

William H. Wilson in *The City Beautiful Movement* offers a masterful analysis of the principles, conflicts, and legacy of the City Beautiful movement. The turn-of-the-century City Beautiful movement influenced the design, planning, and management of American cities from New York to San Francisco. Its effects are still felt today. Wide, tree-lined boulevards and monumental but low-lying buildings — libraries and museums, town halls and train stations — were designed to break up the familiar American gridiron of clogged streets and uncontrolled growth.

To be sure, City Beautiful was an environmental, sociocultural, and aesthetic movement, but Wilson also sees it as its founders did: as an exercise in participatory politics aimed at changing the way citizens thought about their cities. Far from being the province of an elite, City Beautiful depended on popular participation — from voter approval of bond issues to citizen activism on behalf of beautification. In those cities where the movement failed, it failed from a lack of local political infrastructure, not from the public's rejection of planning or of the City Beautiful philosophy.

This book focuses on the growth of the City Beautiful idea and its development into a cultural, aesthetic, political, and environmental movement, with the hope of illuminating the varied City Beautiful activities in fresh ways on both local and national levels.

## First Section

The movement's origins in the late nineteenth century to its consolidation at the dawn of the twentieth are examined. The first chapter pays particular attention to Frederick Law Olmsted, whose thought and example underlay much of the City Beautiful. Examination of the movement's municipal improvement and civic design origins follows. Chapter 4 analyzes the ideology and aesthetics of the emergent City Beautiful.

## Second Section

The movement is seen through projects in four cities:

**Kansas City** , where a successful park and boulevard movement utilized an ideology, rhetoric, and technique absorbed wholesale into the City Beautiful;

**Harrisburg** , where the business elite pushed through a City Beautiful program combining aesthetic and utilitarian elements;

**Seattle** , where John C. Olmsted designed and advised on the construction of a traditional park and boulevard system for a western port city; and

**Denver** , where a boss politician sensitive to civic needs produced magnificent City Beautiful improvements.

### Third Section

The later period of City Beautiful is covered.

It begins with an analysis of **Kansas City** 's reorganization of its rail traffic and achievements of a union station, an attractive complement to its park and boulevard system.

Chapter 10 discusses **Seattle** , where the City Beautiful was repudiated when the Bogue plan failed at the polls. The plan was expensive and primitive by the standards of housing reformers, settlement house workers, and socialists. It was not, however, defeated for those reasons, although they often are cited as explanations for the failure of the City Beautiful.

Neither Kansas City nor Seattle secured a civic center, but **Denver** 's civic center movement triumphed.

In **Dallas** , planning began in the late City Beautiful era and continued with loss of purpose but with remarkable consistency of technique into the 1940s.

### Fourth Section

Wilson returns to the national level to examine the fading City Beautiful and to assess the movement's contributions.

William H. Wilson is professor of history at the University of North Texas. He is the author of *The City Beautiful Movement in Kansas City*

,  
*Coming of Age: Urgan American, 1915-1945*

,  
*Railroad in the Clouds: The Alaska Railroad in the Age of Steam*

,  
*Carl F. Gould: A Life in Architecture and the Arts*  
(co-author), and  
*History of Hamilton Park, A Planned Black Community in Dallas*  
.

*The City Beautiful Movement* is in paperback and is available through any book store.