding them often claimed, they were unique in their relentless expression of a particular political ideal: the American democracy.¹

Although overshadowed by these enormous urban emblems of America's ideals, Union Square, located at Fourteenth Street in New York City, has played a different but equally central role in symbolizing democracy, serving as a place for democratic action from the time of the Civil War until today. Although it is an anomaly in the grid and although the intentions and forms behind its original design were quite different from those of Central Park, throughout its history the square has held an unplanned but prominent place in the political life of the city and the nation.

The Republican Urban Landscape

The association between the romantic landscape of Central Park and the political ideals of democracy is well established in the literature of landscape architecture. Borrowing from the new public parks he had seen in Europe, the renowned landscape designer Andrew Jackson Downing was one of the chief supporters of a proposal to set aside 800 acres north of Fifty-ninth Street for a “central park” in New York. Such a park, he said in 1851, “is republican in its very idea and tendency. It takes up popular education where the common school and ballot box leave it, and raises up the working-man to the same level of enjoyment with the man of leisure and accomplishment.”² Such a park was necessary in New York, he argued, because of the urgent need to temper the competitive spirit of business, which dominated social interactions, with a more refined sense of community. “Out of this common enjoyment of public grounds, by all classes,” he wrote, “grows a social freedom, and an easy and agreeable intercourse of all classes.”³ The park had to be very large to achieve Downing's social goals. Closely boxed in by houses and commercial buildings, the existing squares did not provide room for any civilizing contact with nature. As alternative exemplars, Downing offered up rural cemeteries such as Greenwood, Mount Auburn, and Laurel Hill. These romantic landscapes offered the scale and sensibility to foster democratic feeling, he believed. It was this schema that Frederick

Figure 1 The Union mass meeting in Union Square, New York, 20 April 1861

Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux followed in their winning “Greensward” design for Central Park of 1858.

While the creation of Central Park involved an unprecedented effort to edit, prune, and improve upon nature to create an entirely anti-urban landscape within the grid, Union Square was small and utterly conventional in form. Originally, in the 1807–11 commissioner’s plan for Manhattan, Union Place was a triangular open area, named after the union of several irregular streets between Fourteenth and Seventeenth Streets along the path of Broadway. In 1839 the awkwardly shaped lots that made up Union Place were combined and landscaped as an elliptical three-acre public park as part of a reform movement that advocated for urban parks to ameliorate the effects of crowding in industrial cities. The design of the square recalled densely planted and secluded eighteenth-century London squares such as Cavendish, Berkeley, and Grosvenor Squares, which were created as focal points for new residential areas for the wealthy.⁴ Bisected by two straight paths, it was separated from the surrounding streets by an iron fence and heavily planted with trees and shrubs. However, by the 1850s it had

outgrown its origins as a quiet oasis surrounded by homes and had taken up a central role in the civic life of the city. An actively used public space, the site of numerous celebrations and demonstrations, it was already “republican in its very idea and tendency,” although not at all in the same way that Downing intended for Central Park.

Union Square entered the American consciousness as a national center, not merely a civic one, during the Civil War. Following the attack on Fort Sumter in April 1861 it was the location of a mass rally; huge crowds gathered around the statue of George Washington at the southeastern corner in support of the Union cause. The spectacle of this enormous gathering was captured and quickly disseminated through newspaper and magazine illustrations, using the newly developed process of wood engraving (Figure 1).⁵ The powerful image of the large crowd gathered around the statue, waving flags, and listening to speeches supplemented previous views of the city as a static landscape of buildings and streets. Urban space was now seen as an active setting, amplifying the public voice.

In the post-Civil War period the memory of such

Figure 2 Metropolitan Fair Buildings, Union Square, 1864

Figure 3 Calvin Pollard, Proposal for a Washington Monument in New York City, 1843

images made Union Square a symbol of the nation's triumph. In 1864 the lawyer and real estate developer Samuel Ruggles, who had been one of the developers of Union Square in 1832, chose the square for a patriotic speech at the opening of the great Metropolitan Fair. This fair was a vast educational and fundraising exhibition organized by the United States Sanitary Commission, a private group dedicated to improving military camps and hospitals. The Grand Hall of the Fair was built on the square, with ancillary displays located nearby in the Twenty-second Regiment

Armory on West Fourteenth Street, near Sixth Avenue (Figure 2). In his speech Ruggles reminded his audience that the road to American nationhood ran right through the square, tying it to the Revolution and the Constitution through George Washington. He recounted one of the founding myths of New York, in which General Washington, in his retreat from the English forces in 1776, supposedly rode up Broadway through the site of the present-day square, and then rode along the same route to claim the city for the new nation on 25 November 1783. The square also had a link to the Constitution, through another historical figure, Gouverneur Morris. As Ruggles explained:

The self-same Gouverneur Morris who gave the finishing touch to the draft of the Constitution, as Commissioner of the State of New York, under the act of 1807, stamped indelibly upon the map of this our Island of Manhattan the large public square known as "Union Place." With eagle eye piercing the future, Mr. Morris selected the very spot on which we are now standing, then far away from the dust and din of the city, to become the very center and heart of the great metropolis—discerned by his prophetic vision, to bear the name, and to be forever consecrated to the memory of that glorious and immortal Union which he had labored so successfully to call into being.⁶

With these stirring words Ruggles laid claim to Union Square not only as the geographic center of the city, but also as a monument to the political ideals of the entire nation.

Union Square had acquired an iconographic focus when an equestrian statue of George Washington was erected in the southeast corner in 1856. To honor the first president following the 100th anniversary of his birth in 1832, a nationwide movement of architects and sculptors

proposed the construction of permanent monuments in various cities and in many styles—Gothic, classical, Egyptian. Union Square's statue was the result of a campaign to erect a Washington monument in New York that began in 1833, when the New York Washington Monument Association was incorporated to raise funds.⁷ In 1843 the New York architect Calvin Pollard proposed a giant gothic tower made of granite for Union Square, decorated by sculpture and paintings commemorating the revolution. With a centralizing pentagonal plan and ecclesiastical spires, this elaborate tower was to incorporate a library, artist studios, and an observatory (Figure 3). Pollard's 425-foot-tall monument would require a huge base, occupying almost the whole square. This scheme was never realized, partly because of its expense, and partly because of public protest. The florid Gothic style was criticized in local newspapers as absurdly wrong for the hero of the Revolution, representing as it did a medieval social order far removed from the American democratic ideal.⁸ After construction of Robert Mill's national Washington Monument was begun in Washington, D.C., in 1848, support ran out for an equally gigantic monument in New York City.⁹ Instead the Association commissioned Henry K. Brown to sculpt a more modest equestrian statue, resting atop a tall plinth. The monument, installed in 1856, gave the square the kind of symbolic focus that royal statues gave to urban squares in Europe, although in this case the symbolism pointed to the power of the Republic rather than that of the ruling aristocracy.

Despite the iconographic potency of the Washington statue, in his 1864 speech Ruggles located the symbolic value of Union Square not its statuary but in its shape: "Enclosing nothing but open space, the very creation of God himself, subject to no decay, and impervious to the 'tooth of time,' it is destined, like the square of imperial Trajan in the Eternal City, to remain for all coming time the type of our continental Union, and the bright and imperishable jewel of the city."¹⁰ In other words, the elliptical plan gave New York an emblem of unity and permanence. Ruggles also claimed that the square was deliberately designed to support participatory democracy. The triangular parcels of land left over by the imposition of the ellipse on the grid were expressly made for "the assemblage of large masses of our citizens in public meetings," he claimed.¹¹ The recent use of the square for huge rallies in support of the Union were in accord with that design, he believed. These public meetings had showcased the role of Union Square as a "spacious national opening," "a theater adequate to the utterance of the national voice."¹² The square would be a site for the expression of the public will. Ruggles's description anticipated the creation of a different kind of urban space:

a large empty plaza where the crowd rather than commemorative statuary was the focus.¹³ However, despite Ruggles's patriotic claims made during the heat of war about Gouverneur Morris's original intentions, the emergence of Union Square as a symbolic public space was accidental rather than intentional.

A Residential Square

In 1807 the commissioners charged with platting Manhattan north of Houston Street, including Gouverneur Morris, had no intention of creating any kind of public space that resembled traditional European squares or their idealized American counterparts in Philadelphia, Savannah, and Washington, D.C. To do so would have been antithetical to their goals. The relentless and homogenous grid was designed to foster efficient land development. Contemptuous of urban planning affectations such as "circles, oval, and stars," the commissioners were reluctant to provide public gathering spaces for any purpose except pure utility, such as markets, a military parade ground, and an observatory.¹⁴ The "spacious national opening" to which Ruggles ascribed almost metaphysical meaning was created to resolve an unfortunate misalignment of streets in the otherwise orderly grid. An elongated triangle, it masked the awkward meeting point of Bloomingdale Road (now Broadway) and the Bowery (now Fourth Avenue) (Figure 4).¹⁵

Union Place was reserved as an un-landscaped "opening for the benefit of fresh air" only because the small parcels of land formed at the intersection of so many roads would otherwise be of little value. It was so unimportant to the overall plan that in 1815 a committee charged with reducing the amount of wasteful open space suggested eliminating it altogether by cutting the streets through it.¹⁶ Later proposals to turn the space into a public park ran counter to the essential premise of the grid, that it should be made up of purely pragmatic lots, largely privately owned, with no monumental features.¹⁷

Despite the graphic strength and practicality of the grid, in 1832 Samuel Ruggles and his colleagues realized that more varied urban forms could be a powerful attraction, just as the promoters of Central Park did twenty years later. As part of a movement to improve American cities by building urban parks, and in order to encourage residential development north of Fourteenth Street, he also proposed the construction of Gramercy Park (1831), and Madison Square (1847), as well as Union Square.¹⁸ In the late 1830s Ruggles built a row of town houses, simpler versions of those he had already built around Gramercy Park, just several blocks away from Union Square. Their unified façades were set back ten feet from the

Figure 4 Map of New York, 1827 (left) and detail (above). The original form of Union Place may be seen in the trapezoidal lots at the intersection of Bloomingdale Road and Fourth Avenue

street, creating an air of harmony and elegance.¹⁹ Union Square became a fashionable place to live, far from the crowded commercial streets of Lower Manhattan. It was one of the first commuter suburbs: the first horse-drawn street-car line, founded in 1832 to link new residential areas to downtown businesses near Wall Street and City Hall, terminated here. However, the city was growing very quickly, and by the 1840s the square marked not the northern periphery, but a potential new center.

Although Union Square was conceived as a residential district, both Ruggles and the Common Council believed it would come to have a larger public function as New York's population increased. In 1842 Union Square was chosen as the location of a fountain to celebrate the opening of the Croton Aqueduct and the inauguration of a citywide water supply. As the need for sanitation became apparent in industrial cities in Europe and North America, fresh air and water were the most precious resources that a city government could offer its citizens. New urban parks were constructed to provide both to city dwellers.²⁰ The prominent fountain made the square a monument to the ideal of public health; Central Park, by contrast, was intended to make a material contribution to public health, by providing a vast tract of open land for recreation and exercise.

A second important focus to the square joined the fountain in 1856 with the erection of Brown's Washington

memorial; together, these two monuments marked the transformation of Union Square into a civic center rather than the centerpiece of a residential district. The square accommodated the kinds of urban public monuments that were increasingly popular, but which were disallowed in the original grid. In 1853 the Common Council proposed that one day, when the population center had moved ever farther northward, Union Square could be combined with Madison Square, some ten blocks north, to form one giant public space, the "future focus of the Metropolis."²¹ An engraving of 1849 suggests this potential (Figure 5). It shows the view south from the huge elliptical square toward the crowded streets of lower Manhattan. Only the southern half of the ellipse is shown, but it implies an unseen whole, the center point of a city only half complete.

Olmsted and Vaux's Muster Ground

As New York grew after the Civil War, crowds drawn to the businesses that lined Broadway—hotels, department stores, theaters and restaurants—subsumed Union Square. The neighborhood had begun to change so much that the *New York Times* wondered if the quiet residential square was obsolete.²² When the upper-middle classes began moving away from the area, small town houses and genteel gentleman's clubs were replaced by large commercial buildings

such as the grand Everett House hotel, built at the north-eastern corner in 1854. The area became known for entertainment and luxury shopping. In 1870 Tiffany and Company started construction on a grand cast iron building at the corner of Fifteenth Street and Union Square West, the latest manifestation of the steady northward advance of commercial buildings along Broadway. The Union Square Theater opened in 1871 on the corner of Fourth Avenue and Thirteenth Street, followed by other theaters and luxury goods emporiums. The square's original purpose as a quiet suburban oasis was hopelessly out of date.

In 1872 the landscape architects Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, champions of the romantic park movement, were called upon to redesign Union Square and in doing so they recognized and reinforced its unique urban character. Their involvement with the square came about in the aftermath of the short-lived but disastrous takeover of city government by the corrupt and profligate Tweed Ring. In 1870 politicians associated with William "Boss" Tweed, headquartered near Union Square at Tammany Hall, had claimed authority over city parks, replacing the Board of

Commissioners of Central Park, previously controlled by the state legislature, with a new city Department of Public Parks.²³ Olmsted and Vaux were cast aside as advising landscape architects. The Tweed Ring seized the parks budget, and by 1871 the department spent over six million dollars on various park "improvements" that channeled money to friendly contractors, tradesmen, and other supporters. Under this regime, the Tammany Hall-appointed parks engineer-in-chief M. A. Kellogg and acting landscape gardener E. A. Pollard drew up a plan to replace the straight walkways in Union Square with curved paths in the fashionable picturesque manner (Figure 6). They also suggested removing the iron fence and some of the shrubbery to make the square more open. However, this plan, like most of the improvements implemented under the Tweed Ring, was only partially realized. The coup was short lived. When control of the parks was returned to the original park commissioners in late 1871, they were faced with a dilemma: what to do with the partly and imperfectly renovated parks and gardens? When Olmsted and Vaux regained their role as advising landscape architects, they were most concerned

Figure 5 C. Bachman, Union Square looking south, 1849

Figure 6 M. A. Kellogg and E. A. Pollard, plan for Union Square, *New York City Department of Parks Annual Report*, 1870 (New York, 1871)

with the completion of Central Park, which they had begun in 1858 according to their original naturalistic vision. However, when they were asked to look at Union Square, they were faced with quite a different problem: how to deal with a formally designed residential garden now located in the middle of a shopping and entertainment district.

Many authors have discerned a contradiction between Olmsted's democratic impulses and the elite activities that he imagined taking place in his parks.²⁴ While far more modest than his plan for Central Park, his work at Union Square reveals his pragmatic side, in particular his willingness to accommodate some traditions of mass culture into landscape design. Olmsted and Vaux's initial assessment of Union Square is contained in a letter of 13 March 1872 to Henry G. Stebbins, the president of the Department of Public Parks, in which they wrote that the original quiet and leafy character of the square was under threat from the crowds who regularly blocked the surrounding streets and trampled the plants.²⁵ As first executive secretary of the U.S. Sanitary Commission, Olmsted was familiar with the transformation of this once-quiet garden into a crowded public space because of his experience with the 1864 Metropolitan Fair. After the Civil War, continuing use of the square for public celebra-

tions and protests became increasingly at odds with its original design as a public park. These events were not spontaneous but highly organized, involving careful choreography and props, with platforms for speeches erected at the base of the Washington memorial, banners, flags, choirs, elaborate lighting, and even fireworks (Figure 7). If anything, the square was too successful as a public space. Olmsted and Vaux presented the parks commissioners with suggestions for a design taking these new uses into account.

While their plan was more pragmatic than ideological, it effected a dramatic change by adapting Union Square for its growing use as an active public space rather than a place for passive respite, quiet contemplation, and genteel behavior.²⁶ In their report to the commissioners the two men recognized that it was no longer enough to offer "a refreshing gleam of simple greensward under an umbrageous grove to those who pass by on the outside," as the authors of an earlier report had claimed.²⁷ As the square assumed a more central role in the city's civic affairs, its use for mass gatherings would continue to increase. Temporary platforms constructed around the Washington memorial often blocked the streets for days at a time. Unless the department intended to prevent public meetings from being held

Figure 7 The Centennial celebration, Union Square, New York, 4 July 1876. Picture Collection, New York Public Library

Figure 8 Union Square, from *Atlases of New York City* (New York: G.W. Bromley, 1916), sect. 3, plate 44

there, Olmsted and Vaux argued, it was only prudent to plan for future crowds. Consequently they supported the implementation of the Tweed Ring plan to take down the surrounding iron fence and to reduce the number of trees and shrubs. In many ways this redesign involved returning Union Square to an earlier European version of open public space, not a quiet residential square but a plaza characterized by greater visual openness, less vegetation, more paving, and more public access.²⁸

Most significantly, Olmsted and Vaux suggested creating a separate area specifically for public assembly. While they did not significantly alter the Tweed-era design by Kellogg and Pollard for the park itself—a series of teardrop-shaped planting beds that embodied the kind of stylized picturesque they abhorred at Central Park—they proposed flattening the northern end of the elliptical park in order to create a wide paved area along Seventeenth Street (Figure 8).²⁹ Olmsted and Vaux called this 300-by-100-foot open space a “muster ground,” and they intended it to replace the Washington memorial as the main gathering point in the square. In their words, it was designed to “meet the public requirements of mass meetings, which had previously led to the frequent erection of temporary stagings, booths, tents, flags, staffs and lighting apparatus, of a character inconvenient, unseemly and dangerous, on the southeast part of the square.”³⁰ The Board of Commissioners agreed with their proposal, stating in their 1873 report that

Figure 9 Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, the Cottage at Union Square after an 1893 meeting of the unemployed

Figure 10 Columbus Day Parade, Union Square, 1892

“Twenty thousand persons can stand in the new ground without interrupting or being incommoded by the street-cars and omnibuses. . . . The whole space may be fully illuminated by substantial fixtures. The arrangements are adapted to allow a military column or other procession passing the platform to be reviewed from it by any guest of the city.”³¹ In conjunction with the muster ground, Olmsted and Vaux designed a small, rustic, neo-Gothic building known as the Cottage between Seventeenth Street and the park to the south (Figure 9). The Cottage became the stage for many passionate political speeches in the early twentieth century. The little building and the open ground in front of it have stirred a contentious debate about the proper use of public space that has stretched from the late nineteenth century until today.

In form, use, and name the muster ground echoed the tradition of the urban military parade ground, although it was intended to serve a more modern purpose. The 1811 plan for New York City had included a large parade ground near the present-day site of Madison Square Garden. The original plan for Central Park showed a parade ground that was never built, and in 1866 Tompkins Square Park in the Lower East Side was adapted for use as a parade ground.³² While some historians see the creation of such spaces as an exertion of control over a fractious working-class population through the public display of police and military power, it is clear that Olmsted and Vaux imagined the formation drilling that would take place on their muster ground as a positive form of exercise and community building for the working classes themselves.³³ They had included a parade ground for “active recreation” in their design for Prospect Park in Brooklyn, and the muster ground at Union Square was intended for a similar purpose.³⁴ It was used for all kinds of civic celebrations, for example, Columbus Day parades (Figure 10). Such parades included massed ranks of soldiers, as well as members of civic organizations with martial overtones, such as the Knights of Columbus. These offered the spectacle of human figures assembled to form a kind of mass urban ornament, the highly visible and emotionally charged manifestation of a self-organizing, self-policing polis.³⁵ In its new form Union Square was truly a civic space, a “theater adequate to the utterance of the national voice” in the earlier words of Samuel Ruggles. It provided a urban space for the sanctioned exercise of democracy. However, this theater became a stage to pageants not only of patriotism but also of protest, and by the early years of the twentieth century this protest assumed a form that appeared to threaten nationality stability.

A Stage for Class Conflict

Situated between the sweatshops of the Lower East Side and the department stores along Ladies Mile on Broadway, between the sites of production and consumption, Union Square was ideally suited as a place to promote working-class solidarity. Distinct from the popular leisure grounds situated across the Hudson in Hoboken and on Staten Island, which were dedicated to picnicking, sports, and games, the square became the highly visible site of determined and deliberately choreographed working-class political demonstrations. These rallies were the organized version of the working-class protest movement that had begun during the Civil War when, in July 1863, poor Irish immigrants, resenting conscription into the army, lashed out at the wealthy who could escape the draft and against

African-Americans, whom they believed responsible for the war with the South. A riot started at a draft office on Forty-sixth Street and Second Avenue, then spread all over town, from the Lower East Side to Yorkville, in the Upper East Side, and lasted for three days.

After the war was over, working-class protests became more organized and cohesive. Immigrants of various ethnicities, bound together by a common desire to improve the lives of working people, joined trade unions, and these unions organized parades and demonstrations to argue their cause. These groups mimicked the kind of mass parades favored by other civic clubs and organizations, marching in unison, acting as one cohesive unit with a single message. In many American cities the organizers of labor meetings began to expand their activities beyond working-class neighborhoods into more central and visible urban spaces. In Chicago demonstrators spilled out of the south and west side ethnic enclaves to gather along the lakefront and in front of the Chicago Board of Trade in the heart of the financial district.³⁶ In New York, after Tompkins Square Park in the Lower East Side, the traditional gathering place for such activity, was closed as a public meeting place following a riot in 1874, the more centrally located Union Square became the destination for working-class political marches.³⁷ When the Central Labor Union (CLU), a group made up of representatives of many trade unions, organized the first Labor Day parade on 5 September 1882, they held it in Union Square. Advertised as a “monster labor festival” of 50,000 people, the huge, peaceful parade offered a clear contrast to the violent *mêlée* of the draft riots and to the

small, localized labor gatherings held on the Lower East Side (Figure 11).

The concept of democracy embodied in Downing’s vision for Central Park depended on all classes coming together in a pseudo-natural environment, removed from the pressures of commerce and competition. He and Olmsted imagined Central Park as a place apart from the world of trade and business. However, the reality of New York City’s largely unregulated industrial economy meant that working people had to toil all hours of the day, with little time for leisurely strolling. The fight for better working conditions coalesced around the issue of the eight-hour day—the right to have time after work for education, and to socialize and enjoy the amenities of the city. From the 1860s Union Square regularly hosted union protest meetings of 10,000 people, targeting the system of piecework (“sweating”) prevalent in the garment industry. Union members marched through the Lower East Side carrying banners bearing slogans, waving red flags and singing the French revolutionary anthem the “Marseillaise.” It was these crowds, overwhelming the streets and the square, that prompted Olmsted and Vaux to design the muster ground at the northern end. There labor leaders could address the assembly from a platform erected in front of the Cottage. Additional, temporary stages, mounted on carts and placed around the square, accommodated additional speeches in German, Italian and Hebrew. In their use of the square for mass meetings, the labor movement emphasized a trans-Atlantic culture of working-class unity rather than a specifically American idea of democracy.

Figure 11 Labor Day Parade, Union Square, 1882, from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 16 Sept. 1882

Figure 12 Socialists in Union Square, 1 May 1908

These labor demonstrations were designed to publicize the movement's message of international solidarity and the Central Labor Union's success in uniting multiple trades and ethnic groups. They showed that the labor movement was both unified and highly organized. The CLU was especially interested in the press coverage that such a large and peaceable gathering would attract. Its leaders sought the attention of sympathetic journalists, aiming to counteract the negative publicity they received in mainstream newspapers, especially the *New York Times*. The official journal of the CLU demanded to know why the press labeled its members "agitators" 'disturbers of the peace' 'anarchists' and 'revolutionaries,'" when their means were peaceful and their only aim was equality, surely an American ideal.³⁸

Appropriately for a site described as a muster ground, the CLU leaders used military language in their speeches. At the 1882 Labor Day parade, grand marshal William McCabe proclaimed, "Let us offer to monopolists and their tools of both parties such a sight as we will make them think more profoundly than they have ever thought before. Let us lift the curtain and show them by this demonstration some of the organizing work that has been going on behind the scenes during the past nine months . . . our demonstration tomorrow is the review before the battle. The greater it is the more thoroughly will the enemy be disheartened and the easier our victory will come."³⁹ The parade organizers adopted military tactics, too, with three divisions of marchers beginning in different places in the Lower East Side and coming together at Broadway. Labor leaders had learned from the Civil War demonstrators: massed ranks of loudly cheering citizens bearing banners and waving flags made a fearsome and inspiring sight.

After the turn of the twentieth century, propelled by catastrophic world events, the demonstrations in Union Square became less orderly and more raucous. The issues at hand were greater than labor justice: social activists began to demand the reform or even overthrow of government. Their mass meetings appeared to prefigure working-class revolt, constituting a threat to democracy rather than its visible exercise. Founded in 1905, the Socialist International Workers of the World (known as the "Wobblies") often used Union Square as a site for their rallies. Unlike the carefully choreographed Columbus Day and Labor Day marchers, these crowds appeared to be an amorphous mass without any obvious order (Figure 12). Their sheer numbers overwhelmed the square to the degree that none of its landscape features could be seen. The city had provided a place for mass demonstration. The question now was how to control that mass.

These apparently formless gatherings fostered violence on both sides. When the Department of Parks denied permission for the Socialist Conference for the Unemployed to assemble in Union Square in March 1908, 7,000 people gathered anyway. Police began clubbing the crowd to get them to disperse. At 3:30 in the afternoon an unidentified person detonated a bomb near the fountain at the center of the park, killing himself and one other person (Figure 13).⁴⁰ During a 50,000-strong May Day parade in 1912, members of the Wobblies and the Italian Socialist Federation stormed the platform in front of the Cottage and tore down the American flag displayed there, claiming that the Socialists were an international fraternity, with no allegiance to the United States. In December 1914 another bomb was detonated in Union Square. This explosion was widely seen as retaliation for the notorious Palmer Raids by the Department of Justice, which aimed at rounding up and deporting alien radicals.⁴¹ Following the American entry into World War I in 1917 and the national hysteria known as the Red Scare, Governor Alfred E. Smith signed a law outlawing the display of the red flag of the Communists at any public assembly in order to demonstrate that the state was taking action against radicalism.⁴² During these years the nature of protests in Union Square was called into question: were they bona fide political demonstrations, guaranteed by the Constitution, or were they illegal and seditious?

The turmoil above ground reflected what was happening underneath. From 1900 until 1930 Union Square was torn up piece by piece to make way for two subway lines and a concourse connecting them, as the municipal government, in partnership with private companies, constructed a unified underground rapid transit system (Figures 14, 15).⁴³ During these years the proposed reconstruction of the square was a contentious issue. While urban reformers, influenced by a

Figure 13 "Casualties of Anarchist Riot, Taken Twenty Seconds after Bomb Thrown," Union Square, 28 March 1908

Progressive social agenda, took the opportunity to re-imagine Union Square as a new kind of civic center, designed for peaceful community meetings, labor groups protested the encroachment of the subway into a space they claimed as their own. When the subway construction was complete, the Parks Department built a new park on a platform raised three feet above the level of the street. The park was a watered-down version of the City Beautiful ideal, a symmetrical landscape ornamented with statues of patriots and other historical figures, who replaced the cheering crowds who had swarmed in front of the old Cottage.

Figure 14 Union Square from the southwest, 1893

The City Beautiful Ideal and the Iconography of War

In adopting a City Beautiful Movement formula for a civic center, the turn-of-the-century redesigners of Union Square adopted the obvious model. Building on the Enlightenment idea that monumental public buildings and urban spaces could foster a new form of civic life, Progressive-era social reformers, architects, and city planners aimed to redefine public space according to Progressive political ideals.⁴⁴ In response to the individualism of the *laissez-faire* era, when a few private individuals had made huge fortunes in new industries that were only very loosely regulated and manned by a poor underclass that was made up largely of recent immigrants, Progressives sought to create new forms of social cooperation by reinforcing loyalty to the state.

In the Progressive philosophy, architecture and urban design were important mechanisms through which to awaken the urban masses to the importance of individual contributions to the greater good.⁴⁵ Urban design could create active and informed citizens as well as foster social harmony. Authors such as the Rochester journalist Charles Mulford Robinson promoted the creation of civic centers, centrally located administrative complexes with municipal buildings grouped together for both ease of access and monumental effect. In Robinson's ideal American town, these buildings would face an open plaza modeled on a "common," as in a New England village.⁴⁶ Robinson's proposal to remake the early republican village common to serve a new era reflected his desire to return to the nation's

Figure 15 Construction for the subway, southeast corner of Union Square, 1901

political roots, put down in an imagined era of collective political purpose that was now lost.

Other commentators were less nostalgic. In 1920 the New York critic John Taylor Boyd put forward an alternative, contemporary model for a Progressive civic center, the stadium. In "A Gathering Place in Town Plans," published in *Architectural Record*, Boyd described the necessity for open space in democratic societies: "As one aspect of the life of such communities we have countless public meetings, where people foregather collectively, not to transact business directly, but for celebration and stimulation; with ceremonies, addresses, commemorations, inaugurations, pageants, in which the whole people formally but democratically and spontaneously, delight to join."⁴⁷ Seeing democracy as a kind of public performance, Boyd called for the design of forums or theaters for its enactment. He believed that functional requirements necessitated forms different from traditional urban parks. Since civic centers were intended for mass gatherings, not individual leisure, he argued that they should be formal rather than picturesque: "Any great masses of green cut up the crowds and they detract from the impressive effects of that colorful pattern of crowds and processions. . . . The simpler the setting, the better. Neither elaborate architecture nor elaborate naturalistic parks are needed."⁴⁸ His ideal model, the football stadium, was borrowed not from any landscape tradition but from a built expression of the emerging mass culture.

Within a few years, the careful manipulation of massed crowds and heroic architecture would be used with powerful effect by the fascist states in the lead-up to World War II.⁴⁹ Under fascism, however, the organization of the crowd was not spontaneous and collective, as Boyd wished, but elaborately designed by architects, set designers, and choreographers.

Already half designed as a place of mass gathering, Union Square seemed to fulfill many of the criteria required for a City Beautiful civic center: it stood close to the geographic center of the city, enmeshed in the nexus of many streets and transit systems, and it was a vibrant place for celebrations and protests of all kinds. Under the authority of the reformist city administrations of the early twentieth century, it seemed possible to remake the square according to their ideals. Previously, no public authority monitored and regulated urban design in New York City. The Tammany Hall-controlled city government of the early 1870s had had no municipal planning authority and no inclination to undertake grand urban projects. Mayors Seth Low and George McClellan aimed to change that. In 1903 Low created a New York Improvement Commission and charged it with drawing up a comprehensive city plan. A member of the Municipal Art Society of New York City, he was a firm believer in its motto: "To make us

love our city, we must make our city lovely."⁵⁰ Founded in 1893 by a group of artists and their patrons inspired by the splendor of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, the Municipal Art Society aimed to turn public attention to the cause of civic beautification.

Partly because of the extensive subway work going on underneath, the square suffered from perpetual neglect throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century. A bold new vision was required to return it to its past glory, and the Municipal Art Society was happy to provide one. In a 1902 report on the street system of Lower Manhattan, the organization's committee on Thoroughfares, chaired by architect Charles Lamb, suggested a major rearrangement of the adjoining thoroughfares. Christopher Street was to be extended northward to meet the southwestern corner of the square.⁵¹ Its diagonal was to continue through the square as a wide, straight pedestrian pathway meeting Fourth Avenue at Seventeenth Street. Pushing Broadway through the square in a straight line from Fourteenth to Seventeenth streets would form another diagonal. Although it was intended that these pathways to be used for civic processions, the Municipal Art Society committee proposed moving the statue of Washington to the center of this new axis, reestablishing the statue, rather than the crowd, as the focus. By making Union Square formal and geometrical, the plan answered contemporary complaints about its layout, which dated back to Olmsted and Vaux. Charles Mulford Robinson was particularly critical, claiming that the meandering paths were "an example both of ineffective and of positively wrong planning." He also claimed, somewhat enigmatically, that "the wrong portion is paved."⁵² The redesign aimed to transform a place of rowdy working-class protest into a site for more genteel displays of civic unity.⁵³

The Parks Department considered and ultimately rejected the Municipal Art Society's 1902 proposal, but in the wake of that decision the state legislature advanced plans that would have transformed the square into an even more grandiose City Beautiful composition, reconfigured to serve as the city's legal center. Between 1903 and 1913 state officials and the New York City Board of Estimate considered constructing the New York County Court House on or adjacent to Union Square, which would have created a backdrop of unified administrative buildings for the square, replacing the collage of individually conceived commercial buildings. Lawyers and politicians had long complained that the existing courthouse, the so-called Tweed Court House north of City Hall, was too old and too small and that it was generally a blight on City Hall Park. Since it was also a symbol of the corruption of the Tweed era, the reform administration was anxious to see it demolished. In 1905 state Senator Eisberg sponsored a bill to build a new county

Figure 16 Battleship USS *Recruit*, Union Square, 1917

courthouse in either Union or Madison Squares, with a new public square to be constructed on land directly adjacent.⁵⁴ By 1907 the Board of Estimate declared it had chosen a site on the eastern side of Union Square, between Fourteenth and Seventeenth Streets, from Fourth Avenue to Irving Place.⁵⁵ Shortly afterward, the justices of the Supreme Court voiced their support for this idea. The square would become a new legal center, complementing the municipal center being developed near City Hall.

It was heavy-handed symbolism to place the county courthouse directly facing the site favored by anarchist and socialist groups for their large and vocal public demonstrations. These groups openly questioned the validity of the United States government and its legal system. For conservative politicians, the courts were the proper place to enact democracy. They did not concur with the liberal agenda for public space put forward by Progressive planners such as Boyd and Lamb. The *New York Times* came out in support of the courthouse plan. Fronting onto Union Square, the courthouse would provide an “object of pride and admiration for the citizens whose money erected it,” the editors claimed.⁵⁶ Despite the enthusiasm of Senator Eisberg and the *Times*, however, many members of the legal community were less than enthusiastic about the location, thinking it too remote from the municipal buildings in Lower Manhattan. Surrounded by department stores, hotels, and theaters, Union Square also presented a less-than-seemly atmosphere for the transaction of civic business. This crit-

icism shifted the new county courthouse to Foley Square, where it was built in 1913–26 as the centerpiece of the ill-fated civic center north of City Hall Park.⁵⁷

Despite the efforts of the Municipal Art Society and others, the Department of Public Parks, the city agency responsible for the design of Union Square, showed little interest in reaffirming its role as a public gathering space. During World War I the department attempted to counter the square’s radical reputation with two temporary constructions, both designed to inspire patriotism. In 1917 the Mayor’s Committee on National Defense docked the USS *Recruit*, an ersatz battleship built by the George A. Fuller Company, in the square (Figure 16).⁵⁸ Formally “launched” on Memorial Day, this landlocked maritime monument served as a marine and navy recruitment office for young New Yorkers while socialist leaders adjacent to it gave speeches against American involvement in the war. The battleship shared Union Square with a 75-by-25-foot “demonstration garden” built by the Farm Garden Bureau (a division of the Department of Parks). At a time when the outer boroughs were being opened up for development by the construction of new subway lines, this so-called model back yard encouraged tenement dwellers to move to the suburbs. Sitting at the very center of New York, it was an advertisement for urban decongestion.⁵⁹ The bureau provided experts to answer questions about garden design, the proper care of lawns, the use of fertilizer, and tips on growing vegetables.⁶⁰ The garden remained in place until 1928,

Figure 17 Plan for remodeled Union Square, from "Union Square Park to be Raised Three Feet," *New York Times*, 6 June 1929

Figure 18 "Revised Plan for the Improvement of Union Square Park," *New York Times*, 4 May 1930

when it was demolished to make way for the construction of the underground concourse. On that occasion, Parks Commissioner Walter R. Herrick reported that newly minted commuters had found the garden a "Mecca for needed information."⁶¹ In this way, the Department of Parks employed Union Square to promote the American values of patriotism and home ownership during World War I, and to weaken the dangerous working-class solidarity created in the segregated and over-crowded Lower East Side. For three years, between 1917 and 1920, New Yorkers passing through Union Square were presented with the bizarre sight of a giant battleship seemingly about to plow through a suburban garden, a surrealistic reminder of dangers overseas and the need to protect domestic life at home.

A Centennial Memorial

When Union Square was formally reopened in 1931 after the subway work, the memories of these oddly incompatible wartime constructions were swept away along with the remnants of the Olmsted and Vaux plan. All was replaced by

a watered-down City Beautiful public park (Figures 17, 18).⁶² The new Union Square, designed by Parks Department landscape architect Julius V. Burgevin, incorporated the formality favored by planners Robinson and Boyd. The square was reformulated as a passive memorial to national political values, and its role as a place for active political gatherings was consigned to history. The square's recent reputation as a center of working-class activism was played down. Starting in 1900, the Department of Parks transferred its strategy of promoting social change away from larger parks, like Union Square, to small neighborhood parks, a program Robert Moses continued when Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia named him Parks Commissioner in 1934. In the age of the New Deal, the need for a visible civic center no longer seemed pressing. Public space was considered chiefly as a contributor to individual good health, not as a venue for the mass democratic action.⁶³

Raised above the surrounding streets, the new Union Square was an artificial platform of lawns, plants, and statuary disguising subway entrances and vents. It had a single straight path down the center, with the Washington memo-

rial and a statue of Abraham Lincoln relocated along this axis. (In 1934 a World War I memorial was dedicated in the southeastern corner of the square, where Washington had once stood.) Statues of heroic historic figures were once again the focus of the square, replacing the massed ranks of the living, who had dominated it in the early years of the twentieth century. The northern end of the square was also redesigned. Olmsted and Vaux's neo-Gothic Cottage was demolished and replaced by a neoclassical stone and concrete building described as a "combined bandstand and comfort station." The environs of the Cottage, explicitly designed as a place for public address, were reborn with a modern purpose. The open space in front of the little building had been dedicated to parking since the 1920s, and by 1930 Department of Parks drawings refer to it simply as "parking space."⁶⁴ In 1941 the Department completed its functional re-orientation of the historic muster ground by planting a row of trees right through its middle.

Samuel Ruggles had invoked the Forum of Trajan in his patriotic description of Union Square in 1864, and in 1932 the square received a version of that imperial monument in the form of the Liberty Flag Pole donated by the Tammany Society to commemorate the sesquicentennial of the Declaration of Independence. The entire text of the Declaration was inscribed on its base, along with a relief sculpture by Anthony de Francisci (Figure 19). The base also bears a quotation from Thomas Jefferson: "How little do my countrymen know what precious blessings they are in possession of and which no other people on earth enjoy." The symbolism of the new Union Square could not have been clearer. It was a memorial to the nation created by the revolution and the Civil War. Whereas Ruggles had seen its political association as ongoing, it was now fixed in the past.

Despite the attempt to depoliticize Union Square through design, it continued to be a place for radical political meetings.⁶⁵ Soapbox orators of all stripes were a daily presence in the square throughout the Depression, and Communists and crowds of unemployed workers continued to rally there.⁶⁶ These gatherings caused friction as more and more joined their ranks. Property owners and business people were adamantly opposed to the use of Union Square a political forum. Others were appalled at the aggressive tactics used by the police, seeing them as a suppression of civil liberties. On 6 March 1930 a huge demonstration in support of the unemployed inspired a vigorous debate about free speech in public places. In advance of the demonstration, Mayor James J. Walker issued a statement outlining his notably accepting policy toward "public disturbances."⁶⁷ Walker's remarks were part of a wider national dispute about the meaning of the First Amendment guaran-

Figure 19 Base of Liberty Flagpole with relief sculpture by Anthony de Francisci, 1932

tee of free speech in relation to gatherings in city parks and streets. While Walker set down regulations to govern the use of such spaces for public assembly, he guaranteed citizens the right to be heard.

Despite his assurances, the demonstration of 35,000 people, one of the largest ever held in the square, turned out badly. When protesters tried to march south toward City Hall, in violation of their permit, police and firemen turned fire hoses on them, inciting a riot.⁶⁸ Following this mêlée the Chamber of Commerce petitioned the city for a complete ban on public demonstrations in the square.⁶⁹ In 1932 the Broadway Association, another business group, also recommended that public demonstrations be banned from the square and confined to a less public site, "the marginal street facing the East River between Nineteenth and Twenty-third Streets."⁷⁰ Businessmen were concerned that the viability of Union Square as a commercial district was being seriously undermined by its radical reputation. They wanted to return to an earlier idea of the public park as a place of respite, although now dedicated to those who worked and shopped in the neighborhood, not for its long-departed residents.

In an effort to reclaim Union Square from the Communists and the unemployed, city authorities and business groups offered a series of patriotic celebrations. The centennial pageant commemorating the founding of the square on April 23, 1932 was the grandest, with the surrounding buildings and stores draped with American flag bunting (Figure 20). The day-long program planned by the Union Square Centennial Committee included a dedication ceremony for the new bandstand, a historical pageant sponsored by Tammany Society complete with figures in 1832 dress,

Figure 20 Centennial of Union Square, 1932

and a mass chorus of high school students signing patriotic songs. The police and the military took an active role. The Veterans of Foreign Wars held an outdoor “Americanization” meeting. Members of the Police Academy demonstrated military maneuvers, including “the art of handling a pistol and disarming prisoners.”⁷¹ The Police Rifle Regiment offered a mock riot drill. Communists and Socialists could not miss the message: displays of public dissent would be met by force.

While the Chamber of Commerce fought Communists and Socialists for ownership of Union Square throughout the 1920s and ’30s, many Progressives accepted the need for public spaces to act as social safety valves. In a 1932 editorial following the disastrous unemployment march, the *New York Times* commented, “The Square has belied its name, standing more often for disunion than for union.”⁷² However, the editors argued, its reputation as the “Home of Discontent” had to be preserved. Taking their cue from the new Liberty Flagpole, they associated Union Square with the principles of American nationhood set down by Thomas Jefferson. It was a place where the “error of opinion may be tolerated,” they claimed. The editors also quoted Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, whose “champagne bubble” theory held that the best way to counter radical opinion was to expose it to the air so that it might be diffused. Union Square

was no longer Ruggles’s “theater for the national voice” but a grudgingly tolerated forum for those who opposed government policies. Rather than being a place where organized mass meetings shaped public opinion and gave it aesthetic form, it was now simply a place for dissent.

It is for its larger historic role that Union Square is now remembered. In 1998 it was named a National Historic Landmark by the National Park Service in honor of “the park’s role as a focal point in American labor history.” Since 1966 the Park Service has recognized landscapes as significant not just for their natural features but also for their historical and cultural value: their associations with historic events or significant designers, their use by cultural groups, or their very ordinariness (that is to say, their expression of American vernacular traditions).

The elevation of Union Square in the national consciousness says as much about changing ideas of landscape as it does about the recurring need for preservation and remembrance. This small area of parkland, not a central park but still somehow at the center of a set of ideas, has an identity far larger than its silhouette. Accidental, unpremeditated, undefined, and lopsided, Union Square fails to conform to the rationality of the New York City grid and it expresses, perhaps more than any other urban landscape, how American political ideals are realized.

Notes

1. Denis E. Cosgrove outlines a broad history of the relationship between the constructed landscape and social ideals in modern Europe and the United States in *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble Books, 1984).
2. Andrew Jackson Downing, "The New York Park" (1851) in *Rural Essays*, ed. George W. Curtis (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1853), 152.
3. Andrew Jackson Downing, "A Talk about Public Parks and Gardens" (1848) in *ibid.*, 141. Galen Cranz discusses the political motivations of successive generations of park designers in America in *The Politics of Park Design: A History of Urban Parks in America* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982). On the social aims of Central Park's early advocates, see Ross L. Miller, "The Landscaper's Utopia Versus the City: A Mismatch," *New England Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (June 1976), 179–93; Ian R. Stewart, "Politics and the Park," *New-York Historical Society Quarterly* 61, no. 3–4 (July–Oct. 1977), 124–55; Melvin Kalfus, "A Philosophy of Urban Landscape Design," in *Frederick Law Olmsted: The Passion of a Public Artist* (New York: New York University Press, 1990), 277–96; Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, "The Design Competition" and "The Greensward Plan and Its Creators" in *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1992), 95–120, 121–49.
4. Henry Lawrence discusses the evolution of English residential squares from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century in "The Greening of the Squares of London: Transformation of Urban Landscapes and Ideals," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 83, no. 1 (March 1993), 90–118.
5. J. B. Jackson, *American Space. The Centennial Years 1865–76* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972), 208–9.
6. Samuel B. Ruggles, *Union Square and the Sanitary Commission: Address by the Hon. Samuel B. Ruggles, at Union Square, on the Opening of the Metropolitan Fair, April 8th, 1864* (New York: C. A. Alvord, 1864), 8.
7. Jacob Landy, "The Washington Monument Project in New York," *JSAH* 28, no. 4 (Dec. 1969), 291–97.
8. *Broadway Journal* (11 Jan. 1845), 22; *New York Evening Post* (9 March 1844), 2; Landy, "The Washington Monument Project in New York," 292.
9. Landy, "The Washington Monument Project in New York," 297. On Robert Mills's national monument in Washington D.C., see Pamela Scott and Antoinette J. Lee, *Buildings of the District of Columbia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); and Richard Longstreth, *The Mall in Washington D.C., 1791–1991* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).
10. Ruggles, *Union Square and the Sanitary Commission*, 10.
11. *Ibid.*, 11.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Eric Hobsbawm describes the modern urban crowd in the European context in "Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870–1914," *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 304. Michael North describes the use of crowds as urban "ornaments" in relation to the work of Joseph Beuys in, "The Public as Sculpture: From Heavenly City to Mass Ornament," *Critical Inquiry* 16, no. 4 (Summer, 1990), 865–68.
14. William Bridges, "Commissioner's Remarks" in *Map of the City of New York and Island of Manhattan* (New York: printed for the author by T. & J. Swords, 1811), 1.
15. Bridges, "Commissioner's Remarks," 8.
16. Isaac Newton Phelps Stokes, *Iconography of Manhattan, 1498–1909* (New York: Arno Press, 1967, ca. 1915), 6: 1540.
17. D. G. Brinton Thompson, *Ruggles of New York: A Life of Samuel B. Ruggles* (New York: AMS Press, 1946), 62–65. On the development of the Manhattan grid in the early to mid-nineteenth century, especially the provision of open spaces, see M. Christine Boyer, "The Inheritance of the Grid," *Manhattan Manners: Architecture and Style 1850–1900* (New York: Rizzoli, 1985), 8–23.
18. Lawrence, "The Greening of the Squares of London," 111–13.
19. Gregory Raynor, "The Origins of Union Square," unpublished MS, New York City Department of Parks and Recreation Library, New York.
20. On the connection between urban design and public health, see Martin V. Melosi, *The Sanitary City: Urban Infrastructure in America from Colonial Times to the Present* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000). On the creation of an urban sanitation system for New York City, see John Duffy, *A History of Public Health in New York City, 1625–1866* (New York: Russell Sage, 1968); and Joanne Abel Goldman, *Building New York's Sewers: Developing Mechanisms of Urban Management* (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 1997). The creation of urban parks with public health in mind was undertaken in a systematic manner in Chicago during this time. See Daniel Bluestone, "'A Cordon of Verdure': Gardens, Parks and Cultivation 1830–1869," in *Constructing Chicago*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 7–35.
21. *New York City Proceedings of the Board of Aldermen* 4 (1853), 130, 189. Phelps Stokes, *Iconography of Manhattan*, 1851. Brinton Thompson, *Ruggles of New York*, 63.
22. "Local Intelligence. The Uptown Movement," *New York Times* (20 August 1867), 6. J. B. Jackson describes the rapid growth of New York City in the mid-nineteenth century, including the busy commercial district along Broadway between City Hall and Union Square, in *American Space*, 201–4. See also Edward K. Spann, *The New Metropolis: New York City 1840–1857* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981); and David Schuyler, *The New Urban Landscape: The Redefinition of City Form in Nineteenth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).
23. This period in the history of New York City parks and the career of Frederick Law Olmsted is described in *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted. Volume VI, The Years of Olmstead, Vaux and Company, 1865–1874*, ed. David Schuyler and Jane Turner Censer (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 38–46.
24. See for example Kalfus, "A Philosophy of Urban Landscape Design," 281.
25. This letter is reprinted in *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted. Vol. VI*, 531–37.
26. Lisa Keller discusses the tensions surrounding the various and often-conflicting uses of public parks in New York City in *Triumph of Order: Democracy and Public Space in New York and London* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).
27. *Minutes of the Commissioners of the Department of Public Parks, 1871*. Document 35 (New York, 1872), 2. New York City Department of Parks and Recreation Library, New York.
28. Lawrence, "The Greening of the Squares of London," 93–95.
29. The remnants of this design may be seen in drawing no. M-L-89-3 at the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation Archives. While this drawing is undated, it represents the state of the square in the late 1890s.
30. *Third General Report of the Board of Commissioners of the Department of Public Parks for the Period of Twenty Months, From May 1st, 1872 to December 31st 1873* (New York: William C. Bryant and Co., 1875), 18. New York City Department of Parks and Recreation Library.
31. *Ibid.*
32. Keller, *Triumph of Order*, 172.
33. Deborah S. Gardner, "Tompkins Square: Past and Present," *The Journal of American History* 77, no. 1 (June 1990), 232–38.
34. *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted* 5: 23.
35. Hobsbawm, "Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870–1914." In the

1920s the German critic Siegfried Kracauer saw the aestheticization of massed human figures moving in unison as evidence of the loss of individual will under capitalism. "The Mass Ornament" (1927) in *New German Critique* no. 5 (Spring 1975), 67–76.

36. On the occupation of public space by labor groups in Chicago, see Eric L. Hirsch, *Urban Revolt: Ethnic Politics in the Nineteenth-Century Chicago Labor Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Richard Schneirov, *Labor and Urban Politics: Class Conflict and the Origins of Modern Liberalism in Chicago, 1864–97* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998); and James Green, *Death in the Haymarket: A Story of Chicago, the First Labor Movement, and the Bombing that Divided America* (New York: Pantheon, 2006).

37. On Tompkins Square Park and Union Square as sites of working-class political protest, see Keller, *Triumph of Order*, 169–81, 224–31.

38. Ibid.

39. Theodore Watts, *The First Labor Day Parade* (Silver Spring, Md.: Phoenix Rising, 1983), 28–33.

40. "Bomb Kills One; Police Escape," *New York Times* (29 March 1908), 1; Keller, 224–25.

41. "Two Bomb Scares Baffle the Police. Explosion of Infernal Machine Terrifies Hundreds Passing through Union Square," *New York Times* (5 Dec. 1914), 1.

42. Smith's attempts to moderate the abuse of civil liberties in New York State during this period are described in, David R. Colburn, "Governor Alfred E. Smith and the Red Scare, 1919–20," *Political Science Quarterly* 88, no. 3 (Sept. 1973), 423–44. See also Julian F. Jaffe, *Crusade against Radicalism: New York during the Red Scare 1914–1924* (National University Publications: Port Washington N.Y., 1972); and Tod Pfannestiel, *Retinking the Red Scare: The Lusk Committee and New York's Crusade Against Radicalism, 1919–1923* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

43. The New York City Central Underground Railway Company first proposed a subway system for New York in 1869, but it was not until 1895 that the city government began to work in partnership with private companies to construct a comprehensive subway system replacing the old streetcars. Peter Derrick describes the institution of the comprehensive subway system in *Tunneling to the Future: The Story of the Great Subway Expansion that Saved New York* (New York: New York University Press, 2001).

44. Barry Bergdoll describes the eighteenth-century French renewal of classical ideas of public space in "What is Enlightenment? The City and the Public, 1750–89," *European Architecture 1750–1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 43–71. Paul S. Boyer explains the use of urban design to create a feeling of civic community in late-nineteenth-century American cities in "The Civic Ideal and the Urban Moral Order" and "The Civic Ideal Made Real: The Moral Vision of Progressive City Planners," in *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America 1820–1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 252–60, 261–76. See also M. Christine Boyer, "Would America Produce a Civilization of Cities? 1890–1909," in *Dreaming the Rational City* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983), 1–57.

45. On City Beautiful planning in America, see Mel Scott, "The Spirit of Reform," *American City Planning Since 1890* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 6–17; William H. Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); and Boyer, "Would America Produce a Civilization of Cities? 1890–1909," 1–57.

46. Charles Mulford Robinson, "The Administrative Center," in *Modern Civic Art, Or the City Made Beautiful* (1918), 84. Joseph S. Wood describes the New England village common as a particularly American urban landscape form, developed in the nineteenth century as the social and political focus of the town, and differing from earlier open spaces in that it was not used for cultivation or agriculture. *The New England Village* (Baltimore and

London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 128–33.

47. John Taylor Boyd, "A Gathering Place in Town Plans," *Architectural Record* 47 (Jan.–June 1920), 288. *Architectural Record* was edited by the Progressive journalist Herbert Croly, whose politics informed Boyd's writing on the proper design of public space; Croly went on to found the *New Republic*. David W. Noble, "Herbert Croly and American Progressive Thought," in *The Western Political Quarterly* 7, no. 4 (Dec. 1954), 537–53.

48. Boyd, "A Gathering Place in Town Plans," 288.

49. North, "The Public as Sculpture: From Heavenly City to Mass Ornament," 867.

50. Gregory Gilmartin describes the early-twentieth century activities of the MAS in detail in *Shaping the City. New York and the Municipal Art Society* (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1995).

51. Municipal Art Society of New York, *Bulletin* 2 (1 Sept. 1902), 10. New York Public Library.

52. Robinson, *Modern Civic Art*, 298.

53. While the proposal to extend Christopher Street was unlikely to be implemented, Lamb's plan to strengthen the form of Union Square initially received a favorable response from the Department of Parks when he submitted it for review in 1903. However, Samuel Parsons, the Department's landscape architect, probably vetoed his suggestion. A former employee of Calvert Vaux, Parsons was dedicated to preserving a naturalistic vision of city parks. Lamb's plan is mentioned briefly in *Minutes and Documents of the Board of Commissioners of the Department of Parks, Year Ending December 31st 1903* (New York, 1904), 301. New York City Department of Parks and Recreation Library, New York. See also Gilmartin, *Shaping the City*, 67–68.

54. "Union Square Court House. Eisberg's Bill Seems to Make Its Erection Possible," *New York Times* (3 Feb. 1905), 3.

55. "Union Square Favored for Great Court House," *New York Times* (12 Jan. 1907), 6.

56. "The Union Square Court House Site," *New York Times* (6 Feb. 1907), 8.

57. Guy Lowell was the architect. See Montgomery Schuyler, "The New York Court House and Its Site," *Architectural Record* 36 (July 1914), 1–11; "New York County Court House," *Architectural Record* 55 (April 1927), 189–92.

58. "Mayor to 'Launch' Land Battleship; Miniature Fighting Craft in Union Square to be Recruiting Headquarters," *New York Times*, 27 May 1917, 23; "Mayor's Wife Names Land Battleship; Big Crowd in Union Square Sees Recruiting Headquarters Dedicated," *New York Times*, 31 May 1917, 3.

59. Gabrielle Esperdy describes the ideological opposition between the multifamily walk-up tenement and the single family detached house in the early twentieth-century, where "the house itself was the signifier of the 'modern decent' way of life that a decentralized existence would presumably engender—a way of life that was both geographically and psychologically distant from the supposedly sordid and morally lax conditions of the crowded tenements from which the newly decentralized workers would come." "Defying the Grid: A Retroactive Manifesto for the Culture of Congestion," *Perspecta* 30 (1999), 10–33.

60. "Tiny Farm at Union Square Dies as New Subway Comes," *New York Times*, (12 August 1928), XX4.

61. *Annual Report of the Department of Parks, Borough of Manhattan for the Year 1927* (New York: I. Smigel, 1928), 91–92. New York City Department of Parks and Recreation Library, New York.

62. "Union Square Park to be Raised 3 Feet; Plans for Improvement Call for Boundary Wall and Complete Relandscaping," *New York Times* (6 June 1929), 7; "Plans Are Revised for Union Square," *New York Times* (4 May 1930), RE2; *Department of Parks Borough of Manhattan Annual Report 1931*

(New York, 1932), 5, 24, 41. New York City Department of Parks and Recreation Library, New York.

63. On the reform park movement in early twentieth century America, see Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design*, 61–99. Thomas Kessner describes Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia's efforts to incorporate parks into his New Deal agenda in "Fiorello LaGuardia and the Challenge of Democratic Planning," in David Ward and Oliver Zunz eds., *The Landscape of Modernity: New York City 1900–40* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 315–30. See also *New York City Planning Commission Annual Reports, 1938–1940* (New York, 1940). On Moses's park programs, see Hilary Ballon and Kenneth T. Jackson eds., *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 174–203.

64. Drawing no. M-T-89-100A, New York City Department of Parks and Recreation Archive, New York.

65. The association between radical political activity in the Union Square area and the art scene is discussed in James M. Dennis, ed., *Between Heaven and Hell: Union Square in the 1930s* (Wilkes-Barre, Penn.: Sordoni Art Gallery, 1996).

66. Communists held a large May Day parade in Union Square in 1932. In 1933 the Socialist party held a Fourth of July celebration in Union Square, hailing their party as the true inheritor of "this revolutionary holiday." "Socialists Claim July 4 as Theirs; Union Square Speakers Assert Party Has Sole Right to Celebrate Independence," *New York Times* (5 July 1933), 4.

67. "City Will Not Tolerate the Use of Its Streets to Exploit Jobless, Mayor Declares. Assures Free Speech. Radicals Will Be Protected as Long as They Keep the Peace," *New York Times* (4 March 1930), 1. On the long legal dispute over the right to freedom of speech and assembly in the United States, see Lenamya Saulson, "Constitutional Law: Municipal Control of Public Streets and Parks as Affecting Freedom of Speech and Assembly," *Michigan Law Review* 49, no. 8 (June 1951), 1185–99; and Reuel E. Schiller, "Free Speech and Expertise: Administrative Censorship and the Birth of the Modern First Amendment," *Virginia Law Review* 86, no. 1 (February 2000), 1–25.

68. "35,000 Jammed in Square; Views of the Red Rioting In Union Square

Yesterday," *New York Times* (7 March 1930), 1. "Reds Battle Police in Union Square; Scores Injured, Leaders are Seized; Two Dead, Many Hurt in Clashes Abroad," *New York Times* (7 March 1930), 1.

69. "Business Men Begin Fight to Curb Reds; City Chamber Plans 'Militant' Drive to Deport Aliens and Oust Radicals from Jobs," *New York Times* (10 March 1930), 14.

70. "Ban on Union Square Meetings Asked by Merchants' Group" *New York Times* (23 March 1932), 17.

71. "Union Square is Ready for its Centennial," *New York Times* (22 April 1932), 20. The attempt to restrict political meetings in Union Square continued after the Second World War. In 1953 the Fourteenth Street Businessmen's Association proposed a Loyalty Day parade to replace May Day in order to "reclaim Union Square for America." While the Parks Department did not support this idea, it did limit the traditional May Day parade to 6–8 p.m.

72. "Union Square," *New York Times* (25 March 1932), 18.

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