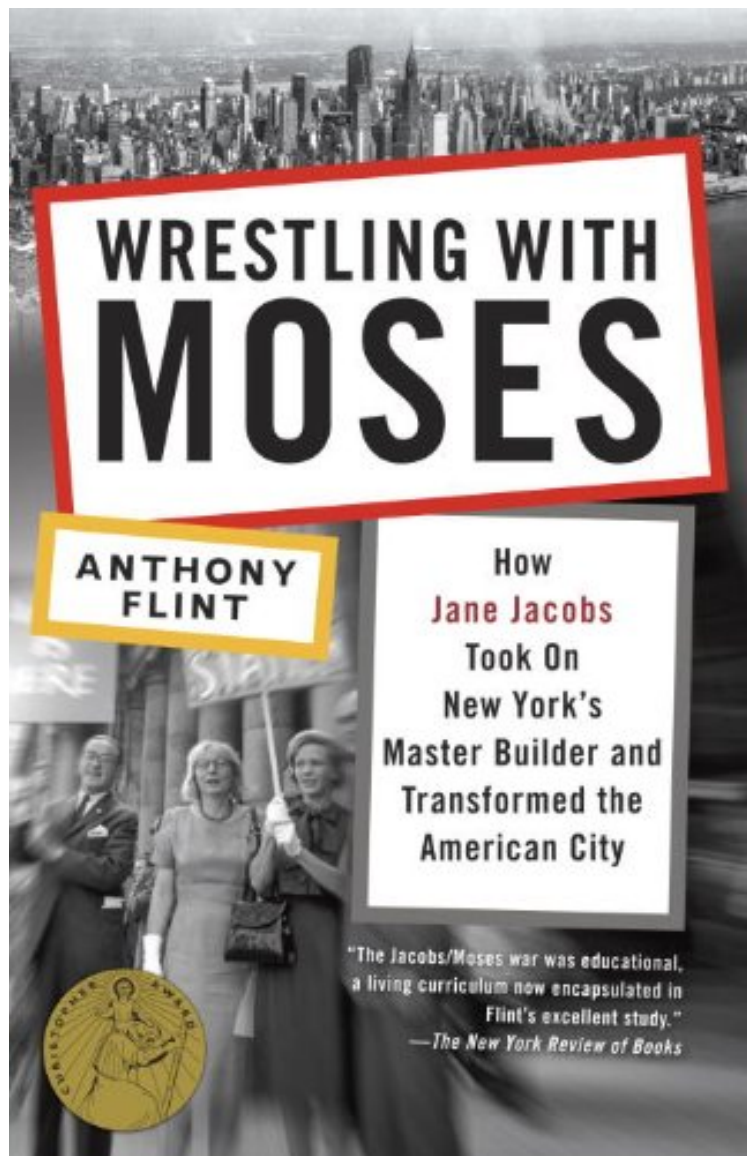


(Download pdf ebook) Wrestling with Moses: How Jane Jacobs Took On New York's Master Builder and Transformed the American City

Wrestling with Moses: How Jane Jacobs Took On New York's Master Builder and Transformed the American City

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Anthony Flint : Wrestling with Moses: How Jane Jacobs Took On New York's Master Builder and Transformed the American City before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Wrestling with Moses: How Jane Jacobs Took On New York's Master Builder and Transformed the American City:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A Solid Introduction to Two Towering Personalities By David Alden "Wrestling with Moses" contains abbreviated biographies of Jane Jacobs and Robert Moses and accounts of the three fields on which they did battle. The author doesn't pretend to be impartial. Jacobs is clearly his hero and he presents her as the valiant underdog to the shadowy overlord. And, of course, he celebrates when she wins all three battles. I read "Wrestling with Moses" simultaneously with "The Power Broker" on Moses and "The Death and Life of Great American Cities" by Jacobs. "Wrestling with Moses" is the most lightweight of the three books. It is a light and easy read. Despite the less intense nature of the book, there are still valuable insights to be gained. The first is the amount of momentum that can be acquired by someone like Moses. By the time Jacobs first opposed him, he had been the dominant personality in shaping the configuration of New York City for nearly three decades. He had developed an aura of inevitability. Next, it is insightful to look at the tactics employed by Jacobs. Mostly she and her adherents relied on grassroots organizing and mobilization. But Jacobs was willing to slip into civil disobedience when required and was arrested on multiple occasions as a result. Lastly, it is interesting to note the story of Jane Jacobs as developer. Following the defeat of Moses' urban redevelopment plan for Greenwich Village, Jacobs and other local residents formed an organization to build housing that they thought would fit better within the context of their neighborhood. One of their proposed buildings was eventually constructed, but as the costs rose, various building features had to be eliminated. The architectural critics panned the final result and many Village residents were unhappy with the resulting rents. Jacobs fell prey to the same issues that trouble many developers. Even the best-intentioned developer can't avoid the pressure that the marketplace imposes. One weakness of the Jacobs versus Moses premise is that nowhere in the book do Jacobs and Moses come face to face. Indeed, they probably never met in life. However, we are given two humorous stories of their distant interplay. Publisher Bennett Cerf sent an advance copy of "The Death and Life of Great American Cities" to Moses for his review. Moses returned it with a note reading, "I am returning this book you sent me. Aside from the fact that it is intemperate and inaccurate, it is also libelous. ... Sell this junk to someone else." On the other side, Jacobs and her husband Bob received an advance copy of "The Power Broker". They lay in bed, trading sections back and forth, alternating between horror and amusement over the depth of Moses' duplicity laid bare for the first time. If you have the time, either "The Death and Life of Great American Cities" or "The Power Broker" is worth the effort. But if time doesn't permit, then "Wrestling with Moses" is a fine introduction to the urban planning antipodes represented by towering personalities of Jane Jacobs and Robert Moses.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Moses vs Jacobs By Ghost71 I was born in the Midwest and worked housing construction, landscaping, and installed storm doors and storm windows all in the southwest suburban sprawl of the Chicago area. It was dismal over priced over sized housing that was so uniform and desolate to be nothing more than a glorified prison camp. The suburbs are a terrible form of modern living. Cold, isolated, and separated from the life of the city by miles of Illinois highway that is endlessly under construction. And jammed with traffic. A farce of existence in a first world country. Then I heard about the new urbanism movement. Speck, Kunstler, Leigh etc. on TED talks and watched about N.Y. transforming the high line and closing off Times Square to automobiles. Finally people are getting it and it was because of Jane Jacobs. Moses should have stuck to bridges and subways and parks. This book highlights an important cultural battle between the yin and yang of American planning. A big country needs big projects but not at the expense of communities. Jane Jacobs was the counter balance to the tyranny of uncontrolled developers and architects who don't have a clue about daily living at the ground level. Hopefully the future will bring great community based urban planning, that Europe has always enjoyed, to every part of America for all types of people, old, young, rich, working class, black, white, Latino, and Asian. This book helped tell the story about why Jane Jacobs battle with Moses was history in the making and why communities needs should transcend the focus on national issues.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. New York City Planning Struggles Well Chronicled By LEON L CZIKOWSKY This is an insightful description of critical battles over New York public policy plans. Robert Moses, who led various New York City transportation and planning departments, proposed the creation of a ten lane elevated highway in Manhattan. It would require tearing down 400 buildings and remove 2,200 families and 800 businesses. Jane Jacobs was a leader of community groups that opposed and killed this proposal. Jane Jacobs wrote for "Architectural Forum" when she was assigned to write about city planner Edward Bacon and how Philadelphia center city neighborhoods were being torn down for redevelopment projects. Bacon took Jacobs on a tour and proudly showed her much new construction. Jacobs asked Bacon "where are the people?" Jacobs began questioning urban renewal programs. The Federal government policies known as Title I, following the philosophy of Le Corbusier that favored large and functional structures, favored razing poorer neighborhoods so new private development could replace them. A problem in New York City was the newly constructed structures were not necessarily better than what they replaced. No one ever asked the residents what they preferred. In East Harlem, relocating 50,000 people also came at the expense of 1,100 stores. Jane Jacobs noted the residents rejected their newer superstores and instead preferred the local smaller stores, now located further away. Moses proposed constructing a road that would cross Washington Square Park. This was the park where Jane Jacobs took her children. This set up a clash between an urban renewal power, Moses, and a critic, Jacobs. Moses held as many as 12 appointed public positions simultaneously. When legislation created a commission he wanted to control, he had the legislation created

so he would be the obvious candidate to fill the important position within that commission. Moses used a strategy of building projects quickly. By doing this, opposition to his ideas lacked sufficient time to organize against them. Moses had laws created to enable rapid construction that also provided him ease in condemning land. Moses ran as the Republican nominee for Governor of New York in 1934. He called the incumbent Governor Herbert Lehman corrupt. Lehman won easily. President Roosevelt wanted Moses out of power and threatened to deny Federal funds to projects Moses directed. Moses leaked this to the press, who faulted Roosevelt for being involved in petty local politics. Roosevelt, Governor Lehman, and Mayor LaGuardia all felt this pressure and decided not to seek to remove Moses. Being able to defy the elected leaders and remain in power only Moses appear stronger. Moses was known for being vindictive. He was also known for keeping tabs on Commission and Council members and blackmailing them for support in return for keeping quiet on extraneous love affairs or drunkenness. Moses even ignored the law, causing Mayor LaGuardia to have the police make certain Moses didn't have something torn down that legally wasn't supposed to be destroyed. In 1949, several members of Congress feared cities were declining. Title I of the Housing Act of 1949 sought to save cities by encouraging new private development. The primary means to build anew was to tear down existing low income and relatively cheaper to purchase neighborhoods. Mayor William O'Dwyer named Moses as Construction Coordinator, Chairman of the Emergency Committee on Housing, and Chairman of the Committee on Slum Clearance. New York received \$70 million in Title I funds, compared to Chicago which received the second most amount of these funds at \$30 million. Many of the new developments that were constructed met the aims of the private developers. More profitable housing options for the upper and middle classes were built rather than housing for the displaced poorer residents. Even the housing that was created often cut corners in construction and were not as nice as expected. The displaced low income often could not afford to move back into the new constructions and those who could afford them often were disappointed. Walter O'Malley, owner of the Brooklyn Dodgers baseball team, noted most of the Dodgers fan base was moving further away from the Dodgers' stadium, Ebbetts Field. Many fans were moving into more distant Long Island locations. The stadium did not have a Long Island Railway (LIRR) stop and had only 700 parking spaces. Moses refused the Dodgers access to LIRR. Moses instead wanted to build a new stadium in Flushing, where Shea Stadium eventually would be built. O'Malley decided to move the Dodgers to Los Angeles. Moses proposed extending Fifth Avenue through Washington Park. This project called for destroying many Greenwich Village buildings. A new housing development Moses proposed for the area would destroy 130 buildings and displace 150 families. Moses saw Washington Square Park as a decaying area with broken benches. He saw it as a target for urban revitalization. Area residents saw it as their park and sanctuary. Neighbors in 1935 formed the Save Washington Square Commission in reaction to Moses's plans. Moses threatened to cut off improvement funds if the residents continued resisting. He refused to meet with the group. In 1939, Moses submitted a second but similar plan. Moses again threatened to cut off New Deal funds. This divided the citizens group and they endorsed Moses's plan by a one vote margin. A splinter group continued opposing Moses. They gained thousands of signatures opposed the plan. This opposition was joined by a group of nearby New York University (NYU) students who feared for pedestrian safety. Manhattan Borough President Stanley Isaacs insisted that approval of the project would require the support of neighborhood voters. Moses reacted by vilifying the neighborhood opponents as elitists who were stopping progress. Moses met with New York University officials to seek their support. Moses decided to play a waiting game to wear down the opposition. Neighborhood groups began obtaining their own data on traffic counts. They did not accept the official city data. Opponents conducted letter writing campaigns to officials and newspapers. Moses used the tactic of postponing public hearings shortly before they were to be held and then quickly called for them. He hoped this would minimize the number of people who objected from attending. Jacobs decided her group would insist there be no vehicles allowed at Washington Square. They would not challenge the broad Moses vision, yet they would refuse to compromise on that one point. They would not agree to a two lane road instead of the proposed four lane road. Lewis Mumford agreed with Jacobs's group. He saw it as commercial profit at the public expense. Members of the Village Independent Democrats, such as Edward Koch, supported Jacobs's cause. Both Congressional nominees endorsed Jacob's goals, including the eventual winner John V. Lindsay. An alternative newspaper, the "Village Voice", wrote supportively on the neighborhood battles against Moses. Eleanor Roosevelt joined in support. Then, support began emerging from political power insiders. Secretary of State Carmine DeSapio, a leader of the Tammany Democratic Party organization and a Greenwich Village resident, spoke out for saving Washington Square. Moses realized he had been defeated once DeSapio was against him. From there, support for saving Washington Square increased to including Mayor Robert Wagner and Governor Averell Harriman. Moses retreated and developed a new proposal in 1959. If Washington Park were to be closed to vehicles, he wanted the streets around the park widened to 80 feet with rounded corners. Instead, Mayor Wagner in 1963 cut off all vehicle traffic, including buses. This yielded 12 more acres of parkland by eliminating the roads. The location where Moses wanted to become Fifth Avenue south is now LaGuardia Place with a statue of Fiorello LaGuardia. Where the road would have continued south of Washington Park is where Bobst Library of NYU now stands. Jacobs had a separate struggle with Moses. Moses sought to construct the Lower Manhattan Expressway. This was a project that worked well with the Federal government goals of creating superhighways according to the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act. Moses saw several highways

connective Manhattan to its regions as important to maintaining Manhattan's economic and social vitality. He had the Cross Bronx Expressway built and sought to connect it to northern Manhattan. Moses proposed a Mid-Manhattan expressway running from the Lincoln Tunnel to the Queens Midtown Tunnel. Father Gerard LaMountain was upset that this proposed expressway would mean the Church of the Most Holy Crucifix would be torn down. He turned to Jane Jacobs for help. Jacobs decided she could endure another fight when she saw he also had recruited neighbors and skilled organizers. There were religious and political leaders and understanding that La Cosa Nostra was not pleased to see its territory devastated. Bob Dylan wrote a song of support. Herman Badillo wrote a report for the city claiming all displaced people would be provided with new housing. The opposition was not satisfied. Jane Jacobs stood up against making it easier to drive vehicles in New York City. She encouraged mass transit, foot transit, and bicycling. Moses argued for the need to act to avoid traffic congestion. Moses let Jacobs and her associates win an initial victory at halting the project. Moses often used delays to his advantage and would wait for the opportunity to renew his fights for his proposals. Moses declared that Jacobs was an obstructionist. Rep. John V. Lindsay opposed the project and was elected Mayor. Moses still fought, declaring that the SoHo neighborhood was blighted and should be destroyed. The growing historic preservation movement differed. Jacobs thus had new allies in people seeking to preserve the history of Lower Manhattan. Mayor Lindsay faced a threatened strike of 200,000 city workers if he delivered on his promise to stop construction projects. Lindsay agreed to an open trench highway that would destroy 650 homes and 400 businesses, compared to the 2,000 homes and 00 business structures Moses had proposed. Jacobs and advocates pushed to kill the idea. Jacobs was arrested for protesting. The arrest galvanized support for Jacobs. Lindsay agreed to kill the proposal. Governor Rockefeller reduced Moses's powers. Rockefeller agreed with killing the Lower Manhattan project as well as another Moses proposal for a bridge across the Long Island Sound. Moses remained a consultant but his influence was mostly gone. Jacobs wrote several influential books on city planning issues. Moses retired soon afterwards. Jacobs continued being upset at redevelopment plans that began with little or no public notification. She continued working to preserve parks and neighborhoods in the West Village against redevelopment. Rep. Lindsay joined with the neighborhood activists in protesting that not enough notice was given. Jacobs appealed to the press as well as to political leaders, and got their attention. The plan to develop the West Village was led by James Felt, Chairman of the City Planning Commission, and developer J. Clarence Davies, Jr., Chairman of the Department of Real Estate and Director of Housing and Redevelopment Board (a descendant of one of Moses's previous commissions). Davies declared the West Village was blighted. They sought to diminish the neighborhood activists by creating a group, Middle Income Cooperators of the Village and its subsidiary, the West Village Site Tenants' Committee. To support their plans, Roger Starr and his group, the Citizens Housing and Planning Council, also endorsed the redevelopment efforts. David Rockefeller gave his support. Jacobs filed a lawsuit to stop the project. The Judge ordered that the blight designation be justified. He also ruled the city had not met public hearing requirements. State Comptroller Arthur Levitt ran against Mayor Wagner for renomination as Mayor. Levitt supported stopping the West Village redevelopment plans. Wagner then also agreed to oppose the proposal and to increase citizen participation. Felt, noting the City Planning Commission is independent of the Mayor, continued pushing for the development. The City Planning Commission officially designated the West Village as blighted. Felt tried to use the tactic of suddenly scheduling hearings. There was a secret sympathizer against the proposal working in Felt's office who always tipped off Jacobs as to when the meetings were being announced. Jacob successfully rallied people to attend. The neighborhood activists determined that private developer David Rose Associates had already been chosen to build the redevelopments. The group discovered that the developers were supporting the community groups supporting development. They found they even used the same typewriter. The activists then obtained over 100 notarized statements from members of the pro-development groups stating they had been tricked into joining. Davies halted the efforts to redevelop West Village. Davies resigned his post within a month and Felt resigned two years later. Jacobs, in her writings, would argue that city planning was an impossible task. She argued that neighborhoods had their own structures that shouldn't be changed by city planners. City planner Edward Logue denounced Jacobs's writing as "a plea for the status quo." Roger Staff responded that "if Jacobs had visited Pompeii and concluded that nothing makes a city so beautiful as covering it with ashes." Starr notes Jacobs's vision would do little to prevent gentrification from driving low income people out of the neighborhoods. Jacobs joined movement for historic preservation, including fighting tearing down Penn Station. Her writings are heralded by many libertarians.

The rivalry of Jane Jacobs and Robert Moses, a struggle for the soul of a city, is one of the most dramatic and consequential in modern American history. To a young Jane Jacobs, Greenwich Village, with its winding cobblestone streets and diverse makeup, was everything a city neighborhood should be. But consummate power broker Robert Moses, the father of many of New York's most monumental development projects, thought neighborhoods like Greenwich Village were badly in need of "urban renewal." Standing up against government plans for the city, Jacobs marshaled popular support and political power against Moses, whether to block traffic through her beloved Washington Square Park or to prevent the construction of the Lower Manhattan Expressway, an elevated superhighway that would have destroyed centuries-old streetscapes and displaced thousands of families. By

confronting Moses and his vision, Jacobs forever changed the way Americans understood the city. Her story reminds us of the power we have as individuals to confront and defy reckless authority.