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“Citizens with a Special Training”: Henry Stern Churchill and Democratic Ideals in Planning and Urban Renewal

Abstract

The story of American urban renewal is frequently reduced to a struggle between autocratic supporters of mass urban clearance and the admirable individuals and communities who resisted. Henry Stern Churchill (1893-1962), the focus of this thesis, was an early advocate and practitioner of urban renewal, who, by the end of his career, became a staunch critic of the practice. Churchill, therefore, upsets the dominant narrative of renewal, showing that it is not purely a story of good vs. evil, but rather one with dynamic figures who evolved over their careers.

Churchill demonstrated a lifelong commitment to planning as a democratic practice. This manifested itself in numerous ways, from his work for the Roosevelt Administration’s Greenbelt Towns program to his housing reform advocacy with New York’s Housing Study Guild to, in the late 1950s, advising a community planning effort in Philadelphia’s Germantown neighborhood.

Throughout Churchill’s career, he was in close contact with important figures in planning. Henry Mayer, Albert Wright, and Churchill were founding members of the Housing Study Guild, and they served in the same Greenbelt project. In New York, Churchill engaged in a public dispute with Robert Moses, accusing the latter of racial prejudice in the pages of *The New York Times*. In Philadelphia, to which he moved in the early 1950s, Churchill was the chief planner for the Eastwick renewal project. Finally, he corresponded with Jane Jacobs, offering advice and support as she fought against urban renewal in the West Village.

Churchill, despite his liberalism, had a perspective that was, at times, exclusionary. In his community planning, he considered the community’s interest to be that which was represented by the leaders of its institutions, such as private schools, giving no place to the common resident. Moreover, Churchill, in his renewal consulting, exhibited racial bias in the identification of sites that he thought should be cleared.

Henry Stern Churchill embodies the complexity of planning past and present. As such, his story provides instruction and caution to a discipline in continual evolution.

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“CITIZENS WITH A SPECIAL TRAINING”: HENRY STERN CHURCHILL
AND DEMOCRATIC IDEALS IN PLANNING AND URBAN RENEWAL

Maxwell Booth Johnson

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The real answer to where we are heading will come 20 years from now when the kindergartner of today looks down a tree lined street and says: "This is a charming neighborhood that has much to offer me. I'd like to live here."

— Jack Meltzer¹

Democratic societies rarely accord planners those positions and powers planners desire, nor do these societies even accede to the wisdom implied: planning is too important to be left to the planners.

— William C. Baer²

It is probable that the notable lack of success of the large-scale planning program jokingly called "urban renewal" will at least stimulate new thought and new ideas. So will the gradual passing out of the academic picture of the older men such as myself.

— Henry S. Churchill³

¹ Jack Meltzer. "Information Report No. 100: Planning In Urban Renewal." American Society of Planning Officials Planning Advisory Service (February 1957): 13.

² William C. Baer. "Urban planners: doctors or midwives?" *Public Administration Review* 37, no. 6 (1977): 675-676.

³ Henry S. Churchill. "Preface," *The City is the People*. (1962).

Introduction

By the end of his career, Henry Stern Churchill, an influential Cornell-trained architect-turned-planner, had grown disillusioned with the practice of urban renewal in the United States. Renewal, for which he advocated during its genesis and in whose execution he was involved, consistently failed to achieve its lofty ambitions. The culprits behind this failure? They were, as Churchill detailed in a 1961 letter to *Progressive Architecture*, the excessive power of real estate speculators combined with the blind application by planners of unproven theories. Indeed, the whole enterprise of planning — “categorical zoning,” the ‘comprehensive’ plan, and destructive urban ‘renewal’” — needed a serious review. Cities that had undergone renewal “were bleeding copiously.” Past architectural “band-aids” were not going to help.⁴



Figure 1 — Henry S. Churchill, pictured during his work at the Resettlement Administration⁵

⁴ Henry S. Churchill. Letter to Ellen Perry, Nov. 1961, Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347, Box 1. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

⁵ United States Resettlement Administration, Carl Mydans, photographer, *Untitled photo, possibly related to: Henry S. Churchill, Washington, D.C., Principal Architect of the Bound Brook, New Jersey*

Churchill's evolving views on urban renewal provide important insight: that renewal's practitioners could also be its critics. He was an outspoken critic of the focus on the physical aspects of planning, like an intense concern with the proliferation of perceived slums. Many urban problems, believed Churchill, were not purely physical in nature.⁶ Rather, solutions to them lay in social planning — common during the New Deal but a rare practice in urban renewal before the 1960s.

Churchill, in his writings and public lectures, expressed deep skepticism of what he viewed as planning's reactionary attitude towards social and economic change. He frequently contributed to the progressive magazine *New Republic*, as well as to *Scientific American*. Perhaps the bulk of Churchill's academic work is found in the *Journal of the American Institute of Architects* and the *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*. Urban life was changing, he repeatedly emphasized in these outlets. It was the job of planners not to fight against change but to plan with it for the good of society. Urban renewal, he argued, was a vital tool in that effort.

The early social vision for planning and redevelopment that Churchill laid out became increasingly at odds with what actually happened, including in his own practice. His renewal planning primarily occurred in Philadelphia, where he served as a planning consultant for a large project in the city's Eastwick neighborhood and, shortly thereafter, for a smaller one in the neighborhood of

project, *Suburban Resettlement Division*. (Washington, D.C., Feb. 1936.)
<https://www.loc.gov/2017714882>.

⁶ Each use of the term "slum(s)" is not intended to convey my subjective judgement but rather the common language of the era.

Germantown. Churchill once accused Robert Moses as planning “for the interests and benefit of the few,” lumping him together with the Roman Emperor Nero and Baron Haussmann, the rebuilders of Paris.⁷ Shortly before his death, Churchill exchanged correspondence with Jane Jacobs, providing advice and writing a letter in support of an effort to defend New York City’s West Village from renewal.⁸ He professed racial liberalism and spoke of the importance of creating equal opportunities. Yet, his renewal practice was marked by instances of class and race prejudice — traits which he criticized in others. Churchill’s renewal work in Germantown was the most prominent example of this dichotomy.

The late 1950s marked a decisive shift away from top-down urban renewal for Churchill. He transitioned to working in community planning, serving as an advisor to Concern for Germantown, an organization composed of local institutions worried about the future of the neighborhood. In that work, he supported a planning project intended to identify and counteract the socioeconomic forces behind perceived decline. However, the limited range of community voices that Churchill thought mattered meant that his planning in Germantown had a distinctly middle-class bent.

An examination of Churchill’s planning career, from his entry into the field in the 1930s until his death, in the nascent days of the community turn of the early 1960s, expands the portrait of renewal’s proponents, practitioners, and opponents to include a figure who straddled all three categories over the course of his career.

⁷ Henry S. Churchill. “University of Toronto Lecture,” May 1944, Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347, Box 1. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

⁸ Henry S. Churchill. Letter to Jane Jacobs, 8 Mar. 1962, Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347, Box 1. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

This approach is inspired by the work of Lizabeth Cohen, who demonstrated Ed Logue’s transformation from leading large-scale planning to planning with the community at a neighborhood level.⁹ It is also inspired by Guian McKee’s study of Eastwick, which examined the use of urban renewal to achieve purportedly “liberal ends” in Philadelphia.¹⁰ Cohen cautioned that renewers are often reduced to a homogenous body, symbolized by Moses.¹¹ This, in turn, reduces histories of the renewal era to “a monumental battle between the clashing visions of the villainous Robert Moses and the saintly Jane Jacobs.”¹² Churchill spent his career caught between the idealism of planning for a democratic society and the practical and political limits of planning’s power. His perspective was shaped by a strong faith in his own expertise and a conception of democratic planning that excluded significant portions of the communities affected. The story of Churchill, consequently, can provide an instructive historical mirror for reflecting on a discipline that prizes community engagement and planning for the whole of society.

Chicago Born

Henry Stern Churchill was born in Chicago just before the turn of the 20th century. Né Kirchberger — he would change his name between his 1916 graduation from Cornell University with a Master of Architecture and his military

⁹ Lizabeth Cohen. *Saving America's Cities: Ed Logue and the Struggle to Renew Urban America in the Suburban Age*. (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2019).

¹⁰ Guian A. McKee. “Liberal Ends Through Illiberal Means: Race, Urban Renewal, and Community in the Eastwick Section of Philadelphia, 1949-1990.” *Journal of Urban History* 27, no. 5 (2001).

¹¹ I adopt here Lizabeth Cohen’s term, “renewers.” “Urban renewers,” to me, best encapsulates the diversity of those who were involved in the administration and promotion of the policies which fell under its auspices. Like Ed Logue, the subject of Cohen’s work, renewers came from a number of professions and educational backgrounds beyond urban planning. Cohen, *Saving America's Cities*.

¹² Cohen, *Saving America's Cities*, 13.

service at the end of the First World War — his parents were deeply involved in Jewish mutual aid organizations in the city. His father, Siegfried, frequently contributed to United Hebrew Charities (UHC) as a member of the Sinai Congregation.¹³ Celia, his mother, donated to assistance funds and served as a delegate and president for Chicago Women’s Aid, which was under the umbrella of UHC.¹⁴ She also was active in the city’s artistic life; the Art Institute of Chicago made her a life member for her charitable donations.¹⁵ The Kirchberger family was decidedly middle-class — but with an eye towards social causes. This environment, along with his education at The Harvard School for Boys, a private preparatory institution, whose students overwhelmingly went on to attend elite private institutions, formed Churchill’s childhood.¹⁶

Yet Chicago was a city for which Churchill was none too sentimental, once writing to a publisher that his birth there was “obviously not my fault.”¹⁷ (His parents had previously lived in New York.¹⁸) It was during Churchill’s Chicago childhood that Daniel Burnham fashioned his grand plan for the city. Churchill would note in 1943 that the plan brought about an enduring “lively

¹³ “Report of the Jewish charities of Chicago.” United Hebrew Charities of Chicago (Chicago, 1892)

¹⁴ Ibid; Chicago Directory Company. *The Chicago Blue Book of Selected Names of Chicago and Suburban Towns* (1907). The *Blue Book* claimed to list the “names and addresses of prominent residents.”

¹⁵ The Art Institute of Chicago. “The Seventeenth Annual Exhibition of Works by Artists of Chicago and Vicinity.” (1913). An award at a 1913 exhibition of local artists, held by the Art Institute of Chicago, took its name from Churchill’s mother: the “Mrs. Celia S. Kirchberger prize for painting.”

¹⁶ “Record of Graduates.” The Harvard School for Boys (University of Chicago Press, June 1923).

¹⁷ Henry S. Churchill. Letter to Barry Hunt, 17 Mar. 1962. Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347, Box 1. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

¹⁸ “List of Registered Voters for the Year 1886: Twentieth Assembly District.” *The City Record* (New York, 17 Oct. 1886); “Looking Backward.” *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle* (13 Nov. 1922).

public interest” in planning in Chicago.¹⁹ Released in 1909, it was a wheel-and-spoke design redolent of Beaux Arts grandeur. However, Churchill, as an adult, was not impressed, frequently referring to the Burnham plan as a folly divorced from the real needs of the city’s residents. He wrote that such City Beautiful planning, which held Paris as its lodestar, had “little economics...no sociology, and certainly no democracy” — like Haussmann merely hiding behind the new Parisian facades “foul old slums.”²⁰ Solutions to urban problems demanded a modern approach, believed Churchill. In planning, he would argue, that approach must also be for the people.

A Modernist

Henry Churchill’s steadfast embrace of modernism was evident even in his early architecture career. In 1924, a year after he submitted a proposal to the competition to design a new Chicago *Tribune* headquarters, *The Arts* published his review of Lewis Mumford’s *Sticks and Stones: Study of American Architecture and Civilization*.²¹ Churchill sharply criticized the “Utopian” for what he thought a mistaken belief that contemporary architecture should be judged on its social merits. Mumford had argued that the “Garden Suburb” he championed represented an architectural means to create the “good life.” But, to Churchill, this was the talk of social workers. Architecture, he countered, should only be judged by what

¹⁹ Henry S. Churchill. “Cities Should be Places to Live in.” *New Pencil Points* 24, no. 3 (1943): 34. Churchill also writes of the “indoctrination” of public-school students via the “Wacker Manual,” which was created to “sell” the Chicago Plan to the people.

²⁰ Henry S. Churchill. “Planning in a Free Society.” *Journal of the American Planning Association* 20, no. 4 (1954): 189.

²¹ *The international competition for a new administration building for the Chicago Tribune, MCMXXII; containing all the designs submitted in response to the Chicago Tribune's \$100,000 offer commemorating its seventy fifth anniversary*, (Chicago, 1923).

enduring meaning it had beyond use value.²² As the Garden Suburb would only be valued by its inhabitants, it, for Churchill, really was not architecture at all.²³

Technological change was something to be designed with, not against. This was a theme which would endure through Churchill's renewal work and frame much of his writing on planning, including his 1945 book, *The City is the People*. Those architects who "seem[ed] unable to think in anything except the terms of a dead tradition" piqued his ire, doing little more than engaging in what he termed the "Building Game."²⁴ Thus Mumford's promotion of craft production, as opposed to standardized, "machined" products, was misplaced, according to Churchill.²⁵ Technological evolution was necessary for "a more perfect expression of the Machine Age," and the mechanization of cities was to be welcomed.²⁶ (To this effect, Churchill praised one young midwestern city as "the perfect product of mechanized and regimented civilization."²⁷) The value of Chicago's City Plan, intended to bring order to an older city marked by chaotic industrialization, must be judged in relation to the effect produced by the Tribune

²² Henry S. Churchill. "Sticks and Stones (By Lewis Mumford)." *The Arts* 6, No. 5 (November 1924): 293.

²³ *Ibid.* Incidentally, Churchill was a proud suburbanite. He practiced architecture in New York City but called the upstate town of Mamaroneck home. Later, in Philadelphia, he lived in house on a spacious lot in East Falls.

²⁴ Henry S. Churchill. "The Plaster Builders." *The Arts* 6, (July-Dec. 1924): 153. Churchill's architectural practice reflected his admiration of modernism. He designed a 17-story Art Deco hotel in New York's Upper East Side, which still stands. "Postings; Art Deco Revival." *The New York Times* (29 January, 1984). Another building, a 7-story 1931 Bauhaus, with floor to ceiling wrap-around windows, at 57th Street and Lexington Avenue, found itself demolished and replaced with what Christopher Gray of *The New York Times* described as the exact sort of building Churchill would have criticized: a postmodern skyscraper with a pseudo classical ring of columns anchoring the plaza before the entrance. Christopher Gray. "A Ghost With an Impressive Résumé." *The New York Times* (6 June 2013).

²⁵ Churchill. "Sticks and Stones (By Lewis Mumford)."

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 293.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 295.

Tower. The tower had garnered in just a few years significant praise — architectural value, by Churchill’s estimation — beyond Chicago.²⁸

Churchill’s architectural career advanced rapidly over the course of the 1920s, but his ascent in the field was cut short by the Great Depression. A development group, led by Albert Mayer, had proposed a 40-story “modern...brick and steel” Manhattan apartment building in spring of 1929.²⁹ Churchill and his New York City firm, Thompson & Churchill, were associated with the project. But it wasn’t to be. Excavations for the project began just after the October 1929 stock market crash. Shortly thereafter, in 1932, it went into foreclosure.³⁰

The Making of a New Dealer

The decline of Churchill’s architectural career was quickly followed by his entry into planning — an entry catalyzed by the Franklin D. Roosevelt Administration’s expansionist view of federal government. In “the first days of unemployment” during the Depression, as Churchill put it, he, along with Albert Mayer, Henry Wright, and others formed the Housing Study Guild, a housing reform organization, in New York City.³¹ The group received Works Progress Administration (WPA) funding.³² Churchill soon became prominent in the housing movement. It was during that time that he contributed to the intellectual and

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ “Urges Architects to Keep Pure Forms.” *The New York Times* (20 Oct. 1929). Indicative of his modernism, Churchill, in an apparent talk printed in *The New York Times* eight days before Black Tuesday, cautioned architects against adopting European architectural styles “uncritically,” “Unintelligent adoption of ‘new tricks,’” Churchill stated, “‘is not style, but stylism, faddism.’” Ibid.

³⁰ Gray.

³¹ Henry S. Churchill. “Henry Wright: 1878-1936.” *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 26, no. 4 (1960): 298.

³² Ibid.

policy environment that would culminate in the enactment of urban renewal legislation following the Second World War.

While it is likely that economic considerations encouraged Churchill to step away from architecture and toward socially concerned planning, he had previously demonstrated a commitment to liberal causes. In 1923, for example, Churchill donated 25 dollars to the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee.³³ The Committee had formed in response to the arrests of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti — both Italian immigrants — for the murders of two people during a robbery at a shoe factory in Massachusetts in 1920. The men had been involved in anticapitalist politics, and their opposition to a government they believed oppressive led them to avoid the draft during the First World War. The early 1920s were marked by an intensification of racial and ethnic prejudice in America. That, along with a red scare unleashed by the Russian Revolution, brought particular scrutiny on men of Sacco and Vanzetti's beliefs and descent. The case received significant public attention. It became a *cause célèbre* for left-leaning observers, who saw in the men's treatment a manifestation of political and racial prejudice endemic in American society.³⁴ Supporters of Sacco and Vanzetti believed that such attitudes undermined the fair and impartial administration of justice in the men's case.

Churchill, on the other hand, was no radical. He served as a Second Lieutenant during the same war that Sacco and Vanzetti sought to avoid, though, as

³³ "Financial report of the Sacco-Vanzetti defense committee." Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee (Boston, 1925).

³⁴ Annika Neklason. "Sacco and Vanzetti's Trial of the Century Exposed Injustice in 1920s America." *Smithsonian Magazine* (2021).

he later wrote in his trademark mellifluous fashion, “it was over over there before I got over there from over here.”³⁵ (A pilot in the Army Signal Corps, Churchill held a similar military occupation as Ed Logue. Logue served as a bombardier in World War Two, which provided him an opportunity “read” the organization of European cities from the air — “the best possible city planning training,” he said of the experience.³⁶ Other modernists, like Le Corbusier, were in part inspired to reorder cities by viewing them from above.³⁷) In his decades of writing, Churchill never called for a fundamental reordering of American political and social structures. Indeed, he believed that good planning played a role as a bulwark against political extremism, the extremes being communism and fascism. And Churchill accepted the role of profit-seeking in urban development. He did, however, believe that American society, through good planning, should protect itself against capitalism’s excesses. He expressed as much in a 1937 article for *The American City*, writing,

[p]roper planning for the future does not prevent expansion and the making of profits: it aims merely to channel expansion in such a way as not to injure the entire community, to see that those who make profits pay their share of added community costs, and do not, in the long run, do irreparable damage to their fellow citizens. This is not socialism, but just a lesson learned from the past; if it is not heeded, the old cycle of false prosperity through land speculation,

³⁵ *Air service journal* 2 (New York: Gardner Moffat, Jan.-June 1918); Churchill. Letter to T. Barry Hunt. A *New York Times* writer, reviewing Churchill’s book, *The City is the People*, wrote of his prose that “[he] does write with a lively pen. Many of his sentences one has to read twice before the meaning is clear.” R.L. Duffus. “Cities of the Future.” *The New York Times*, n.d., Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

³⁶ Cohen 2019, 29.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

and real depression through bankruptcy, will again be gone through.³⁸

Churchill positioned his planning ethos as a sensible, moderate position. It was ironic, then, that his politics were at odds with the nation's hesitancy towards central control. The early end of Churchill's service in the Greenbelt Towns program, which shut down amid accusations of socialism, was a case in point.

Greenbelt Towns

Churchill and two of his colleagues at the Housing Study Guild — Mayer and Wright — worked on a Resettlement Administration Greenbelt Towns project: Greenbrook, in New Jersey. Churchill praised the “new towns” well after the program's demise in the late 1930s. Their plans, he wrote, were not standardized. Rather, they met “only on the principles of the basic program,” with significant allowance for individual nuance.³⁹ Moreover, the land the towns sat on was centrally controlled, and provision was made for the coordination of public services, like education and “a system of rural economy.”⁴⁰

Serving in the Resettlement Administration introduced Churchill to the mechanics of government and policy. Architects had to “write their own program, prov[e] its merit...make suggestions of policy, and back up the suggestions with facts.”⁴¹ In effect, the architect practiced skills associated with public sector

³⁸ Henry S. Churchill. “Small-Town Planning for the Future.” *The American City*, Oct. 1937, Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347, Box 4. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

³⁹ Henry S. Churchill. “America's Town Planning Begins.” *The New Republic* (3 June 1936): 96. The *New Republic* article included an editor's note. A federal appeals court had, after Churchill already drafted his article, found unconstitutional the appropriation for the New Jersey Resettlement Administration project.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

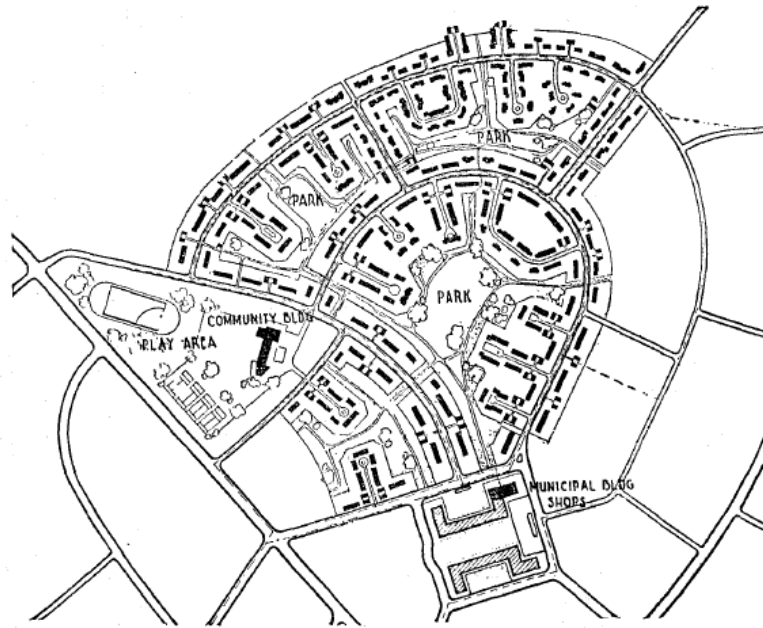
planners. Architecture was only “incidental.” This is not to say that Churchill thought all architects up to the task. He would repeatedly emphasize in the coming years — perhaps as much projecting as he was informing his interlocuters — that it takes a special kind of architect to engage in urbanism. Additionally, Churchill would, several decades later, describe the engineer for Greenbrook as “that rare anomaly” in the field who actually cared about nature and people.⁴² “The Greenbelt Towns initiative brought social utility to Mumford’s Garden Suburbs concept, Churchill argued. “It was no longer a study in sticks in stones,” he wrote drily, implicitly criticizing Mumford, “but one of people.”⁴³

Officials involved in the Greenbrook program were optimistic, but they worried about the longevity of the program. Churchill and Mayer emphasized that, in addition to the importance of the physical assembly of a community’s various elements, it is also “a living organism existing in time.” The enabling legislation for the program, they observed, did not acknowledge this reality. It was a failure that could potentially “wreck” the whole enterprise, eventually turning Greenbelt Towns into “static areas of potential blight and decay.” What is more, Churchill cautioned that that value of physical and social planning was limited within the larger framework of an unplanned economy.⁴⁴ Similar language would recur over the course of Churchill’s career, during which his ambition and conception of planning’s potential would run into the realities of political power and societal indifference.

⁴² Churchill. “Henry Wright,” 297.

⁴³ Churchill, “America’s Town Planning Begins,” 97.

⁴⁴ Henry S. Churchill. “Considerations of the Future of Resettlement Communities,” 21 Dec. 1935, Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347, Box 1. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.



PLAN OF ONE UNIT OF GREENBROOK, NEW JERSEY

In the illustration is shown only a very small part of the "green belt" of several thousand acres, by which the town is surrounded. Note the arrangement to provide maximum garden and park area without increasing first cost of streets or utilities over customary type of subdividing. (This is the project last week declared unconstitutional by the District of Columbia Court of Appeals.)

Figure 2 — Plan of Greenbrook, New Jersey, an unbuilt Resettlement Administration project⁴⁵

Renewer Before Renewal

Resettlement projects, urged Churchill, "show[ed] what can be done" when the forces of conservatism, speculative greed, and indifference are overcome.⁴⁶ However, he and others with whom he served in the Greenbrook project saw a need to go beyond the small, experimental foray in new towns planning. They called for large-scale urban replanning that would bring America's cities into the modern age and respond to social concerns, chiefly the problem of slums.

⁴⁵ Churchill, "America's Town Planning Begins," 97.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 98.

Indeed, the Housing Study Guild wished to bring about a nationwide campaign of urban social reform, rooted in — but not exclusively related to — housing.

Churchill represented the Guild before Congress, writing a two-page statement of testimony to the Senate Committee on Education and Labor in June 1935. The occasion was a hearing on legislation intended to “provid[e] for the elimination of insanitary and dangerous housing,” “relieve congestion,” and “aid in the construction and supervision of” affordable housing.⁴⁷ (The legislation later passed as the Wagner-Steagall Housing Act of 1937.) In total, 31 individuals submitted written or oral statements to the record. These included such figures as New York City Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, and early planning advocate Benjamin C. Marsh. Housing was not a recent concern of reformers. Established housing advocate and fellow testifier Mary Simkhovitch alluded to longstanding concerns with the state of the nation’s housing in her opening remarks: “Ever since 1889 I have been interested in this matter personally.”⁴⁸

The members of the Guild to which Churchill belonged were younger — Simkhovitch began her involvement four years before Churchill was born — but equally concerned with the issue and broadly supportive of the bill. The Guild members’ “collective, reasoned opinions,” as Churchill put it, led them to conclude that the bill, brought by Senator Robert F. Wagner of New York, was a good first start. However, there were some caveats. Concerns Churchill expressed regarding the proper design of urban renewal policy in the Wagner bill would

⁴⁷ United States Senate Committee on Education and Labor. 1935. *Slum and low-rent public housing. Hearings, Seventy-fourth Congress, first session, on S. 2392.* (Washington, D.C., 1935): 1.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

repeatedly reemerge over the course of his planning career. The bill required that slum clearance and the provision of “low-rent” housing be inseparable, but Churchill argued that “[t]he two need not have any relation.”⁴⁹ Moreover, private actors should not be enabled through the bill to run roughshod over the public interest. To illustrate this, Churchill wrote a fictionalized account of a housing program for *The New Republic* several days after his testimony. In it, he warned of private actors usurping government money. He equated realtors “riding in a dudg-eon” to locusts who, “since the days of Pharoah,” have done nothing “except suck blood.” (References to antiquity abound in Churchill’s written production.) These private interests, he continued, eventually won the ear of those in power, convincing this leadership to “[turn the country] over to the locusts.”⁵⁰

Solving urban ills, then, required a comprehensive response led by central government. Churchill would proclaim to the Philadelphia Young Planners Group in 1954 that, as a “new culture” emerges, jarring with that which the past built environment was designed to accommodate, order must be made out of “not only...our physical cities,” but the whole of society.⁵¹ It is evident from Churchill’s 1935 testimony that this was a longstanding passion. Housing did not exist in a vacuum, he wrote to the committee, and the problem of “slums and low-rent housing” could not “be solved without the power to attack the many related and causative problems of which they are but a part.”⁵² That power must come from the federal government and include “the entire environment and its

⁴⁹ Ibid, 127.

⁵⁰ Henry S. Churchill. “Housing Made Clear.” *The New Republic* (12 June 1934): 130.

⁵¹ Churchill, “Planning in a Free Society,” 189.

⁵² Senate Committee on Education and Labor 1935, 127.

appurtenances” as its scope. Only by “large-scale” anti-blight planning — “not just a building...but a neighborhood...streets, utilities, recreational and business facilities” — could “civic bankruptcy” be avoided.⁵³ Another fear shared by Churchill and the Guild was that if the federal government left land ownership, construction, and management of public housing to local governments, those entities might raise rents beyond what tenants could afford or skimp on upkeep. The bill, in short, gave the federal government insufficient control over public housing.

The role Churchill thought the common citizen should have within the proposed urban redevelopment policy was unclear in the 1935 testimony. Individual and group initiative should be encouraged, he argued. Regional boards should protect from the vagaries of local politics. The law should provide tenants of new, government-sponsored housing “security of tenure” against misfortune and “malign political influence,” as well as provide representation in management.⁵⁴ Yet, while calling for each of these modifications to the bill, Churchill simultaneously argued in support of broad public authority to clear slums and take preventative action against neighborhoods which could be thought to be in danger of becoming slums. This would undoubtedly entail the displacement of residents — for many, the elimination of the tenure security Churchill believed so valuable.

The Human City

In many ways, Churchill reflected the New Deal bureaucrat’s veneration of expertise. He wrote of Resettlement Administration towns that “[t]hey are the

⁵³ Ibid, 128.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

first large-scale attempt in this country to integrate all the factors that go to make a community — towns planned from the beginning by technicians according to a definite conception of purpose.”⁵⁵ Churchill’s assertion, that regional managers, not politicians, were best suited to administer an urban and housing redevelopment program, echoes Cohen’s description of New Deal administrators. These figures were “armed with administrative expertise, political muscle, and federal dollars.”⁵⁶ They thought themselves “best situated to represent the public interest, mediating between conflicting and often self-serving private interests.”⁵⁷

Churchill was self-confident, perhaps even arrogant, but he nonetheless paid notable attention to marginalized groups, especially the poor and racial minorities. Still living in New York, he chaired the Citizens Housing Council Committee on City Planning in the early 1940s. In this capacity, he repeatedly criticized perceived perversions of housing policy he thought contrary to the public interest. Writing to *The New York Times*, Churchill castigated the New York City Housing Authority in its siting of a Harlem public housing complex.⁵⁸ Staunchly supportive of the creation of new public housing, Churchill, and by extension the Citizens Housing Council, viewed the proposal to build the project in an area of “just as bad slums” as influenced by “racial prejudices” against the future residents — likely Puerto Rican — of the project. Churchill predicted that such a mistake would set a poor standard. “Mortgaging the future for the expediency of the moment,” argued Churchill, “hardly seems sound post-war planning.”⁵⁹ Park

⁵⁵ Churchill, “America’s Town Planning Begins,” 96.

⁵⁶ Cohen 2019, 122.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Henry S. Churchill. “Housing Plan Disapproved.” *The New York Times* (31 Dec. 1942).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*; Henry S. Churchill. “Harlem Site Held Faulty.” *The New York Times* (4 Jan. 1943).

Commissioner Robert Moses' defended the site selection in a letter to *The New York Times*. Moses, taking umbrage to Churchill's accusation of racism, responded:

Mr. Churchill's final references to racial prejudices, declining population, expediency, etc., are just tripe. There is no racial prejudice involved in doing something for a neglected part of our population living in squalor.... It is easy enough for starry-eyed planners to make pretty pictures of wholesale slum clearance. The real job is to find responsible public officials who will do something concrete.⁶⁰

To Churchill, Moses' defense only confirmed his prior suspicion of racism. "The primary consideration," he wrote four days after Moses' letter appeared, "appears to have been that the Puerto Ricans must be rehoused on the same identical blocks and not 'infiltrated'" elsewhere.⁶¹

Churchill promoted his social vision of planning before a wide variety of audiences, ranging from planners and architects to citizens' groups, often arguing for the social dimension of planning he so greatly valued. In 1938, just after the passage of the Wagner-Steagall Housing Act, he spoke before the Sculptors Guild, in New York City. Recently empowered housing authorities, he urged, should do more than "build just shelter for the underprivileged." Rather, "communities for citizens" must be the goal. And these communities can only exist "by virtue of common interest among the people living in the buildings."⁶² His high-minded rhetoric, though, often lacked what Churchill later criticized in

⁶⁰ Robert Moses. "Harlem Housing Defended." *The New York Times* (31 Dec. 1942).

⁶¹ Churchill. "Harlem Site Held Faulty," 1943.

⁶² Henry S. Churchill. "Talk for the Sculptors Guild," 13 Nov. 1938. Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347, Box 1. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

Mumford. There was rarely a “guide to the planner who wishes to act thoughtfully, but who must act anyhow, because that is his job.”⁶³

Renewal à la Churchill

Communities must become places that adapt to the future if they were to endure, held Churchill. He had feared in the 1930s that Greenbelt Towns would become blighted if they were not designed for the lifecycle of a community. Similarly, this theme marked Churchill’s work as an inspector for the United States Housing Authority in the 1940s, during the Second World War. For the Housing Authority, he made rounds of government developments for defense workers in the Northeast, authoring reports on their quality. Churchill concluded that, though there were individual instances of successful projects, the overall program was rife with issues that “relate directly to basic questions of policy.”⁶⁴ The houses were cheap and “fail to fit into any community or civic pattern, present or possible in the future.” “I suppose it is too much to expect even a modicum of foresightedness, or even any slight apprehension as to the future on the part of our law-makers.” A successful project is one that results in “a place in which people will live, grow up, die” and provides “physical frame for this living, growing and dying.”⁶⁵ The defense housing projects, in Churchill’s estimation, did not do so. Churchill would level similar accusations against the political class and special

⁶³ Henry S. Churchill. “Sticks and Stones *May* Break Our Bones,” Oct. 1961. Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

⁶⁴ For example, the Franklin Terrace Project in Erie, Pennsylvania featured one-bedroom units that were “livable, pleasant little homes.” Henry S. Churchill. “Report of Project in Erie, Pennsylvania,” 13 Jan. 1942. Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library; Henry S. Churchill. “Letter on Defense Housing Project inspections,” 27 Jan. 1942, Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

⁶⁵ Churchill, “Letter on Defense Housing Project inspections.”

interests when he grew disillusioned with urban renewal years later. But Churchill remained, during and after his wartime work, a staunch advocate for adapting cities to a new era.

“The condition...of our cities,” Churchill lectured a University of Pennsylvania audience in December of 1943, “is now up for re-valuation.”⁶⁶ The advent of new technology was causing the city to decentralize. According to Churchill, this was due to the rise of the car and other technologies like the television that radically changed the geography of entertainment for American households.⁶⁷ He also recognized the relocation of factories to open land outside cities, as well as a transition to an urban service economy. However, concern from some corners about factories moving to urban outskirts prompted Churchill to remind his audience that many workers in the cities did not labor in industry. It would furthermore be necessary to reconsider the relationship between work and living, given the transition towards sprawling one-story factories. Overall, though, he welcomed “decentralization” — so long as metropolitan growth was given “some coherent form.”⁶⁸ Indeed, industrialization, from the Chicago-born Churchill’s perspective, had rendered cities “unbearably boring and ugly,” as he put it in a public lecture in New York. The classics-obsessed architect-planner claimed that the passing of the urban industrial era could end in a more human city of “democratic process” and “better social relations,” reminiscent of ancient Greece.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Henry S. Churchill. “University of Pennsylvania Lecture,” 7 Dec. 1943, Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347, Box 1. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

⁶⁷ Henry S. Churchill. Lecture at Fifth Annual Conference of the National Decentralist Institute, Sept. 1948, Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

⁶⁸ Ibid; Churchill. “The Best Laid Plans,” 149.

⁶⁹ Henry S. Churchill. “New York Public Lecture,” 15 Jan. 1946, Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347, Box 1. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

Fundamentally, a proper “re-valuation” of the city should, to Churchill, “[consist] of a shift in our idea of the city from its being a place for speculative enterprise to its becoming a place in which to live, work and play.”⁷⁰ He was nevertheless quite pessimistic about whether society *writ large* cared enough about the sorry state he found it in for such a shift to occur. Just four months earlier, Churchill had written to the then-Philadelphia based architect Hans Blumenfeld that the “foulness and disorder” of cities “reflect[ed] exactly the foulness and disorder of the present day social and spiritual life of the human race.” As such, Churchill did not expect to see orderly cities for a century.⁷¹ A plan could only come second; the social impetus must first be present.

Physical and social environments must be planned together, believed Churchill. He emphasized that the physical realm was not the end all be all. Central to this would be the creation of places that cater to all age groups and a range of incomes. (He wrote of the need for mixed-income neighborhoods in an article in the trade magazine, *Banking*. It is unclear, however, whether this would have been to integrate socioeconomic classes or if it was simply to allow the progeny of residents to have housing that was affordable during their early careers.⁷²) In addition, statistics — venerated by the planning discipline, thanks to the influence of Harland Bartholomew — were “pseudoscience” that could not capture “the human spirit.”⁷³ In this way, Churchill took firm stances against two pillars of

⁷⁰ Churchill. “University of Pennsylvania lecture.”

⁷¹ Henry S. Churchill. “Letter to Hans Blumenfeld,” 16 Aug. 1943, Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347, Box 1. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

⁷² Henry S. Churchill. “How to Prevent Neighborhood Decay.” *Banking* 38, no. 1 (1945).

⁷³ Henry S. Churchill. “City Planning From the Viewpoint of the Architect.” *Journal of the American Institute of Architects* 6, no. 4 (1946): 160.

planning. William Anderson, reviewing Churchill's 1945 book, *The City is the People*, in which he explicated his planning ethos, described Churchill's language as "vigorous and salty" when he criticized "'haussmannizing'" plans that left out "the people."⁷⁴

Several years later, in 1949, Churchill strongly argued against segregation in America's urban areas during a lecture before the Central Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. "All talk about democracy and equal opportunity," he launched, "are just so much hooey," so long as "rank discrimination and utterly undemocratic process" exist. Churchill concluded on the ominous note that the end result of entrenching race and class segregation through planning would be the division of the nation into cities that are communist "poorhouses" and fascist suburbs "vulnerable to every anti-American movement that comes along."⁷⁵

Churchill accused private enterprise of being one of the chief culprits of the inhuman, undemocratic planning he criticized. Mixed-use places can have "life in variety."⁷⁶ Efforts to institute class and land use segregation through zoning emerged at the behest of "vested property interests" and "snobbery," which both sought to be protected.⁷⁷ He claimed that the practice was overused, with the divisions created being over-rigid. Planners, he hammered, were "killing our cities" by separating businesses and residences. Effectively, Churchill drew a direct line

⁷⁴ Anderson. "Review of *The City Is the People* by Henry S. Churchill," 143.

⁷⁵ Henry S. Churchill. Lecture for the Central Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, 14 June 1949, Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347, Box 1. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

⁷⁶ Henry S. Churchill. "An Open Letter to Mr. Isaacs." *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 14, no. 3 (1948).

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 41.

between zoning, wealth, and prejudice. He wrote in the *Journal of Housing* that planning, especially physical planning, will not “cure the...ills of pride and prejudice and poverty.”⁷⁸

Planning was not so much a process for Churchill as it was a particular construction of political economy and societal values. A *New York Times* writer observed that Churchill thought of planning as “only another name for social control over the use of land.”⁷⁹ In his speeches, Churchill spoke of planning as a framework for something greater than property values and private speculation. He wished to see government assemble, hold, and lease land targeted for redevelopment, not sell it off to private interests.⁸⁰ Wrapping himself in the flag of moderation, Churchill assured a Pennsylvania audience of architects that doing so would not be socialist. He believed that, though government would own the land, improvements — i.e., buildings — could still be bought and sold among private enterprise on the market. Churchill feared that municipal control of land could go awry due to machine politics. But his skepticism of “private monopolistic enterprise” was perhaps greater — especially the potential for private government to engage in “feudalistic planning,” pointing to racism in New York City’s Stuyvesant Town and in company towns.⁸¹ Instead, planning must emphasize the Jeffersonian ideal: the small businessman, the community gathering place, upward

⁷⁸ Henry S. Churchill. “‘Neighborhood’ Concept Is Submitted to Questioning,” *Journal of Housing*, Dec. 1948, Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

⁷⁹ R.L. Duffus. “Cities of the Future.”

⁸⁰ Churchill. “Lecture for the Central Pennsylvania Chapter of the AIA.”

⁸¹ Churchill, “Best Laid Plans,” 153-154.

mobility and “renewed participation of all in civic affairs.”⁸² This, he claimed, could be supported by good planning.

Philadelphia Renewer

Churchill moved to Philadelphia in 1952 to work on the Eastwick urban renewal project, marking his first major engagement as a renewal practitioner after nearly two decades of advocacy. He had spent the previous four years as an Associate in Planning at the Planning and Housing Division of the Columbia University School of Architecture’s. There, Churchill oversaw graduate students in the formulation of planning reports similar to those he would soon produce.⁸³ He had also, by the time of his move, published a successful book, *The City is the People*, which garnered positive reviews from several critics, including in *The New York Times*. (The book was influential in planning practice. It was one of just 16 works cited in a more than 600-page plan for one Atlanta neighborhood development — a development designed to house displaced black residents following a “slum” clearance program.⁸⁴ A Fort Worth, Texas plan quoted Churchill at length in an introduction that laid out the scope of planning and its utility — notably, that the “city plan is the expression of the collective purpose of the people...or it is nothing.”⁸⁵) The American Institute of Planners had extended membership to Churchill, and he had chaired the Committee on Housing at the New York Branch of the American Institute of Architects.

⁸² Ibid, 155.

⁸³ Theodor Karl Rohdenburg. *History of the School of Architecture, Columbia University*. (New York, Columbia University Press, 1954).

⁸⁴ Georgia Institute of Technology. College of Architecture. *A planning survey of the South Pryor Road area of Atlanta, Georgia*. (Atlanta, 1950).

⁸⁵ Fort Worth (Tex.). City Planning Dept. *Planning Fort Worth, Texas: past, present, future*. (1962): 17.

In Philadelphia, Churchill established an architecture and city planning practice at 204 West Rittenhouse Square and looked forward to the upcoming renewal work. In remarks to the Philadelphia Citizens Council on City Planning, in late September 1952, he expressed hope that, despite its flaws, the 1949 Housing Act would serve as “a tool to help do better replanning.” The city is unknowable, he told the audience; the breaking point “in terms of density, decibels and disgust” remained a mystery.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, he professed, “I believe in the cities.” “Title I” of the Housing Act, “for the first time...gives us an opportunity to build our cities nearer to the heart’s desire,” Churchill wrote in *The Survey* upon the passage of the Act.⁸⁷ A city suitable for the long term civic good — one not on the road to blight paved by “the short-term real-estate boys” — was possible.⁸⁸ Eastwick would be a chance to try his hand at this sort of planning.

Eastwick was a partially integrated working-class neighborhood in southwest Philadelphia. The area suffered from poor infrastructure. However, it also boasted a number of businesses that employed local residents, as well as high rate of homeownership.⁸⁹ Churchill, serving as chief planner, was one of many engaged in the Eastwick project. Others involved in the project included city planning officials, renewal authorities, and architects. His initial plan for the neighborhood, completed by 1954, earned itself a spread in *Architectural Forum* —

⁸⁶ Henry S. Churchill. “A Plea for Urbanity,” 30 Sept. 1952, Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347, Box 1. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

⁸⁷ Henry S. Churchill. “Modern Cities — Now or Never,” *The Survey*, Jan. 1950, Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* One of Churchill’s recurrent rhetorical tics was to refer to categories of people with whom he disagreed as “boys.” Those in the real estate industry were perhaps the most common recipient of the label.

⁸⁹ McKee, “Liberal Ends Through Illiberal Means.”

dramatically subtitled: “A proposal for rescuing the Eastwick area from the clutches of swamps, sewers and slums.”⁹⁰ The magazine lauded the plan as “a city within a city.” Covering 3,000 acres, the site was intended to fit like a puzzle piece with the larger fabric of Philadelphia, all while establishing “its own balanced residential districts and industrial base.” “[T]he area,” continued the magazine, could transform “from a tax drain to a gilt-edged investment.”⁹¹

Several of Churchill’s theoretical concepts regarding the shape of renewal were reflected in *Architectural Forum*’s praise of his work, which at times quoted him directly. Churchill claimed to have employed in Eastwick his concept of the planning district. He contrasted this concept with Clarence Perry’s Neighborhood Unit, which he roundly criticized for having little utility in planning. (“A neighborhood is a sociologic concept and I don’t think you can plan an area in that sense.”⁹²) Writing several years earlier, Churchill described a neighborhood as something existing only “by virtue of people, not planners.” Instead, Churchill preferred “planning districts,” stating at the time that he tried to integrate the concept into his work. The districts should be “homogenous and self-contained” but not segregated. They should also facilitate meaningful “participation in government and in community activities.”⁹³ Their loose frameworks would provide “open, pleasant, healthful and safe” environments that residents may then define organically — or, as *Architectural Forum* described it, “settings for the areas to create themselves.”⁹⁴ Similarly, Churchill planned for a mixture of housing,

⁹⁰ “Inside Philadelphia: A New Kind of New Town.” *Architectural Forum* 101, no. 3 (1954).

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 140.

⁹² *Ibid*, 141.

⁹³ Churchill, “An Open Letter to Mr. Isaacs,” 41.

⁹⁴ Churchill, “‘Neighborhood’ Concept”; “Inside Philadelphia,” 41.

somewhat reflective of his previous advocacy for providing an assortment of living environments conducive to supporting individuals over a lifetime. Recreational space was to be distributed across the areas, as well as shopping areas accessible by transit and car and corner stores accessible by foot. The theme of the overall plan was to endow Eastwick with “[v]ariety in solutions...to avoid monotony.”⁹⁵

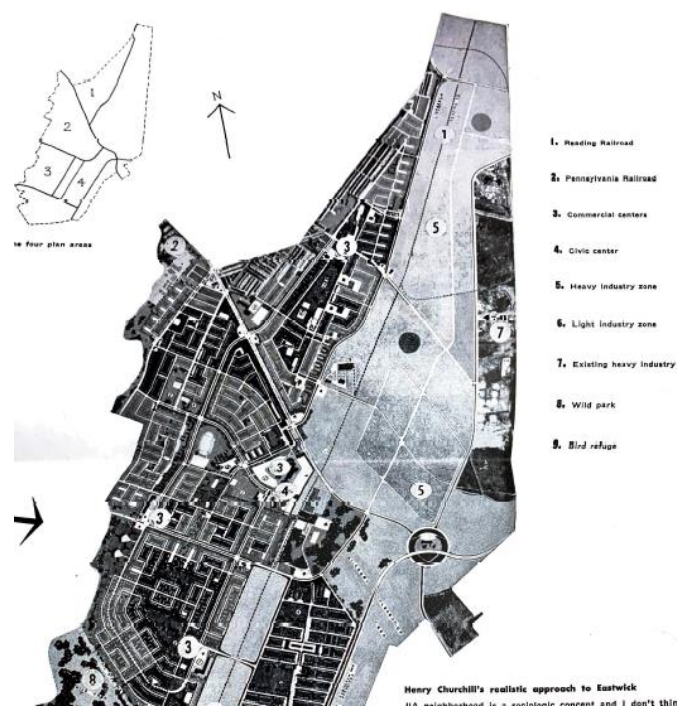


Figure 3 — Spread on Churchill’s plan for Eastwick, featured in *Architectural Forum*⁹⁶

The draft Eastwick plan also frequently cut against Churchill’s professed beliefs. This occurred most notably in the proposed disposition of the land that would be redeveloped. Wrote *Architectural Forum*: “[a]fter the city, with the help of federal aid, condemns and improves the land, it will be resold to private developers for completion of the projects”⁹⁷ Yet, Churchill — before and after his

⁹⁵ “Inside Philadelphia,” 143.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

contribution to the Eastwick project — criticized government subsidy of private enterprise. He detailed resignedly in 1945, before the Independent Citizens' Committee of the Arts, Sciences, and Professions, how the main federal urban redevelopment proposals involved government purchasing blighted land at a high cost and selling it for cheap to private interests. It seemed as if nothing different — to him, nothing better — had been proposed. At least, said Churchill, “no other remotely possible method...within the framework of our economy” was put forward.⁹⁸ (Churchill from time-to-time expressed skepticism towards capitalism, a trait shared by others of the New Deal brain trust, like the Resettlement administrator Rexford Tugwell. This skepticism, though, was often accompanied by a certain prudence, nodding towards, but not articulating, a radical vision of a more centrally planned society.⁹⁹)

Churchill had argued against large-scale redevelopment in a 1950 *Architectural Forum* article. Similarly, Churchill dramatically predicted the year after the Housing Act's passage that large urban renewal projects would “bring disaster to the program as a whole.”¹⁰⁰ Instead, a “small scale method” — Eastwick was the largest renewal development in the nation — with a “basic plan” was that which he thought most likely to endure by being amenable to change over time.¹⁰¹ The framework created by the renewal plan should not be filled in just by large enterprise, “but also by small people who will build freshly, inherently, and

⁹⁸ Henry S. Churchill. “Introduction to discussion of City Planning: Independent Citizens' Committee of the Arts, Sciences, and Professions, 23 June 1945, Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347, Box 1. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

⁹⁹ See, for example: Rexford G. Tugwell. “The principle of planning and the institution of laissez faire.” *The American Economic Review* 22, no. 1 (1932).

¹⁰⁰ Churchill, “Modern Cities.”

¹⁰¹ McKee, “Liberal Ends Through Illiberal Means”; Henry S. Churchill. “City Redevelopment.” *Architectural Forum* (Dec. 1950).

venturesomely,” Churchill argued excitedly.¹⁰² Successful execution of such a plan would require municipal ownership of land, just as Churchill had stated to the Central Pennsylvania AIA meeting a year earlier. Moreover, he emphasized that “prejudice against building on leased land is just that — a prejudice.”¹⁰³ Cities should favor small enterprise when leasing land.¹⁰⁴ According to Churchill, rents would bring more money into municipal coffers than selling off the parcels, and the mistakes of disparate small businesses would be easier to fix, anyway.¹⁰⁵

In this context, Churchill seemed less than enthused about the Eastwick work and the direction urban renewal was headed. He announced before an audience of architects in 1955 that the renaming of 1949’s “urban redevelopment” as 1954’s “urban renewal” was the “old trick of putting new labels on the old hogwash.”¹⁰⁶ Indeed, he came across as the reluctant, skeptical planner rather than as a crusader for the planning profession. Speaking to the Philadelphia Young Planners association in 1954, around the time of his Eastwick involvement, he cheekily described planning as a profession rather than an art because it “professes to do so much and accomplishes so comparatively little.”¹⁰⁷ Government red tape was one of the “odds” limiting city planning’s effectiveness. So, too, was the statistic. The planner’s job might have been to organize the relevant data, but the architect “must have the vision, the guts, to say...Damn the statistics, go ahead!”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰² Churchill, “Modern Cities.”

¹⁰³ Churchill. “City Redevelopment,” 77.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid; Churchill. “Modern Cities.”

¹⁰⁶ Henry S. Churchill. “A.I.A. Regional Meeting” in St. Louis, 13 Oct. 1955, Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347, Box 1. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

¹⁰⁷ Churchill. “Planning in a Free Society.”

¹⁰⁸ Henry S. Churchill. “Some Implications of Redevelopment and Dispersal,” 14 May 1951, Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347, Box 1. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

Churchill, an architect by training, seemed to embody this ethos in his planning work. One 1955 Eastwick project memo, regarding a “Blighting Elements Report,” suggested a noise study on industrial and airport noise be incorporated. Churchill, ever the architect, was itching to move forward, commenting in the margin: “When is the goddamn report supposed to be finished?”¹⁰⁹

Churchill’s Eastwick plan would not pass through the political wringer unscathed. An “innovative” proposal — reminiscent of his early public housing advocacy in New York — to disperse public housing throughout Eastwick rather than concentrate it in a single section was axed.¹¹⁰ It is unlikely, however, that he would have been surprised. Churchill had previously acknowledged that planners should expect little to come of their work if unsupported by political power. Writing on segregation in zoning in 1948, Churchill claimed that it was impossible for a planner to see enacted a plan that went beyond what the political class was willing to accept.¹¹¹ “As long as there is only lip-service to democracy,” he laid out, “plans simply will not be acceptable to those controlling the execution of the plans.”¹¹² It was a statement reflective of what he described during a lecture at the University of Toronto shortly before the end of the Second World War — that the only way to make society and, by extension, those in power care about planning was to let planning “get dirtied in the political arena.”¹¹³ (In this case, Churchill called for the head of planning commission to be an elected position.) Indeed,

¹⁰⁹ Eastwick Project Meeting Minutes, 19 Sept. 1955, Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

¹¹⁰ McKee. “Liberal Ends Through Illiberal Means,” 554.

¹¹¹ Churchill, “An Open Letter to Mr. Isaacs.”

¹¹² *Ibid*, 42.

¹¹³ Churchill. “University of Toronto Lecture.”

Churchill would later write to the editor of the *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, Perry L. Norton, that “the Pure Planner” is “shielded from that creature spawned of hells [sic.] fire, the Politician.”¹¹⁴ Planners needed to get over this.

Shortly after Churchill completed his plan for Eastwick, the City Planning Commission hired him to work on renewal planning in Germantown. Thus, despite apparent reservations about urban renewal, he continued on as a renewer. Churchill once proclaimed that “[c]ollaboration...can result in nothing but a leveling out of the best into the good.” “If a job is too big for one man’s purposeful direction, it should be cut down in size until it is small enough for one man to handle.”¹¹⁵ Luckily for him, the assignment in Germantown was to be a solo endeavor, though, of course, he would not have power over what happened beyond the planning phase. Importantly, however, the work in Germantown led to Churchill breaking significantly from the urban renewal mold. After finishing his work for the planning commission, he moved towards community-engaged planning. This shift defined the remainder of his career — and life.

Planning for Germantown’s Renewal

Germantown’s changing racial and social composition formed the backdrop for Churchill’s appraisal of the neighborhood. One study, commissioned by the First Presbyterian Church and published two years after Churchill’s work for the Commission, found that the black population in Germantown’s 22nd Ward had increased by over a third since 1950, with the ward counting 17,729 black

¹¹⁴ Henry S. Churchill. Letter to Perry L. Norton, 11 Mar. 1957, Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347, Box 1. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

¹¹⁵ Churchill. “Some Implications of Redevelopment and Dispersal.”

residents. Within the neighborhood, there were virtually all white districts bordering others in which at least a quarter of residents were black.¹¹⁶

The 1956 renewal study of Germantown that Churchill produced for the City Planning Commission focused on “preserving” the neighborhood from encroaching blight and identifying potential sites for public housing.¹¹⁷ Much of the study was anchored firmly in physical planning. Other aspects, though, reflected Churchill’s longstanding focuses. He wrote that future blight — not just current blight — should be eliminated, demonstrating his support for planning that would live on in time, rather than settle for short-term interventions. Churchill recommended the demolition of buildings he considered blighting influences in numerous sections of Germantown. The choices often fell along racial lines. One “Negro pocket of substandard housing” on Queen Lane, he wrote flatly, “should be considered for redevelopment.”¹¹⁸ It is conceivable that some houses in Germantown were, indeed, in poor condition. Yet even rehabilitated buildings were not safe.

An area bounded by Chelton Avenue, Baynton Street, and High Street received the label of containing “undoubtedly the worst slums in the study area.” At the same time, Churchill acknowledged that “[s]ome of this area is being privately rehabilitated.” This was thanks to the “strongly Italian” community, on which, he claimed, the “Italian Church, [had] a strong hold.” The young, he

¹¹⁶ *A Comprehensive Study of the First Presbyterian Church in Germantown and the Surrounding Area*, 31 July. 1957. Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

¹¹⁷ Ty Learn served as a research assistant to Churchill. Joan Carnevalis was the graphic artist for the report.

¹¹⁸ Henry S. Churchill. *Germantown: A Planning Study* (6 Feb. 1956).

continued, tended to stay in the community and renovate homes there. Churchill, who emphasized throughout his career and in the Germantown report the importance of planning urban spaces that could support residents from youth to old age, nevertheless generally dismissed the enterprise. “It would be a good place for redevelopment,” he concluded, and a significant number of properties “should be cleared.”¹¹⁹ The Morton section of Germantown — “mostly populated by Negroes and Italians” — received a similar evaluation. The younger generation often stayed in the neighborhood and fixed up “some dilapidated structure,” as Churchill rather disparagingly put it.¹²⁰ But this, he estimated, “may prove to be superficial” improvement. Thus, “it is felt that some of the structures are not really worth saving.”¹²¹

Churchill’s choices may have been predictable for a renewal planner, but they cut sharply against his previous (and later) statements in support of racial liberalism. His discussions of blight in the Germantown Study were distinctly racialized. The only mentions of ethnicity or race involved “Negroes” and “Italians” — and that only in the obliquely negative context of identifying places for clearance and redevelopment. Moreover, given the prejudices of the time, the linking of racialized groups with particular areas may well have made those areas seem worse by association in the popular eye. There was a hint of religious stereotyping with regard to the “Italian” residents, as well. Churchill twice claimed that the attachment of Italian American youth to their community was due to the power of the church — likely a Catholic church — over their autonomy, rather than family

¹¹⁹ Ibid, xx.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 68.

¹²¹ Ibid, 67.

attachment or other lines of reasoning. It is an assumption that echoed prejudiced beliefs, common in the era, of a distant Pope controlling the religious and social affairs of Italian Americans and other Catholics.

As for the increasing black population, Churchill's language in the study reflected a mix of concern, quasi-pathogenic references to "infiltration," and a vague paternalism. He described the changing demographics of parts of Germantown as the result of "a push of the non-white population north and south."¹²² "This area has one problem," he wrote of another section. "It is in transition." Middle-class white families were on their way out. In their wake, and stoking Churchill's concern, "the area may tend to change character completely with infiltration of the Negro population, which are mostly of the labor class."¹²³ Other black areas were simply recommended for demolition. (Churchill tended to hide his subjective recommendations behind the mask of passive voice. "It is felt that" was one formulation that introduced a suggestion for clearance.¹²⁴) Churchill did attribute some of the "racial problem," as he later referred to it, to white prejudice — if in a roundabout manner.¹²⁵ Black in-migration, he wrote, had a "panicking effect...on the white owners"¹²⁶ in one section of Germantown. But is it hard to tell exactly where his sympathies lay: with the black residents who would live among abandonment left by fleeing white residents, or with the white residents "threatened" by black newcomers?

¹²² Ibid, 10.

¹²³ Ibid, xxviii.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 86.

¹²⁵ Henry S. Churchill. *Concern for Germantown*, 1959, Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library. It is worth mentioning that Churchill use of the term, racial problem, in a report for the community organization Concern for Germantown, came with scare quotes.

¹²⁶ Churchill. *Germantown: A Planning Study*, xix.

The language of preservation suffused the Germantown Study. It was as much oriented towards social protection as it was towards guarding the historical value of the built environment and landscape. After all, the central axiom of the study was quite clear, that “[t]he character and quality of housing available are major determinants of the type of population which a community can attract and maintain.”¹²⁷ Some old homes were so altered that Churchill thought they should not even be saved, for their “character” could not be brought back. This, though, hewed closely to social concerns. Large houses in Germantown were undergoing conversions into apartments. The alterations could “prove extremely undesirable” because they “may presage the area’s decline into a transitional neighborhood, which is the first stage of blight.”¹²⁸ It was important that Germantown be retained “as it is today by attracting the same kind of people that live there today”¹²⁹ — in effect, middle-class white residents. In the Germantown renewal study, the road to social stabilization and preservation was to be paved with demolition.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 12.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 22.

¹²⁹ Ibid. 35.



Figure 4 — Picture of Germantown rowhouses from Churchill's renewal study of the neighborhood¹³⁰

Churchill left municipal urban renewal after completing the Germantown study. He transitioned to working on community planning in the same neighborhood, supporting Concern for Germantown. Concern for Germantown was a collection of community institutions that banded together in the late 1950s to combat what they saw as declining conditions in the neighborhood, which included residents and institutions departing to the suburbs. As an advisor to the organization and member of its executive committee, Churchill stressed the importance of residents engaging in the political process. He aimed in his work to facilitate independent action by the involved institutions rather than create a single, prescriptive master plan. Though no longer working in government renewal, stabilization and preservation were still the order of the day, as they were in 1956. (He would write in a preface to the second edition of *The City is the People*, “I have changed my

¹³⁰ Henry S. Churchill. Version of *Germantown: A Planning Study with Photographs*, 1956, Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

mind about a good many things.... I am not sure in what category these revisions place me, that of senile conservationist or rejuvenated reactionary.”¹³¹) This time, however, Churchill’s work was marked by a degree of racial and class liberalism that was not present in the renewal study.

Neighborhood Planner

By the late 1950s, Churchill questioned the placing of slum clearance at the center of the national urban renewal program. He lamented the misplaced focus on low-quality housing as the locus of urban problems in a 1956 article in the *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*:

But we now know that the slum is not the cause of urban deterioration, but an effect of it. The slum is not the reason for the spread of blight, or the flight of families to the suburbs, or the decline of center city, but quite contrariwise — the slum fills in the vacuum left by economic and physical decay.¹³²

Similarly, Churchill avoided putting clearance at the center of his work for Concern for Germantown. (This differed from the at least one leader in the organization, Henry J. Magaziner, who argued, “any worthwhile plan will call for the removal of slums and blight.”¹³³) Slums were, instead, a “social and economic problem,” with such “abasement of people...to squalid surroundings” no longer acceptable “as part of the natural order of things.” He then shifted dramatically from his 1956 solution to the problem of slums. They were an issue he thought could be rectified without “dispossessing people.”¹³⁴

¹³¹ Henry S. Churchill. “Preface.” *The City is the People*, 1962, Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

¹³² Henry S. Churchill. “Wanted: A Workable Federal Program (Part I).” *Journal of the American Institute of Architects* 26, no. 3 (1956).

¹³³ Magaziner, “A Proposal for the Revitalization of the Heart of Germantown.”

¹³⁴ Churchill, *Concern for Germantown*, 1959, 3.

Planning, Churchill wrote for Concern for Germantown, “cannot be left to professionals who are politically impotent.”¹³⁵ He had long argued that planning should not be a closed discipline and that planners were not simply those with the right credentials. Instead, a city planner was “any man...who really worries about the city he lives it.”¹³⁶ Only a salary differentiated the professional planner — “citizens with a special training” — from the citizen planner.¹³⁷ Concern for Germantown’s leadership contained few professional planners. It claimed 35 partners, including “Protestant, Jewish and Catholic institutions, Negro churches and service organizations,” local public and private schools, and arts organizations.¹³⁸ Churchill urged these institutions to organize to “express the solidarity of their mutual interests,” echoing his claim a decade earlier that politicians “never do anything unless forced by the pressure of the people.”¹³⁹ This, he continued, must involve continually and forcefully demonstrating the community’s desires. “Sporadic attendance at a meeting or two” would not be enough.¹⁴⁰ Henry J. Magaziner, a leader in Concern for Germantown, concurred. A plan offering a positive vision for the neighborhood would need to “muster sufficient public support to assure its enactment.”¹⁴¹

¹³⁵ Ibid, 5.

¹³⁶ Churchill, “City Planning From the Viewpoint of the Architect,” 160.

¹³⁷ Ibid; Henry S. Churchill. “An Architect Looks at City Planning.” *Empire State Architect* 6 (1946): 9.

¹³⁸ *Concern for Germantown*, 1 Nov. 1960, Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

¹³⁹ Ibid; Churchill, “Introduction to discussion of City Planning.”

¹⁴⁰ Churchill, *Concern for Germantown*, 1959, 5.

¹⁴¹ Henry J. Magaziner. “A Proposal for the Revitalization of the Heart of Germantown,” Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

Churchill had effectively become a neighborhood planner. A strong supporter of the comprehensive, regional planning approach, he was aware that localized planning efforts could only do so much. Germantown seemed to have the amenities needed to be attractive, but some residents — and even institutions — were leaving.¹⁴² The Germantown Friends School “seriously consider[ed] moving away, and another actually did so. The Quaker institution was the originating actor in the creation of Concern for Germantown, its leadership worrying about the future of the neighborhood.¹⁴³ In a preliminary study, Churchill and his coauthors, Jack M. Kendree and Ty Learn, intended to gain insight into the “major problems” facing the neighborhood and develop a plan to respond to them. (Ty Learn was a trained planner who had also served as Churchill’s research assistant for the renewal study.) The report they produced was explicitly intended as an update and expansion on that done in 1956 for the planning commission.

The geography of urban change in Germantown was uneven, wrote Churchill and his colleagues. Businesses and educational institutions were strong — even growing — in some sections of the neighborhood, yet other sections had seen an exodus.¹⁴⁴ Faced with this, the authors had trouble identifying specific causes for the overall decline that members of Concern for Germantown felt was occurring. “[T]he picture is dark,” they wrote, and “it is mostly blurred.” The preliminary study painted, in short, an image of a neighborhood whose institutions were caught in a cloud of unease regarding change occurring in the present and

¹⁴² Henry S. Churchill, Jack M. Kendree, and Ty Learn. *A Preliminary Study of Germantown prepared for Concern for Germantown*, 1959, rev. 1960, Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

¹⁴³ Churchill, *Concern for Germantown*, 1959.

¹⁴⁴ Churchill, et al., *A Preliminary Study*.

possible changes occurring in the future. The possible effects of these changes were unknown, and their scale varied greatly. A Post Office was slated to close. The possibility of a large highway replacing a local park loomed. Dilapidation was rife. The study's authors set out a potential role for Concern for Germantown amidst the uncertainty:

How is future needed play space to be acquired, what is to be done about extending the rehabilitation of blighted areas that the Germantown Settlement has so well begun?

Concern for Germantown will not try to give answers, but will try to point the way, to suggest avenues of enquiry, and perhaps even to stimulate activity by acting as sponsor for funds for other studies.¹⁴⁵

It was important, the study urged, that the Germantown community not become reactionary in the face of change. Instead, "it should be possible...to overcome this, to see not only what future trends may be but to go about successfully shaping them."¹⁴⁶ This, the authors emphasized, should not be exclusionary. "[A]ll kinds and conditions of people" should have a place in Germantown.¹⁴⁷

Churchill and his colleagues conducted interviews with leaders of Germantown institutions as part of the preliminary study. They wished to learn what the leaders thought regarding the neighborhood's future and the role their institutions could play in it. Most leaders, though, had "given little or no thought to the changing scene."¹⁴⁸ The revelation "was startling...coming from the heads of institutions concerned with the problem of social welfare," who, moreover, had "a

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 3.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 5.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 6.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 6.

financial stake in the community.”¹⁴⁹ Only three had given significant consideration to the questions posed.

More widespread among institution leaders interviewed for Churchill and his colleagues’ study was an awareness of racial change in Germantown.¹⁵⁰ Creating a community that was “well-balanced racially, economically, and socially...will not be wholly decided within the limits of Germantown,” Churchill acknowledged. Germantown’s ability to retain its white residents and its black residents would depend on whether the suburbs remained “white ghettos,” he believed.¹⁵¹ That is, white residents would only stay in Germantown if there was no escape valve to *de facto* segregated white neighborhoods. But some institution leaders interviewed expressed “annoyance” at what Churchill termed the “racial problem.” One “said frankly that all he could see was that Germantown was going to turn colored.” Not only that, the man continued, but “he would have none of it, the important thing was to get out.”¹⁵²

Churchill struggled to comprehend the white flight that was in the background of his work for Concern for Germantown — even when directly faced with it. Concern for Germantown listed in a 1960 interim report that the first priority for a new proposed study was to examine “the forces of deterioration and how to limit their effect.” Its fifth — and last — priority was to “[d]etermine how to do these things and how to put them across in our present social and political

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 6-7.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 9.

¹⁵² Ibid, 7.

environment.”¹⁵³ Churchill had implored a year earlier that it was important to find an answer to the question: “what are (emphasis Churchill’s) the real sources of dissatisfaction and discontent in the schools, churches, and other institutions?” “The usual answer of ‘a changing population’ is not enough,” he believed.¹⁵⁴ The departure of middle-class — white — Germantown residents to the suburbs could not only be due to their animus towards a growing black population, Churchill maintained. There must have been a deeper root cause.

In a similar vein, Churchill, Kendree, and Learn, when drafting the preliminary report, downplayed the place of racial prejudice in Germantown when faced with the community leader who stated he would soon leave due to the changing racial composition of the neighborhood. “This is one kind of attitude,” the authors concluded. “And even...well-informed men were not aware of the many pressures,” like population density and school quality, “which are at least as important as the racial one.”¹⁵⁵ Yet, an official from the Second Presbyterian Church frankly stated to Churchill that, as public schools integrated, white residents were heading for the exits to more monochrome locales.

Mr. C. — Why are people leaving Germantown? Is it only prejudice. [sic.]

Dr. C. — Public schools have become a high percentage colored the standards of education has dropped. Young white families have difficulty finding suitable housing for expanding size. Its either expensive large houses or the row which is predominantly negro.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ “A Proposal to Study and Rebuilt Physical and Human Patterns in a Compact Urban Community,” 6 Dec. 1960, Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

¹⁵⁴ Churchill, *Concern for Germantown*, 1959, 3.

¹⁵⁵ Churchill, et al., *A Preliminary Study*, 7

¹⁵⁶ Henry S. Churchill. “‘Concern’ for Germantown — Notes,” n.d., Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library. The interview is lightly stylized for clarity. It was recorded by hand. “Mr. C.” denotes Churchill. “Dr. C.” denotes the interviewee.

Race was indeed a central factor in the changing Germantown of the late 1950s. Churchill and Concern for Germantown, despite their laudable intentions, were incapable of understanding the power of racial prejudice when studying community dynamics in the hopes of establishing a more “balanced” neighborhood.

Churchill’s community-oriented planning, despite its social dimension, still reflected class biases. For one, it is likely that social proximity was at the root of Churchill’s involvement with Concern for Germantown. His son, Michael, attended Germantown Friends School.¹⁵⁷ And Churchill lived in nearby East Falls, in a modernist house of his own design, situated on a verdant lot along winding Apalogen Road. Established institutions, not necessarily the collective will of ordinary residents, were represented in Churchill’s “community planning.” It was the “interest of the institutions” that should guide actions to shape the future of Germantown, read the preliminary report, because “collectively they are the community.”¹⁵⁸ Churchill had previously stressed in lectures that good planning must look beyond the middle-class to account for, as he put it in 1948 at the University of Florida, “all and everybody.”¹⁵⁹ Concern for Germantown and Churchill attempted put this aspiration into practice, but they were unable to extricate themselves from the middle-class attitudes, institutions, and values that shaped their perception of Germantown’s challenges.

¹⁵⁷ C. Allen Keith. “Dateline...Delaware Valley U.S.A.: Harvard Editor.” *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (24 Dec. 1959).

¹⁵⁸ Churchill, et al., *A Preliminary Study*, 5.

¹⁵⁹ Henry S. Churchill. University of Florida Seminar: “The Architect and Community Planning,” 3 Dec. 1948. Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library; Churchill. “Lecture for the Central Pennsylvania Chapter of the AIA.”

Conclusion

It is possible that Churchill's community planning practices and beliefs would have continued to evolve. But illness brought his career to an early end, and he died in December of 1962. After his death, Churchill's prodigious life's work only earned him brief mentions in the newspapers of a few cities where he had worked at one time or another. However, despite Churchill's relative historical obscurity, an evaluation of his career provides contemporary observers insight into an individual who both followed and broke with then-dominant practices in planning.

Churchill was aware in the years before his death of the need for planning to change, as those affected by renewal increasingly made their voices heard. "There is no excuse whatever," he wrote to the preservationist Charles Peterson, "for the indiscriminate destruction that is perpetrated in the name of 'Urban Renewal.'"¹⁶⁰ He wrote to a colleague, an assistant editor for *Progressive Architecture*, upon the publication of Jane Jacobs's *The Death and Life of American Cities* that Jacobs, his friend, "says out loud what many of us have been saying under our bad breaths."¹⁶¹ Planners, he had written to Jacobs a month earlier, cannot be "re-educated." The latter agreed, reassuring Churchill: "You (emphasis Jacobs's) are a rare exception — but I knew that a long time ago and have learned a lot from you."¹⁶² Writing in a letter of support to the Committee to Save the West Village, a community group opposed to renewal in Jacobs's neighborhood, Churchill

¹⁶⁰ Henry S. Churchill. Letter to Charles E. Peterson, 8 Mar. 1962, Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347, Box 1. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

¹⁶¹ Henry S. Churchill. Letter to Ellen Perry.

¹⁶² Jane Jacobs. Letter to Henry S. Churchill, 15 Oct. 1961, Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347, Box 1. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

could not escape from a certain bias, however. Renewal was “authoritarian” and “steal[s]...helpless people’s possessions for the benefits of a few,” he hammered. In some cases, though, Churchill reasoned that “the sacrifices the slum-dweller is forced to make are probably justified by the overall social gains.”¹⁶³

Churchill began his planning career as a believer in planning’s capacity to solve a broad array of challenges across the whole of society, from political polarization to decent housing. By the end, he doubted the planning profession — especially renewal — could achieve almost anything positive of note. Churchill, looking back on his own career, was severely disappointed. A year before his death, he wrote disconsolately to Melvin Webber, editor of the *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, that “[i]t is too late now, but what I would have liked to have done is just one executed plan about which people would say ‘Isn’t it nice here.’ The rest is nonsense.”¹⁶⁴ Churchill believed it would take community action, not technocratic functionaries, to accomplish meaningful planning — to bring to fruition that one plan which pleased residents. In his own practice, however, the range of individuals he included in his conception of the community was extremely limited.

The case of Henry Stern Churchill embodies a dynamic that I believe still exists in planning today. Planning practitioners frequently find themselves caught between community engagement and confidence in their own expertise. The discipline’s lofty visions are counterbalanced by a lack of political power to bring

¹⁶³ Henry S. Churchill. Letter to Committee to Save the West Village, n.d., Henry S. Churchill. Letter to Jane Jacobs, 8 Mar. 1962, Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347, Box 1. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

¹⁶⁴ Henry S. Churchill. Letter to Melvin M. Webber, 20 Sept. 1961, Henry S. Churchill Papers, #2347, Box 1. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

about their realization. Understanding the longstanding nature of these tensions is vital. After all, it is from planning history that we find both instruction and caution as we work to shape a discipline and profession in continual evolution.

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