

Book Review

March 2015

Tomorrow-Land, The 1964-65 World's Fair and the Transformation of America

Joseph Tirella,

Lyons Press is an imprint of Global Pequot Press, 355 pages, 2014.

Summary

You want to read every page in this book; every paragraph is valuable.

The stream of the story is the conception and execution of the New York World's Fair that ran for two years in Queens, 1964 and 1965; but the real story the author tells is found in the second part of the subtitle...

"the Transformation of America."

The 1960s are presented with some overview but mostly through sketches of important players in the evolution, or revolution, of the American culture. The author describes pre- 1960 as a world in black and white with the post-1960 world being in Technicolor [p200]; a great analogy.

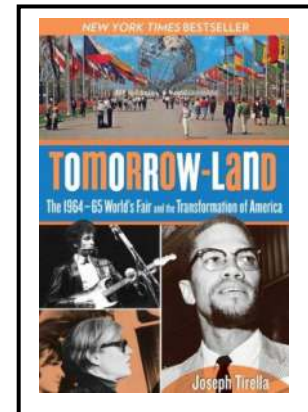
The protagonist is, of course, Robert Moses, "the master builder". *Tomorrow-Land* provides a glimpse of the man described by Robert A. Caro in *The Power Broker, Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*. Mr. Caro's work is over 1200 pages with 35 pages devoted to The Fair; so there is much more to Mr. Moses than revealed in *Tomorrow-Land*, but his character and methods come through.

- **Global Backdrop:** The Fair's theme "Peace Through Understanding" is showcased with the backdrop of three assassinations, civil rights' marches and riots, the Cold War, the cultural revolution of social mores, music and modesty; and the beginning of the Vietnam War,
- **Personalities:** The biographical sketches reflect the role and influence wielded by New York Mayor Wagner, New York Governor Rockefeller, President Johnson, Malcom X, Martin Luther King, Walt Disney, The Beatles, Andy Warhol, and Bob Dylan, among others. The mosaic forms a coherent picture of the times, the emotions and the shifting of the country's cultural tectonic plates.

Implications for the American City

1. **To appreciate the continuing importance of "fairs" in the virtual world.** Fairs, or exhibitions or international expos celebrate the past with a focus on the future. The Columbian World Exhibition in Chicago in 1893 wasn't about the European discovery of America by Columbus; it was about electricity, new technologies for farming, industrial processes, and modern cities. The past merely served as the platform for presenting America's future to the world. This was the purpose of London's Great Exhibition in 1851 and all others that have followed; the legacy and legitimacy of purpose of "fairs" survive.

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2. **To recognize the struggle between powerful opposing community building forces and personalities;** to understand that the winners' impact on the community will last for decades; witness, the dynamic tension between Robert Moses, Jane Jacobs and Louis Mumford.
 - a. Mumford, in 1955, an editor with the New Yorker "firmly believed and repeatedly stated that highways do not mitigate traffic, they create it." [p30]
 - b. "Even the President of the United States couldn't touch Moses. *That was power.*" [p25]
3. **To recall Alvin Toffler's observation** that more education is taking place in hotels and conference centers than in traditional classrooms. Fairs, exhibitions and conferences serve many purposes. They are economic engines for some character towns that can draw people to their cities for "edutainment". They are laboratories for presenting new ideas and trying new methods for addressing intractable problems. They provide facilities that can be used for community events not associated with their primary purpose. They can provide an intellectual or innovation cache to the host community, think of the Chautauqua Institution.
4. **Partner with industry.** The 1964-65 New York World's Fair was shunned by many nations because it was not sanctioned by the Bureau of International Expositions [BIE]. To compensate for this absence, the largest American corporations provided sophisticated exhibits to showcase their latest products. Contemporary American cities tend to be dominated by the public sector as the provider of community goods, services and amenities, neglecting or not fully exploiting the power of their business and academic resources.
5. **"As long as you are on the side of parks,' he [Moses] would often tell his underlings, 'you're on the side of the angels. You can't lose.'" [p18]** When the Fair closed, "the Fair Corporation was relinquishing control of the newly manicured 1,258 acres of green space to new York City. Now rechristened Flushing Meadows – Corona Park, it was the second-largest park in the five boroughs." [p322]
6. **Robert Moses anticipated, from the outset, the second generation of development,** or redevelopment, on the park site. After the Fair, he envisioned the site's redevelopment as a park, he retained key buildings and structures and the Fair revenues partially funded the development of Flushing Meadows; a legacy still.

YouTubes:

Published on Jun 27, 2013

Joe Tirella speaking about the New York State Pavilion - Support this documentary at <http://www.gofundme.com/NysPavilionDoc>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MBmRoFXR7fE>

Published on Mar 13, 2012

A look back at some of the sights of the 1964-1965 New York World's Fair held in Flushing Meadows, Queens, NY. Remember the Unisphere? Belgian Waffles? The debut of the Ford Mustang?

- *Music: "What A Wonderful World" by Louis Armstrong (AmazonMP3)*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gPHbVY-Kq_A

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Tomorrow-Land: The 1964-65 World's Fair and the Transformation of America by Joseph Tirella

Overview

Motivated by potentially turning Flushing Meadows, literally a land of refuse, into his greatest public park, Robert Moses—New York's "Master Builder"—brought the World's Fair to the Big Apple for 1964 and '65. Though considered a financial failure, the 1964-65 World's Fair was a Sixties flashpoint in areas from politics to pop culture, technology to urban planning, and civil rights to violent crime. In an epic narrative, the New York Times bestseller *Tomorrow-Land* shows the astonishing pivots taken by New York ...

[See more details below](#)

<http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/tomorrow-land-joseph-tirella/1114830936?ean=9780762780358>

KIRKUS REVIEW

"The story of New York's second World's Fair in the context of its tumultuous times."

"Top-notch popular history."

<https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/joseph-tirella/tomorrow-land/>

Related Readings

1. ***The Power Broker, Robert Moses and the Fall of New York***, Robert A. Caro, Vintage Books Edition, September 1975, copyright 1974, 1,283 pages, 1974.
2. ***City of the Century: the Epic of Chicago and the Making of America***, Donald L. Miller, Touchstone, New York, 1996 has a great chapter on the Columbian World Exhibition or the Chicago World's Fair of 1893.
3. ***St. Louis, The Evolution of an American Urban Landscape***, Eric Sandweiss, Temple University Press, 2001 discusses the St. Louis World's of 1904 celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Louisiana Purchase.
4. ***A Clearing in the Distance, Frederick Law Olmsted and America in the Nineteenth Century***, Witold Rybczynski, Scribner, 480 pages, 1999, discusses the Chicago World's Fair of 1893.
5. ***The Middle-Class City; Transforming Space and Time in Philadelphia, 1876 – 1926***, John Henry Hepp IV, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2003 starts the 50 year story with the **Sesqui-Centennial International Exhibition** of 1876; the first official world's fair in the United States. Its theme was the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

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