

The Rise, Fall, and Afterlife of the 1939 New York World's Fair:

Flushing Meadows as a "Living Site," 1936-1967



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Archive Abbreviations

AAA-HM.

Hildreth Meière papers, 1901-2011, bulk 1911-1960, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

AMD-WF.

Adam Matthew Digital, Marlborough, World's Fairs.

AA-HF.

Hugh Ferriss Architectural Drawings and Papers, 1906-1980, Avery Drawings & Archives, Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

AHA-LZWF.

Larry Zim World's Fair Collection, 1841-1988, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.

QBPL-NYWF.

New York World's Fair Collection, Archives at Queens Library, Queens Borough Public Library.

NYPL-NYWF.

New York World's Fair 1939 and 1940 Incorporated records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

NYPL-NYWF-DC.

New York World's Fair 1939 and 1940 Incorporated records. Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. Digital Collection.

NYPL-NYWF-64.

New York World's Fair 1964-1965 Corporation records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

NYPL-NYWF-DC-64.

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Image in the public domain.

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Map of the 1939 Season of the New York World's Fair

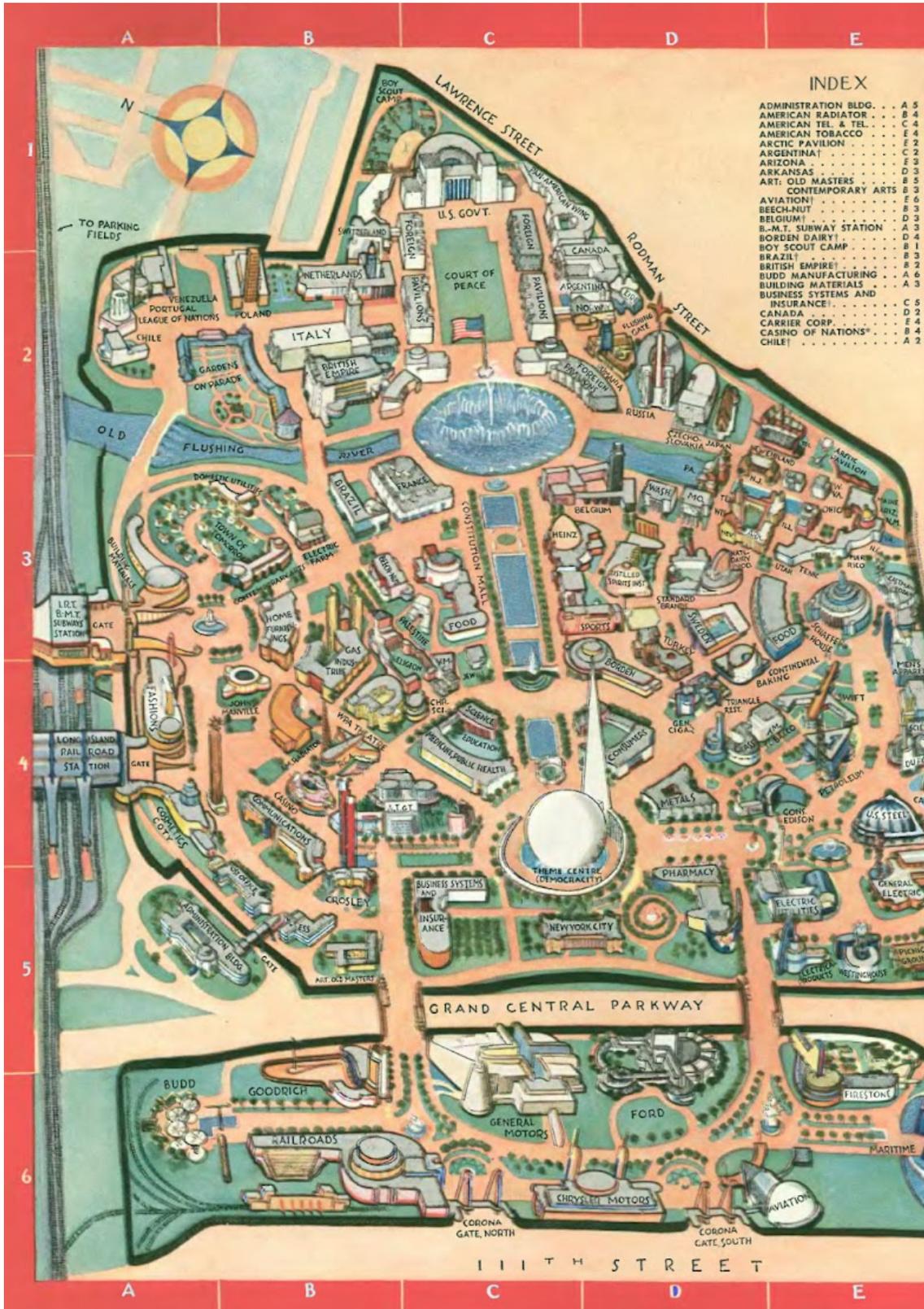




Figure 1. The New Yorker's Map of the 1939 Season of the 1939-1940 New York World's Fair. AHA-LZWF.

Introduction

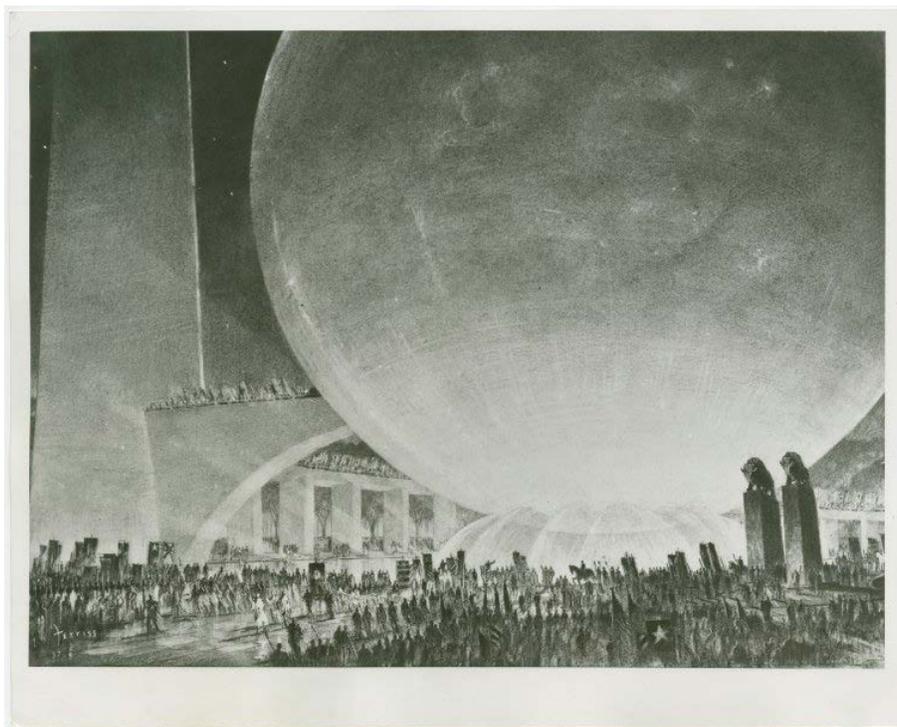


Figure 2. Hugh Ferriss sketch of the Trylon and Perisphere, undated.

On April 30, 1939, the 150th anniversary of President George Washington’s inauguration, the 1939 New York World’s Fair (the “Fair”), whose theme was *The World of Tomorrow*, celebrated its opening day. Fairgoers were welcomed into the fairgrounds at 11AM, when the International Carillon Symphony of Bells played “religious and patriotic airs” and the first designated event of the Fair took place: the dedication of the Temple of Religion where New York City Mayor Fiorello La Guardia and the Fair Corporation’s President Grover A. Whalen delivered speeches.¹ These two figures were influential in organizing the Fair and, in a contest that unfolded over a few decades, successfully embedded their vision and interests for the future of its site—Flushing Meadows in Queens—into the Fair’s structures, theme, and plan.

¹ News Release, no. 706D, Opening Day Program, Monday April 30, 1939, Box 2109, Folder 6, NYPL-NYWF.

Whalen represented the interests of the commercial actors involved in the Fair Corporation. Although it was a non-profit corporation, the Fair Corporation (the “Corporation”) was made up of New York bankers and financiers hoping to use the Fair to stimulate the development of the New York area following the Great Depression.² La Guardia had similar hopes for the Fair but, largely influenced by Parks Commissioner Robert Moses, leased Flushing Meadows to the Corporation so that, through hosting a World’s Fair, they could work towards the reclamation of the site from the Corona Dumps, a waste area full of marshland that F.S. Fitzgerald described as “a valley of ashes,”³ to a permanent park. For Moses, the true “World of Tomorrow” would begin when “old men and women [tell] their grandchildren what the Great Corona Dump looked like in the days of Fitzgerald...and how it all changed overnight.”⁴ In the context of the New Deal’s Public Works Administration (PWA)’s projects, and their aim to develop America’s landscape during the Roosevelt Administration to stimulate the economy, both local actors’ goals and interests seemed feasible.

Taking this local perspective to the 1939 New York World’s Fair—focusing on the power exerted by the Corporation and the City—I analyze the Fair through its site of Flushing Meadows. My methodology differs from the tendency in historiography on World’s Fairs to view them as part of a larger “medium” or “transnational series.”⁵ However, as a result of the 1939 Fair’s impressive neighboring fairs—the ideologically-charged 1937 Paris Exposition

² Robert H. Kargon et al., *World’s Fairs on the Eve of War: Science, Technology, & Modernity, 1937-1942* (Pittsburgh, Pa: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015), 60.

³ Scott F. Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (New York: Scribner, 1953), 23.

⁴ Robert Moses quoted in Oliva Mara, ‘City diplomacy’, 3.

⁵ See Pieter van Wesemael, *Architecture of Instruction and Delight: A Socio-Historical Analysis of World Exhibitions as a Didactic Phenomenon (1798-1851-1970)* (Rotterdam: Uitgeverij 010, 2001); Robert W. Rydell, *World of Fairs: The Century-of-Progress Expositions* (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Florian GroB, “From the New York Crystal Palace to the World of Tomorrow: World Fairs as a Transnational Series” in Joseph Leerssen and Eric Storm, eds., *World Fairs and the Global Moulding of National Identities: International Exhibitions as Cultural Platforms, 1851-1958*, National Cultivation of Culture, Volume 27 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2022).

Universelle and the hugely successful 1933-34 Chicago Century of Progress Exhibition—this approach has given less attention to the 1939 Fair, with the exception of historians interested in analyzing it as a “microcosm” of the world in the lead-up to the Second World War. For instance, David Ekbladh describes the 1939-1940 Fair as a “canvas” on which “various shades of internationalism, liberal and otherwise were splashed”⁶ and Duranti argues that the arrival of the Second World War transformed its utopian elements in 1939 into nostalgic ones in 1940.⁷

This thesis contends that the Fair was not a “microcosm” of the world but rather a site that reflected local visions for the World of Tomorrow, often in contrast to the realities of its context—it took place in the midst of the lasting effects of the Great Depression and, by September 1, 1939, during the Second World War. I argue that local actors emerge victorious over these international events by maintaining their 1930s vision and goals for the Fair over its two seasons and its other monumental plans—one for a United Nation’s World Capitol and another for the 1964-1965 New York World’s Fair. By exploring the allocation of space, design policies, and conflicts that emerge at Flushing Meadows over time. I focus on the context and transformation of its the Fair’s site, from the Corona Dumps in 1936 into a grand park in 1967 to present Flushing Meadows as a “living site,” as defined by cultural historian Warren Susman. He describes the concept of a “living” events, objects, or areas as a theoretical framework where “the inanimate become living things, men become artificial and nature human” and, as such, come to exert some agency in their transformation.⁸ It leads me to consider Flushing Meadows an additional actor in the Fair and, thus, investigate how the conflicting international interests that Ekbladh and Duranti identify were negotiated during the Fair and after it. Ultimately, I show

⁶ David Ekbladh, *Plowshares into Swords: Weaponized Knowledge, Liberal Order, and the League of Nations* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2022), 73.

⁷ Marco Duranti, ‘Utopia, Nostalgia and World War at the 1939-40 New York World’s Fair’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, no. 4 (October 2006): 663–83.

⁸ Warren Susman, *Culture and Commitment, 1929-1945*, *The American Culture* 8 (New York: G. Braziller, 1973), 13.

how the Fair Corporation embedded a vision of the future based on their own commercial interests for a “neutral” site with with to sell the Fair to its American audience.

A speech given by U.S. Commissioner General Edward J. Flynn⁹ five days before the Fair’s opening day, presents a source of contestation in this conflict:

In the community of nations there are various discordant kinds of architecture that cannot be remodeled overnight, there are weeds in every backyard that cannot easily be landscaped (...). (...) Leaving behind the weeds in our backyards, giving no space to the features in our national lives in which we take no pride, we, the representatives of sixty nations, have clustered our houses around our village green, the Court of Peace, and around our village pond, the Lagoon of Nations.¹⁰

Taking seriously Flynn’s reference to “remodeling,” “weeds,” “landscaping,”¹¹ this thesis uses Zygmunt Bauman’s metaphor of the “gardening state,” whereby an actor removes “weeds” that interfere with its “plan and vision of order and harmony,”¹² to introduce the role of certain international actors as “weeds” to the Corporation and City’s projections of power over the site. Although Bauman uses this metaphor to describe the violence of 20th century authoritarian states, it has been adapted to less extreme and more ambiguous contexts of urban planning.¹³ In particular, it urges us to consider the changes that occur in the 1940 Season of the Fair as examples of “enforcement planning” that act to affirm the power of local actors’ original plan. I employ the metaphor to analyze the changes that occur throughout the siterise, fall, and afterlife of the Fair.

Chapter One discusses the planning and design of the 1939 Season of the Fair. It establishes key differences between the Corporation’s land-based perception of power at the

⁹ Commissioner Generals served as ambassadors to the Fair.

¹⁰ Edward J. Flynn, U.S. Commissioner General, upon the occasion of a dinner given in honor of the Commissioners from foreign governments to the New York World’s Fair, 25 April 1939 in James J. Fortuna, ‘Fascism, National Socialism, and the 1939 New York World’s Fair’, *Fascism* 8, no. 2 (17 December 2019), 190-1.

¹¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).

¹² Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 57.

¹³ See Amin Y Kamete, ‘Of Good Plants and Useless Weeds: Planning as a Technology of the Gardening State’, *Planning Theory* 17, no. 2 (2018): 253–73.

Government Zone of the Fair compared to its European participants' use of "soft power," particularly Italy and the USSR. Analyzing site maps and architectural features, I argue that the Corporation exerted its power over these international actors in three ways: the successful reclamation of Flushing Meadows, the distribution of space at the Fair, and the construction restrictions imposed on foreign participants.

Chapter Two focuses on the 1940 Season of the Fair and the intrusion of World War Two into the site. Noting the physical changes to the Fair from 1939, I argue that the Corporation increased its projection of local power when confronted with external challenges to its vision of "order and harmony." I use Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's thinking in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* where the transformation of something is considered a substrate of *domination* as critical theory to support my point.¹⁴ Although I discuss local conflicts between the Corporation and the City to set the groundwork for Chapter Three, the focus is on the "victory" of local actors in their ability to adapt the site to international change.

Chapter Three hones in on Robert Moses as a continuous figure in the story of Flushing Meadows. It argues Moses proposed two other monumental projects at Flushing Meadows—a UN World Capitol and the 1964/1965 World's Fair—in an sustained attempt to complete the 1936 plan for a grand park. I argue that the vision of the future that characterized the 1939-1940 Fair continued exerting influence on the site and, in the process, expedited the development of the site and City infrastructure. The life of the site ended on June 3, 1967, when the site was handed over to the City and became another piece of New York City history.

Throughout my thesis, I analyze sources from archival research at the New York Public Library, the Queens Public Library, and the Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library and use the

¹⁴ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Seabury, 1972), 6.

broad definition of “permanent improvements” outlined in the 1936 Agreement of Lease of Flushing Meadows to guide my selection: “any improvement in the nature of a *building, planting, landscaping, utilities, roads, walls, shelters or other facilities*, built by and at the expense of the Corporation, the City, the State, or the Federal government, *planned and intended to outlive the period of the Fair.*”¹⁵ From this nuanced perspective of permanence and continuity, I conclude that the Fair was a vision of “order and harmony” that was drawn up, reinforced, and developed between 1936 and 1967. It serves as a testament to power of local actors in the story of the Fair as a “garden spot of [an] artificial city within a city” that, unbeknownst to the fairgoers that visited the Fair on April 30, 1939, would live on within the site.¹⁶

¹⁵ City of New York to Fair Corporation, Agreement of Lease, Box 8, Folder 9, NYPL-NYWF. Note: my italics.

¹⁶ Russel B. Porter, ‘President Opens Fair as a Symbol of Peace; Vast Spectacle of Color and World Progress Thrills Enthusiastic Crowds on the First Day,’ *New York Times*, May 1, 1939.

Chapter 1: The Planning and Design of the 1939 Season of the Fair



Figure 3. Promotional poster for 1939 Season, 1939.

On June 29, 1936, groundbreaking ceremonies for the New York World's Fair were held at the Corona Dumps, 1216 acres of Flushing Meadow's "primeval bog, spongy marshland, and the accumulated debris and ashes of many years" [Figure 4].¹⁷ The City of New York, its Park Department and the Corporation began what the Fair's official guidebook named the "single largest reclamation project ever undertaken in eastern United States."¹⁸ The language surrounding the transformation—with references to its scale and exceptionality—lays the foundation for this chapter's exploration of *how* Flushing Meadows became a "living site." The landscaping, distribution of space, and design regulations of the Fair show how the Corporation perceived the domination of land as the ultimate form of power. In doing so it allowed other actors—from local governments to foreign exhibitors—with different understandings of power to introduce their own ideas onto the site. It is in this context that the Fair becomes, first, a

¹⁷ What was the Site – Speakers Information, 1939, Box 919, Folder 1, NYFW-NYPL.

¹⁸ New York World's Fair Official Guidebook, 1939, Hagley Museum and Library, AMD-WF.

contested site that continued to be reimagined, developed, and landscaped throughout the midcentury.

1. Reclaiming the Flushing Meadows Site: From “Dump to Glory”

The transformation of Flushing Meadows officially began in 1936 when the City of New York purchased the Corona Dump for \$4,457,364 and designated it Flushing Meadows Park.¹⁹ Over the course of the previous 26 years, however, the site’s natural landscape had been radically changed: the Brooklyn Ash Disposal Company dumped 50,000,000 cubic feet of refuse material from Brooklyn and Manhattan onto the site, eliminating most of the original marshland and rugged landscape.²⁰ It serves a context to local power dynamics in between New York City’s boroughs that the Fair immediately challenged by being located in Queens, the borough with the “problem or virtue of great invisibility.”²¹ In the context of the Great Depression and the harsh landscapes across the US affecting livelihoods—the ‘Dust Bowl’ of the Midwest, for instance—it is no surprise that the City wanted to reclaim the area. It was an eyesore that even boasted of “Mount Corona,” a 90-foot-tall mountain of waste nicknamed by the locals for its prominence within the landscape [Figure 5].

¹⁹ What was the Site – Speakers Information, 1939, Box 919, Folder 1, NYFW-NYPL.

²⁰ What was the Site – Speakers Information, 1939, Box 919, Folder 1, NYFW-NYPL.

²¹ J. M. Tyree, ‘The United Nations of Queens: The Undiscovered Borough’, *The Antioch Review* 63, no. 4 (2005), 647.



Figure 4 (left). Photograph of Flushing Meadows from Flushing River pre-construction on the Fair, undated.



Figure 5 (right). Vintage silver gelatin print of Mount Corona, Brooklyn Ash Dump, undated.

In 1929, Mount Corona was leveled by order of Queens County and the New York City Department of Health to eradicate the natural marshland and make the surrounding areas habitable. Hildreth Meière, a Queens resident who grew up in the area, writes how the salt water marshes bred mosquitoes and how, for most of her childhood, she “shivered and burned with malaria.”²² As a result, Meière claimed that the site was “peculiarly my own” and connected the transformation of the site to her own²³—she was commissioned to paint the largest modernist mural at the Fair for, of all buildings, the Medicine and Public Health Building.²⁴ While Meière’s connection to the site is unique, many fairgoers also considered themselves “directly linked to the fair as if it were intended just for you.”²⁵ Drawing on their own struggles during the Depression to find an escape—entering the Fair Hattie Levine described in 1995 how “one [had] a feeling of being exalted, physically lifted for a moment.” From fairgoers’ recollections of the

²² Hildreth Meière, *Working for a World’s Fair*, Essays & Talks, c1939, Box 4, AAA-HM.

²³ Hildreth Meière, *Working for a World’s Fair*, Essays & Talks, c1939, Box 4, AAA-HM.

²⁴ Board of Design, Mural Painting, December 5, 1938, Box 2387, Folder 1, NYPL-NYWF.

²⁵ Hattie Levine quoted in David Hillel Gelernter, *1939, The Lost World of The Fair* (New York : Free Press, 1995), 60.

spiritual experience, the Corporation had fulfilled their 1938 advertisement promise to create a “Pilgrimage to Tomorrow.”²⁶

During the early promotional stage for the Fair, the Corporation highlighted how the site was exceptionally connected to the American landscape: the Triborough Bridge, opened in 1936, connected Queens to Manhattan and the Bronx; the Lincoln Tunnel, opened in 1937, connected New York to New Jersey; and LaGuardia Airport, opened in 1939, connected New York to the rest of the world [Figure 6]. Like a network of roots, the Fair grew out of monumental construction and reclamation projects of the New Deal’s PWA and, in a patriotic way, invited all Americans to feel uniquely connected to the Fair. As leading World’s Fair historian Robert Rydell explains, Roosevelt hoped the Fair would inspire feelings of nationalism during a time of national crisis.²⁷ The Corporation did more than advertise this nationalistic sentiment by enshrining in their extended theme a sense of trust in the ability of America’s institutions to lead the country into the future: to “Build the World of Tomorrow with the Tools of Today.”²⁸

²⁶ Underwood & Underwood, 1938. *Pilgrimage to tomorrow: 1939 New York World's Fair souvenir diary and photo album* (New York: Gemloid Corporation. Pictorial Collections Department), ADM-WF.

²⁷ Robert W. Rydell et al., eds., *Designing Tomorrow: America's World's Fairs of the 1930s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

²⁸ New York World's Fair Official Guidebook, 1939, Hagley Museum and Library, AMD-WF.



Figure 6. Promotional material for the Fair: “By Land, By Sea, By Air, All Roads Lead to New York World’s Fair 1939,” undated. NYPL-NYWF-DC.

This narrative of promise and exceptionality was not lost on Parks Commissioner Robert Moses who, credited with transforming the physical landscape of New York over his career in public works, also laid a personal claim to the Fair. He capitalized on the desire to host a fair in New York by convincing Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia to lease the Flushing Meadows to the Corporation in 1935.²⁹ The City would fund the reclamation work and in exchange the Corporation would lay the foundations for a permanent park in the Fair’s layout and practical features, with the City’s approval.³⁰ By lease negotiations in 1936, however, Moses wrote to the Corporation’s counsel that “the preparation and success of the Fair must rest on mutual good faith, good judgment and good will,”³¹ hinting at disagreements over the details of the dynamic between the Corporation and the City. As Meière describes, “you do not expect of a fancy

²⁹ Oliva Mara, ‘City diplomacy’, 3

³⁰ Robert Caro, *The Power Broker and the Fall of New York* (New York: Knopf, 1974), 362-367.

³¹ Robert Moses to Paul Windels, June 11, 1936, Box 1382, Folder 2, NYPL-NYWF.

costume what you wear for one evening the same qualities that you demand of a top-coat.”³²

While a Fair was a party, it was conceived with substantial “top-coat” features—those for a permanent park—for the first time in exposition history.

This dual purpose differentiated the Fair from others of its time. However, the use of reclamation and construction projects to stabilize nations was a feature of the rise of state-sponsored urban planning and design in the 1930s.³³ For instance, during the 1920s and 1930s Turkey’s Kemalist regime justified the partial destruction of the “dusky, dark, dangerous, noisy disease-ridden, and rickety Ottoman town” of Diyarbekir by using a “scientific” claim to improve its population’s health³⁴ and, in 1922, Italian dictator Benito Mussolini drained the Pontine Marshes to eliminate malaria in the region and create the *Piana delle Orme* complex, a Fair-like combination of educational structures and a theme park.³⁵ According to Frank Snowden, the reclamation project was a “rare chance to create a Fascist utopia unimpeded by previous existing structures, traditions, and vested interests.”³⁶ In this intersection between ideology, science (the “authoritative” claim to progress³⁷), and urban utopias we can begin to understand how Flushing Meadows’ transformation *into a tabula rasa* created an opportunity and capacity for power to be embedded into the site. It also explains why Benito Mussolini, in a meeting with Corporation President Grover A. Whalen, offered the following insight:

³² Hildreth Meière, *World’s Fair From the Artist’s Angle, Essays & Talks*, c1939, Box 4, AAA-HM.

³³ Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow: An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design in the Twentieth Century* (New York, NY, USA: Blackwell, 1988).

³⁴ Ugür Ümit Üngör, ‘Creative Destruction: Shaping a High-Modernist City in Interwar Turkey’, *Journal of Urban History* 39 (29 January 2012), 305. Following their project over Diyarberkir, the governorship wrote “Eternal contagious diseases of Diyarbekir such as malaria, typhoid, trachoma have decreased by 80%, so the new generation can be raised with a firmness that can give us confidence,” 307.

³⁵ Frank M. Snowden, *The Conquest of Malaria: Italy, 1900-1962* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 7.

³⁶ Frank M. Snowden, *The Conquest of Malaria: Italy, 1900-1962* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 12.

³⁷ Üngör, ‘Creative Destruction,’ 305.

He [Mussolini] asked, “What, for example, would [Italian participation at the Fair] accomplish?” “I continued, “The American people would like to know what fascism is.” Mussolini replied, “You want to know what fascism is? It is like your New Deal.”³⁸



Figure 7. Photograph of Benito Mussolini shoveling dirt in the Board of Design’s records, undated.³⁹

While Mussolini’s reclamation of space ideologically justified imperial expansion in Abyssinia in 1935, the reclamation of Flushing Meadows was an economic attempt to funnel money into New York following the Great Depression. Ironically, it justified an unprecedented amount of federal spending on a temporary structure. It also reflects how the 1930s boasted of a desire for ambitious planning from radically different versions of the “World of Tomorrow.” For the architectural critic and renowned champion of small-scale urban development, Lewis Mumford, a Fair as “story of this *planned* environment, this *planned* industry, this *planned* civilization” was only productive if it became a vehicle for popular education and social reform.⁴⁰ He warned that the Fair was “run by a chamber of commerce men” and, in their industrial and corporate interests, they would “make hell on earth and destroy our civilisation.”⁴¹ A key question arises from this contemporary concern: was the Fair truly “for” the American people or were its organizers staking a personal claim to the site as figures of local authority? In

³⁸ Grover Aloysius Whalen, *Mr. New York: The Autobiography of Grover A. Whalen* (New York: Putnam, 1955), 188.

³⁹ Board of Design, Photograph, unknown date, Box 1404, Folder 1, NYPL-NYWF.

⁴⁰ Lewis Mumford, address, December 11, 1935, Box 918, Folder 6, NYPL-NYWF.

⁴¹ Lewis Mumford, address, December 11, 1935, Box 918, Folder 6, NYPL-NYWF. Note: my italics.

a similar vein, was the park a project for the community or a nationalistic claim over the American landscape?

We can begin to answer these questions by considering the distribution of space and the scale of the Fair as measures of power over the site's most impressive features—its location in a metropolis and its impressive size. At least three times larger than Chicago's 1933 Century of Progress Exposition and almost five times larger than the 1937 International Exposition in Paris,⁴² the Flushing Meadows site contributed to a vision of a future that was appealing in its monumentality. A diagram dated June 4, 1936, presents this clearly. It acted as the framework for the Board of Design's work, outlining the boundary of the area leased to the Corporation and the site's areas "of good foundation conditions" confined to the northernmost section [Figure 8].⁴³ In the Board of Design's first scheme for development, the design for the Fair was confined to the areas of good foundation in accordance with the site's natural conditions [Figure 9].⁴⁴ By scheme nine, however, dated only a week after the first, the Board of Design planned outside the natural boundary imposed by the site in a metaphorical encroachment of the Corporation's power over the site [Figure 10].⁴⁵ Although it still outlined the areas of good foundation on the map, suggesting some concern over the ability of the site to accommodate such an ambitious plan, a presentation drawing created during the same time showed the Fair extending even further—to the southern tip of Flushing Meadows [Figure 11].

⁴² Fortuna, 'Fascism, National Socialism, and the 1939 New York World's Fair,' 191.

⁴³ Board of Design, New York World's Fair 1939 Diagram of Site, June 4, 1936, Box 2385, Folder 10, NYPL-NYWF.

⁴⁴ Board of Design, Scheme #1, June 16, 1936, Box 2385, Folder 10, NYPL-NYWF.

⁴⁵ Board of Design, Scheme #9, June 23, 1936, Box 2385, Folder 10, NYPL-NYWF.

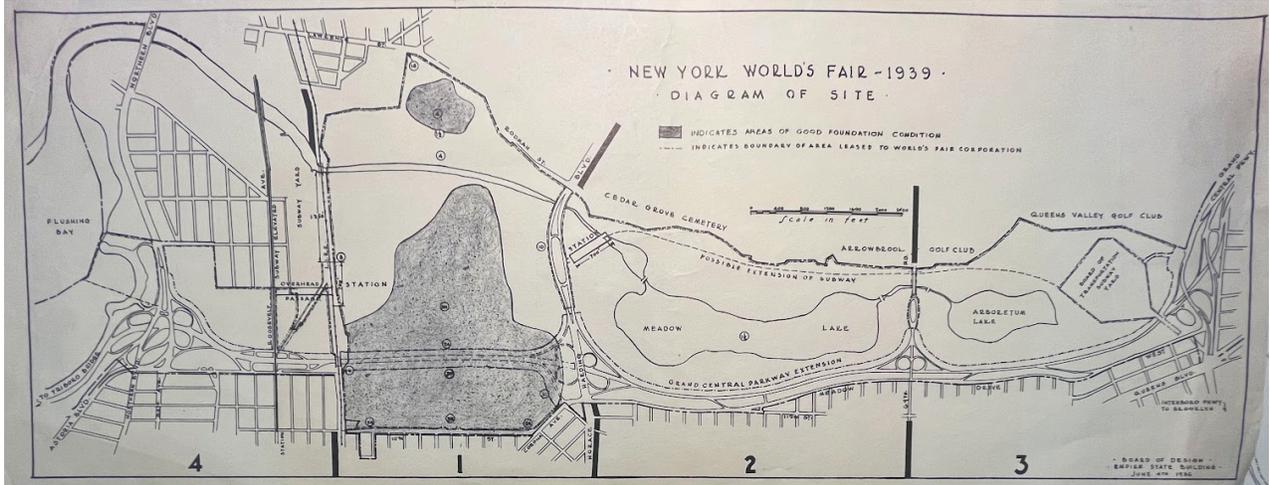


Figure 8. Diagram of Site with shaded areas indicating areas of good foundational character, June 4, 1936.

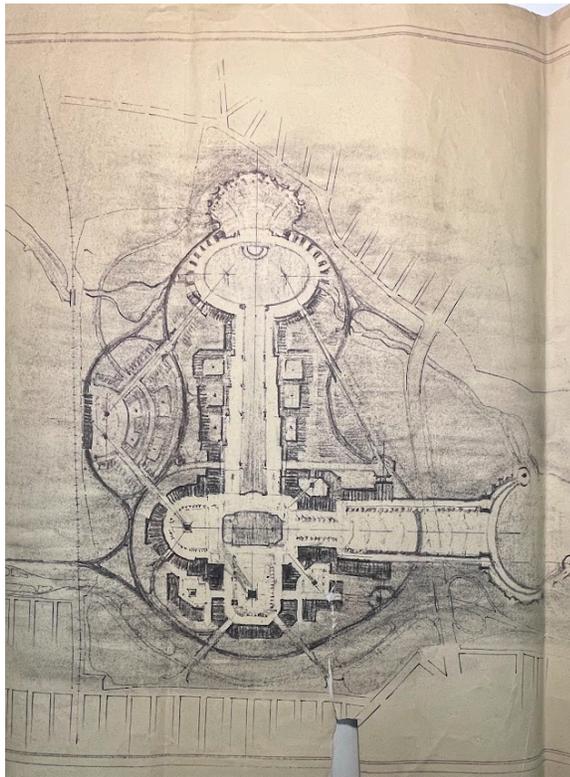


Figure 9 (left).
Figure 10 (right).



Scheme #1 for the design of the Fair, June 16, 1936.
Scheme #9 for the design of the Fair, June 23, 1936.



Figure 11. Presentation Drawing of the expanded area of the site along Meadow Lake / Fountain Lake, undated.

President Roosevelt claimed in his speech on the Fair's opening day that "no other form of Government has remained unchanged so long and seen, at the same time, any comparable expansion of population or of area."⁴⁶ In a similar tribute, the Corporation sought to portray the power of the Fair and, by extension, of the US, by showcasing the grandeur of its land and its control over it in the process of remaking, renaming and defining the natural conditions at Flushing Meadows. By the final plan for the Fair [See Figure 1], the site's main lakes were renamed from Meadow Lake to Fountain Lake and the boundary line followed only the one outlined in the lease. In a similar artificial refashioning of nature, a press release on the landscape of the site wrote how "not a tree or bush was left upon the site when the grading operations had been completed" and landscaping artists were hired to populate the 1,216 acres of land.⁴⁷ It was accompanied by an artists' rendering of the middle sector of the central 2,000-foot esplanade and described how it would be "lined with approximately 250 trees and hundreds of benches arranged alongside five lagoons which will contain five waterfalls and hundreds of fountains"

⁴⁶ Franklin D. Roosevelt, Opening of the New York World's Fair, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/209645>.

⁴⁷ Design Trends, Architectural Records, November 1938, online at <https://www.worldsfairphotos.com/nywf39/articles/design-trends.pdf>.

[Figure 12]. Over the course of the reclamation project, 7 million cubic yards of rubbish material were spread out to change the course of Flushing Creek, creating a new channel and two lakes in a radical altering of the framework of the site.⁴⁸ The monumentality of this project cannot be overstated and, thus, the reclamation of Flushing Meadows needs to be considered as a significant nationalistic project over nature.

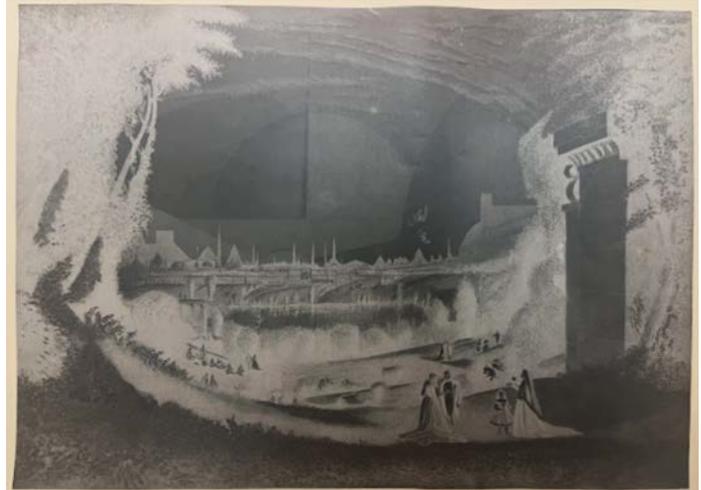


Figure 12 (left). Artist's Conception of the Middle Sector of Central Mall for release December 12, 1937.

Figure 13 (right). Negative of Presentation drawing, undated.

The Board of Design's presentation drawings further demonstrate the grandeur of the project. In particular, one drawing depicts a luscious park and silhouettes of buildings with medieval pirouettes eclipsed by an enormous Trylon and Perisphere where the Perisphere acts as a sun rising over the horizon [Figure 13]. It draws on a mythologization of the past and, in its surrounding foliage, creates an enticing invitation into the future—into a “New World” with abundant land and possibility. Pieter van Wasemael, in his analysis of the ‘planning’ that rose out of the 1930s, notes how for Roosevelt and New Dealers “if the spoiling of nature and the wastage of raw materials could be assailed (...) then the American Dream would again come

⁴⁸ What was the Site – Speakers Information, 1939, Box 919, Folder 1, NYFW-NYPL.

within reach.”⁴⁹ However, achieving this through a utopian reclamation project was viewed cynically by architect Ralph Walker who wrote that there was “some unreality” between the Fair and how “the average visitor (...) has neither the time nor the ability, nor the desire to absorb such a statement of Utopia.”⁵⁰ Mumford, disillusioned by the Corporation’s capitalistic interests, would soon abandon his hope for the Fair a tool for progress and stop steering the inventive and modernist ‘Fair of the Future Committee’⁵¹ and instead turned his attention to a return to the ‘liveable city’ which he argued had been oppressed by the metropolitan centralization of power, people, and culture.⁵²

Though built on “new” reclaimed land, the Fair could not distance itself entirely from the confrontations in its local context. However, by dictating the space of the site in its plans and designs, the Corporation gave itself the opportunity to create the ambitious and nationalistic project uncommon in liberal states. In the reclamation and development of Flushing Meadows, it already exercised substantial power.

2. Distributing Space at the Fair: The Site’s Size as a Source of Authority

Notions of space and nationalism overlapped in the distribution of space within the Government Zone, the section where foreign nations built their own pavilions or participated by occupying exhibition space in the Fair’s Hall of Nations. According to Fortuna, the marginal location of the Area served as a means to prevent the political posturing on display at the 1937 Paris International Exposition where the confrontation between the USSR and German pavilions came to dominate the image of the Fair and overshadow the Exposition’s own buildings [Figure

⁴⁹ Pieter van Wasemael, *Architecture of instruction and delight : a socio-historical analysis of world exhibitions as a didactic phenomenon (1798-1851-1970)*, (Rotterdam : Uitgeverij 010, 2001), 452.

⁵⁰ Ralph Walker, ‘Rationalizing Expositions: Let’s Try the Pragmatic Approach,’ Pencil Points, November 1936, Box 1944, Folder 6, NYFW-NYPL.

⁵¹ Fortuna, ‘Fascism, National Socialism, and the 1939 New York World’s Fair,’ 193.

⁵² Tyree, ‘The United Nations of Queens,’ 648.

14].⁵³ Although the Fair certainly tried to prevent foreign nations from dominating the Fair, according to the site's areas of good foundation [See Figure 8], the zone was given the second most favorable location at the fairgrounds which, though small, serves to show how the Corporation's primary aim was to develop the site to its monumental proportions—to allow foreign nations to build large, and heavy, pavilions.

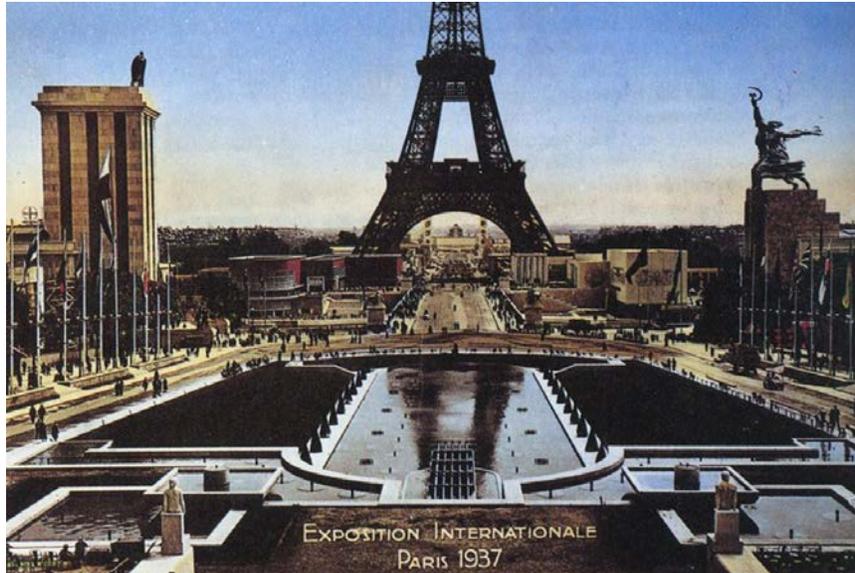


Figure 14. Nazi Germany's pavilion, left, and the USSR's pavilion, right, facing each other at the 1937 Paris International Exposition, postcard, c.1937.

Whalen, President of the Corporation, describes in his autobiography how the Corporation sought and got official approval from the Bureau International des Expositions (BIE) on May 5, 1937 following a session “quite like a meeting of the League of Nations of that day or the U.N. now [in 1955].”⁵⁴ The organization had been founded in 1928 when, in recognition of the growing scale and importance of international expositions, 92 nations signed the Convention Relating to International Expositions to “approve and monitor official expositions.”⁵⁵ As Paul Greenhalgh explains, it was not just an “ethical authority,” it also had the

⁵³ Fortuna, ‘Fascism, National Socialism, and the 1939 New York World’s Fair’, 193.

⁵⁴ Grover Aloysius Whalen, *Mr. New York: The Autobiography of Grover A. Whalen* (New York: Putnam, 1955), 177.

⁵⁵ Paul Greenhalgh, *Fair World: A History of World’s Fairs and Expositions, from London to Shanghai, 1851-2010* (Winterbourne, Berkshire, UK: Papadakis, 2011), 29.

power to influence attendance in denying official status and banning its member nations from participating at a fair.⁵⁶ It leveraged this power to impose a few notable restrictions: countries could not host exhibitions with foreign participants more than once every fifteen years and international expositions could not last more than six months.⁵⁷ The US was not a member by 1939 and had ignored the BIE's time restrictions by hosting the San Francisco International Exposition in 1933 and the New York World's Fair in 1939. Whalen, a self-proclaimed "internationally minded" person but, in reality, a businessman, traveled to Paris to appeal to the BIE for approval, which he got but in the more stringent designation of the two the BIE offered. In an executive order to the Director of Foreign Participation and the European Commissioners, Whalen stated that the Corporation would honor the BIE's requirement to offer free and equal space to its members: pavilions would be erected "in the Government Section for participating countries and that an allotment of free group space, for this purpose, not [to] exceed 10,000 square feet."⁵⁸

Similar to the US's general disregard for the BIE's time restrictions, just three months later the Board of Design drew up a plan for government participation that divided the 600,000 square foot space for foreign pavilions into 20,000 square foot lots [Figure 15].⁵⁹ The following day, on August 6, 1937, the USSR formally offered to "avail themselves of 90,000 square feet of free ground space" in addition to the allocated 10,000 square feet within the Foreign (covered) space⁶⁰ in what Whalen recalled Oumansky, the Ambassador Designate of the USSR pavilion, describing as a "most desirable location."⁶¹ While the Corporation effectively gave the USSR an

⁵⁶ Ibid, 32.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 28-29.

⁵⁸ Grover Whalen to Admiral Stanley, John Hartigan, and Albin Johnson, May 11, 1937, Box 295, Folder 5, NYPL-NYWF.

⁵⁹ Plan for Government Participation, August 5, 1937, Box 297, Folder 9, NYPL-NYWF.

⁶⁰ Grover Whalen to C. Oumansky, August 7, 1937, Box 1402, Folder 2, NYPL-NYWF. Note: in the final plan, the USSR occupied a 100,000 square foot lot and 5,000 square feet in the Hall of Nations.

⁶¹ Whalen, *Mr. New York*, 177.

disproportionately larger platform from which to display their strength, Whalen considered their participation as proof of America's overarching authority: "it's an interesting aside that we should have sold Stalin and Mussolini on contributing heavily—in cash—to underline the launching of the American Republic under the Constitution."⁶² The Fair's very own Exhibit Agreement, which gave the Corporation the right to "remove or terminate the license granted" in the "possession of space," gave them the final say in the distribution of land and, thus, an indirect say in displaying global power dynamics within the local site.⁶³ The USSR's participation also meant that "now every country would have to participate on a larger scale. No one was going to allow the Russians to overshadow them at Flushing."⁶⁴ By January, 1938, Italy, Germany, Great Britain, France and Belgium had committed to the USSR's distribution of space including 5,000 square feet in the Hall of Nations [Figure 16].⁶⁵ Great Britain was given the plot symmetrically opposite the USSR's, positioning international power clearly within the zone and setting up a display of power at the site [See Figure 15].⁶⁶

⁶² Whalen, *Mr. New York*, 201.

⁶³ Exhibit Agreement, 1939, Box 92, Folder 5, NYWF-NYPL.

⁶⁴ Whalen, *Mr. New York*, 180.

⁶⁵ President-Commissioner General to The Secretary of State, January 12, 1938, Box 296, Folder 9, NYPL-NYWF. Note: the other three were Great Britain, France and Belgium, Nazi Germany withdrew before construction began.

⁶⁶ Board of Design, Plan for Government Participation, August 5, 1937, Box 297, Folder 9, NYPL-NYWF..

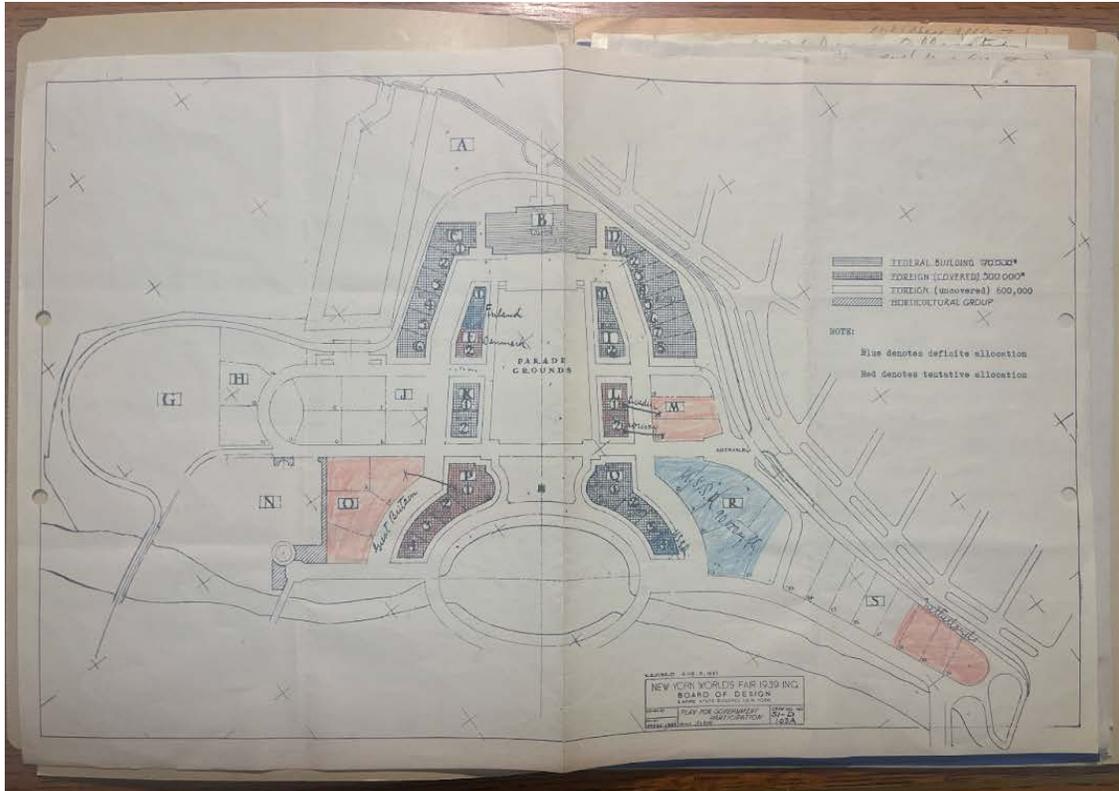


Figure 15. Plan for Government Participation, August 5, 1937. USSR original 90,000 square foot lot in light blue.

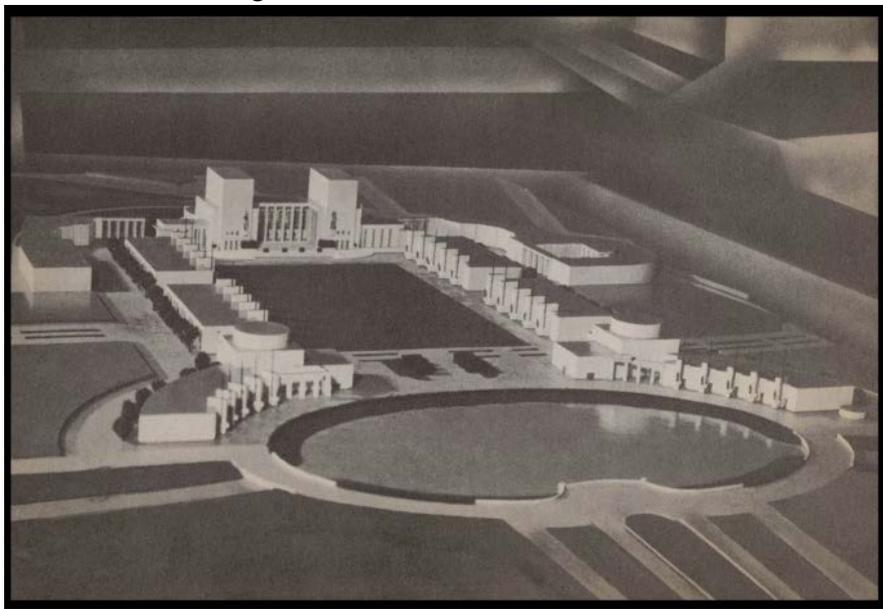


Figure 16. Model drawing of the Court of Peace and Hall of Nations.

The Corporation's objective to build Flushing Meadows as a nationalistic projection of US power over international exhibitors is further evidenced by the Fair's overall distribution of

space within the Government Area. It designated 500,000 square feet to the Corporation for a Hall of Nations, 70,000 square feet to the Federal government for their building and 600,000 square feet among Foreign actors.⁶⁷ Not only was half of the area taken up by American representation, but also it was positioned around the central area, which prevented the visitors entering from Constitution Mall from experiencing foreign participation without American supervision. Behind them stood the foreign pavilions designed by foreign nations. Although this was most likely an attempt to fill the large space, from a spatial perspective the Fair managed to avoid foreign participation from “framing” the visual imagery and memory of the Fair while further strategizing ways to “sell” participation to as many nations as possible. It represents what, according to American cultural geographer Wilbur Zelinsky, distinguishes American culture: the “irresistible urge to achieve – and proclaim – the quantifiably superlative – the biggest, highest, costliest, loudest or fastest, frequently without any dollar or cents justification.”⁶⁸

Rydell’s analysis of the Fair also applies to the Corporation’s designation of space in the Government Zone: “obscene is not quite the right word, but the discrepancies between the wealth and power, not to mention the streamlined glamor, manifest in exposition buildings and the grim economic conditions of the depression can still jar the senses a full half century after the New York World’s Fair closed its gates.”⁶⁹ The Corporation’s blatant disregard for the international mechanisms set up to prevent the opportunity for “obscene” fairs, is a good example of such discrepancy. Not only was the space allocated disproportionately compared to previous fairs, the

⁶⁷ Plan for Government Participation, August 5, 1937, Box 297, Folder 9, NYPL-NYWF.

⁶⁸ Wilbur Zelinsky, ‘The Cultural Geography of the United States’ (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1973), quoted in Greenhalgh, *Fair World*, 69.

⁶⁹ Rydell, *World of Fairs*, 118.

Corporation, and particularly Whalen, who “delighted” in giving fascist salutes in Italy,⁷⁰ favored nations that showcased power.⁷¹

By embedding notions of power into the site, the Corporation altered the experience of the Fair. In a letter dated May 14, 1939, one New Yorker addressed the extensive power Whalen displayed with *La Guardia*: “you have residing in New York City – a potential dictator, if given the chance. (...) I refer to Grover Whalen, “big boss” of World’s Fair who decrees that workers (...) salute him. (...) Certainly it is anti-democratic (...).”⁷² *La Guardia* sent an official communication to the Corporation stating that “saluting Hon. Grover Whalen by Fair employees is un-American”⁷³ and, in August 1939, the Corporation’s Board of Directors replaced Whalen, in function but not title, with New York banker Harvey Gibson. This decision, however, was made not because of Whalen’s authoritarian displays of power but because he had failed to turn a profit for the Corporation during the 1939 Season. It reflects where the Corporation’s interests lie and how the distribution of space, with the Corporation overrepresented in the *Government Zone*, had the same effect.

3. Dominating the Design of the Fair: The Board of Design and its Regulations

As this chapter has shown thus far, from 1935 to 1939 the Corporation acted on the principle that American power could be exercised in the Fair by drawing on the size and

⁷⁰ Robert Rydell, ‘Self Becomes Nation: Sol Bloom and America’s World Fairs, 1893–1939’ in Joseph Leerssen and Eric Storm, eds., *World Fairs and the Global Moulding of National Identities: International Exhibitions as Cultural Platforms, 1851-1958*, National Cultivation of Culture, Volume 27 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2022), 230.

⁷¹ Note on Whalen’s autobiography: This author acknowledges that the autobiography presents a biased vision of Whalen based on the outcomes of the Fair and the Second World War. He emphasizes how he was “international-minded” and writes that he returned Mussolini’s fascist salute ““somewhat wearily,” in contrast to historical analyses of his behavior (see footnote 111 above). He dismisses his role in somewhat amplifying authoritarian power at the Fair and contributing to a misguided vision of the future by arguing that the 1940 Season occurred because “like every business with something to sell, New York still needs advertising!” He makes no reference to the Fair’s financial problems. As such, I use Whalen’s autobiography as a primary source, an account of his personal interests as President of the Fair Corporation. Whalen, *Mr. New York*, 186; 303; 201.

⁷² Fiorello La Guardia to World’s Corporation, May 22, 1939, Box 764, Folder 3, NYPL-NYWF.

⁷³ Fiorello La Guardia to World’s Corporation, May 22, 1939, Box 764, Folder 3, NYPL-NYWF.

nationalistic reclamation of Flushing Meadows. William Withington's poem about the first International Exposition in New York in 1851 which took place two years after London's incredibly successful Great Exposition, offers some insight into the implicit competition that arose from hosting World's Fairs:

*The great crystal Palace which made such a show,
Was in London, in the old world, where millions did go,
But now in the new world their example we take,
In hopes that our yankees good profit will make.*⁷⁴

American, "new world," expositions tried to mirror the European, "old world," expositions and, in the process, make a profit. Although the legacy of international exhibitions as staples of liberal internationalism built on exclusion and racism—empire—⁷⁵were, by the 1930s, part of the past. Evaluating the 1939 Fair through this lens of conquest, territory, and authority allows us to identify how Flushing Meadows became a "living site." Its own features designated the sources of power at the Fair: size and location. In an attempt to mirror European expositions, the Corporation enforced a strict design policy through which it lost some control over the site.

The Board of Design only accepted foreign pavilions that adhered to its strict guidelines of "unity" without architectural "uniformity." various documents for exhibitors outlined how pavilions had to "conform to adjacent buildings,"⁷⁶ could "not exceed the height of the United States Government building" and could not cover "less than 50% nor more than 75% of the Government area assigned."⁷⁷ A *New York Sun* article titled "Paris Fair has Lesson for Us"

⁷⁴ "Crystal Palace and the World's Fair in New York" by William Withington, 1853, quoted in Florian Grob, 'From the New York Crystal Palace to the World of Tomorrow: World Fairs as a Transnational Series,' in Joseph Leerssen and Eric Storm, eds., *World Fairs and the Global Moulding of National Identities: International Exhibitions as Cultural Platforms, 1851-1958*, National Cultivation of Culture, Volume 27 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2022), 29

⁷⁵ Ekbladh, *Plowshares Into Swords*, 74.

⁷⁶ General Information for Foreign Participation in the New York World's Fair 1939, Box 297, Folder 4, NYWF-NYPL.

⁷⁷ General Information for Italian Participation in the New York World's Fair 1939, Box 314, Folder 12, NYWF-NYPL.

provides some explanation as to why this design standard was set up. According to reporter Sibilla Skidelsky, a Russian-born former art critic of the Washington Post educated at the Sorbonne in Paris, the “great error” of the Paris Fair was the choice of the exhibition's emplacement, “disrupting the very center of Paris,” and the failure to “achieve an interesting architectural unit.”⁷⁸ The article also highlighted a greater cultural dynamic: “lack of [architectural] coordination is the first criticism Europe throws at American skyscrapers.”⁷⁹ While the location of Flushing Meadows had allowed the Corporation to address the first error, it now turned to the second in a similar way. Withington describes the American response to the London Exposition—to meet or, preferably, outshine the standard Europe set in 1930s exposition culture. The architects of the Trylon and Perisphere, the Fair’s central monumental structures, seemed to be directly referencing this European criticism by calling American architects to abandon the childish “humility” in a Corporation-disseminated article *The Architect’s Story*.⁸⁰ They took a strong stance against European architects, arguing that while they only “theorized and wrote books about architecture,” New York architects “built [New York].”⁸¹

Amendment 22 of the Exhibition Agreement was the Corporation’s most authoritative clause, granting them the “sole right” to censor all projects they considered “obscene, lewd, vulgar, or offensive to good taste.”⁸² In other words, the Corporation defined what “good taste” was at the Fair and, in this claim, gave its Board of Design the opportunity to show exactly what American culture and architecture was and define the effect it could have on the Corporation’s future in their American-centered “World of Tomorrow.” Within the Government Zone, this materialized in the semi-classical Court of Peace with modernist features. It was a combination

⁷⁸ Sibilla Skidelsky, ‘Paris Fair Has Lessons for Us,’ New York Sun, November 6, 1937, Box 2164, Folder 2.

⁷⁹ Sibilla Skidelsky, ‘Paris Fair Has Lessons for Us,’ New York Sun, November 6, 1937, Box 2164, Folder 2.

⁸⁰ W.K. Harrison and J.A. Foulhoux, ‘The Architect’s Story,’ News Release no. 94-B, March 16, 1937, Box 1944, Folder 1, NYWF-NYPL.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Exhibit Agreement, 1939, Box 92, Folder 5, NYWF-NYPL.

meant to draw on American values with classicism carrying connotations of democracy and republicanism and modernism showing the desire to facilitate social harmony and progress [Figures 17].⁸³ However, by straying from the diversity in architecture that made New York stand out, the Board of Design's strict architectural guidelines backfired. They created exactly what Mumford had opposed in his proposal for a modernist Fair: a Government Zone that resembled a "Parthenon on a Flushing Swamp."⁸⁴



Figure 17. The Federal Building at the Court of Peace, 1940.

⁸³ Eric Storm, 'The Transnational Construction of National Identities: A Classification of National Pavilions at World Fairs' in Leerssen and Storm, *World Fairs and the Global Moulding of National Identities*, 60.

⁸⁴ Fortuna, 'Fascism, National Socialism, and the 1939 New York World's Fair,' 193.



Figure 18 (left).
Figure 19 (right).

USSR pavilion, 1939, NYPL-NYWF-DC.
 Italian pavilion, 1939, NYPL-NYWF-DC.

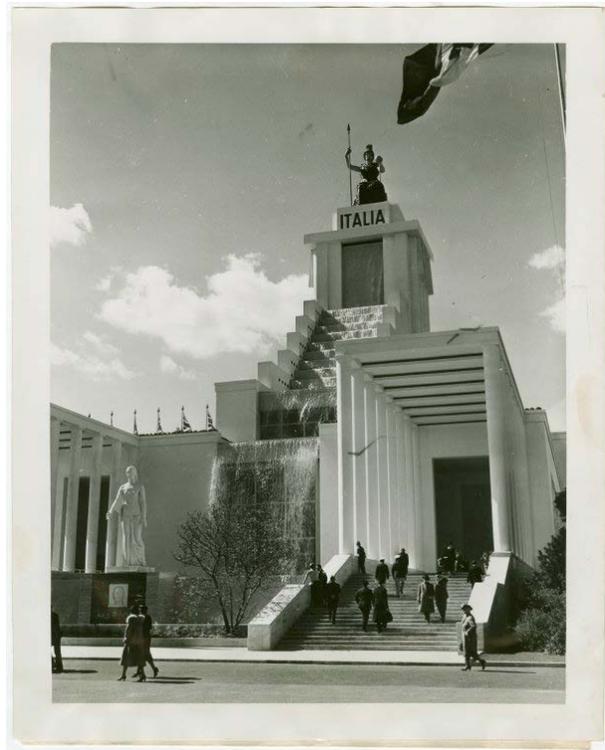


Figure 20. Newspaper clipping of Administration Building for the Rome Fair of 1941.

Eric Storm argues that the “power, solidity and permanence”⁸⁵ that classicism gave to monumental buildings suited the purposes of empires and dictatorial or totalitarian regimes best, referencing Albert Speer’s pavilion for Nazi Germany at the 1937 Paris International Exposition

⁸⁵ Storm ‘The Transnational Construction of National Identities’, 60.

[See Figure 14]. Similarly, by authorizing this semi-classical style as a “new” American style, the Fair unknowingly offered the Italian and Soviet architects their desired style for propagandistic pavilions [Figures 18 and 19]. For the Corporation, however, it visually affirmed their vision for “order and harmony.” As one reporter wrote in the New York Sun of his visit to the Fair, “there is nothing wrong. Smoothness and beauty are the dominant notes.”⁸⁶ Something, unfortunately, was wrong. The homogeneity that emerged in the Government Zone, excluding pavilions such as the Japanese pavilion that were in their own nationalistic architectural styles, projected a misleading image of peace and cooperation, blinding many Fairgoers to the fast approaching reality of a World War. The architectural similarities between the US’s Federal Building and the Administration Building to be built at the Rome Fair of 1941 are also undeniable and offer a sense of uneasiness for the misguided experience of the future presented at the Government Zone. The Italian Commissioner seemed to think the same when he sent the Board of Design a newspaper clipping of the building with the note “I believe the photograph will be of interest to you” [Figure 20].⁸⁷

It is interesting to note how one of the only references to an “anxiety” over uniformity in the Court of Peace comes from a letter about statues. In a letter dated April 11, 1939, only 19 days before the opening day of the 1939 season from Max Dunning to Consulting Engineer, Frederick Zurmuhlen, Dunning demanded on behalf of members in the Board of Design that certain foreign sculptures be removed from the exterior of pavilions.⁸⁸ He explains how the “architectural dignity inherent in the vast size of the Court of Peace” needed to be maintained, pointing out that the Italian statue’s bright gold leaf, Norway’s statue’s natural lead and Turkey’s

⁸⁶ New York Sun quoted in ‘Degraded Utopias,’ Voice Art Special, Fall 1989, Container 864-30, QBPL-NYWF.

⁸⁷ Arthur Constantino to S.F. Voorhees, December 16, 1937, Box 314, Folder 14, NYWF-NYPL.

⁸⁸ N. Max Dunning to Letter Frederick H. Zurmuhlen, 16 April, 1939, Box 295, Folder Folder 16, NYWF-NYPL.

bronze figure for being “out of harmony in scale and color.”⁸⁹ Not only does this introduce this source of anxiety for the first time in the planning of the Fair, it establishes how it was a symptom of the demand for power the Corporation justified in the “vast size” of the Court of Peace. The site’s significance in the Fair becomes increasingly clear: it established that power could be exercised from its size and location but, also through control of its natural features, for example with a strict architectural policy, the Corporation struggled to maintain control over this resource.

Additionally, it urges us to consider “accompanying” design elements seriously as insight into the “cracks” in the Corporations’ applauded design policy. The Fair maintained that sculptural figures could not be “of such character, size or height, as to compete with the statue of George Washington”⁹⁰ but did not impose a height restriction on statues on top of buildings, the USSR committee exploited this loophole by placing their statue of “Joe the Worker” on a marble edifice [See Figure 18]. It could be seen across the Fairground and became, as one fairgoer references, an object of admiration that claimed ownership over the Fair: “We Americans have admired the buildings representing the USSR dominated as they and as all of the “World’s Fair” buildings are by the majestic figure topping the Soviet Pavilion.”⁹¹ In a powerful reference to the “soft power” of culture, the fairgoer added “We have labored to maintain a broad minded approach to the ideology of this great government group.”⁹² It reflected a similar experience at the 1937 Paris International Fair where Amédée Ozenfant explained how young people pointed to the “monstrous German pavilion” and said “Smashing! You can see those people have got a Chief! (...) Why can’t we do the same? What are we waiting for?”⁹³ Building off of the

⁸⁹ N. Max Dunning to Letter Frederick H. Zurmuhlen, 16 April, 1939, Box 295, Folder Folder 16, NYWF-NYPL.

⁹⁰ Herbert Brownell Jr. to JC Holmes, November 23, 1937, Box 1402, Folder 1, NYPL-NYWF.

⁹¹ Herbert Brownell Jr. to JC Holmes, November 23, 1937, Box 1402, Folder 1, NYPL-NYWF.

⁹² Cecil E. Miller to Grover Whalen, November 30, 1939, Box 763, Folder 17, NYPL-NYWF.

⁹³ Amédée Ozenfant, ‘Notes of a Tourist at the Exhibition,’ in Dawn Ades et al., eds., *Art and Power: Europe Under the Dictators, 1930-45* (London [England]: Thames and Hudson in association with Hayward Gallery, 1995).

harmonious vision the pavilion offered against the landscape of the Fair's architecture in the Government Zone, the official narrative of "Joe's" program as that of the US's forefathers "the pursuit of happiness,"⁹⁴ likely offered a comforting feeling of conformity that strengthened their trust in the American government and its ability to lead the way into the future. After all, the Federal Building stood at the helm of the Court of Peace. The Italian commission bypassed the restriction against historical reproductions in architecture in their statue of the Goddess Roma, the original of which stands on Capitoline Hill, connecting the Fascist regime to Ancient Rome as was common in their propaganda.⁹⁵

Due to their size, colorfulness and symbolic role, flags were also significant in disrupting the strict design policy of the Fair. One fairgoer sent a complaint claiming that the "red" (Soviet) flag was flying higher than the American flag."⁹⁶ While she received the response that "the American Flag is on a standard fifty feet higher than the flag of any foreign country at the Fair,"⁹⁷ the *perception* of the higher flag reflects how, despite the Fair's restrictions, these accompanying features were altering the experience of the Fair. For historian James Gilbert, whose analysis of the 1903 St. Louis' exposition challenged the established scholarly position by claiming the experience of the Fair should dictate its history, understanding World's Fairs requires thinking "more generally about living in a world of unamplified sound."⁹⁸ Looking at these accompanying features outside the Corporation's design policy is crucial in challenging the power of the Corporation's narrative of harmony and order in the 1939 Season.

⁹⁴ Constantine Oumansky speech for news release May 17, 1939, Box 2155, Folder 30, NYPL-NYWF.

⁹⁵ See Gregory Milano, 'Past-Modernism, or the Cultural Logic of High Fascism: Toward an Architecture of Italian Difference, 1936–1942', *Critical Historical Studies* 10, no. 1 (1 March 2023): 43–71.

⁹⁶ Ruby Charles to the Grover Whalen, May 7, 1939, Box 764, Folder 3, NYPL-NYWF.

⁹⁷ Secretary to the President to Ruby Charles, June 3 1939, Box 764, Folder 3, NYPL-NYWF.

⁹⁸ James Burkhart Gilbert, *Whose Fair? Experience, Memory, and the History of the Great St. Louis Exposition*, electronic resource (Chicago ; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 8.

In fact, when we consider the landscape of Fair buildings—characterized by “the stamp of functionalism, austere in design, without windows,”⁹⁹ and primarily white—flags stood out and could claim ownership over their smooth and beautiful surroundings in a similar way “Joe the Worker” did [Figure 21]. The Corporation’s Sculpture Location Diagram shows how statues commissioned by the Corporation were evenly distributed everywhere around the Fair, except in the Government Zone, establishing their role in acting as territorial markers of the Corporation’s power was strongest [Figure 22].¹⁰⁰

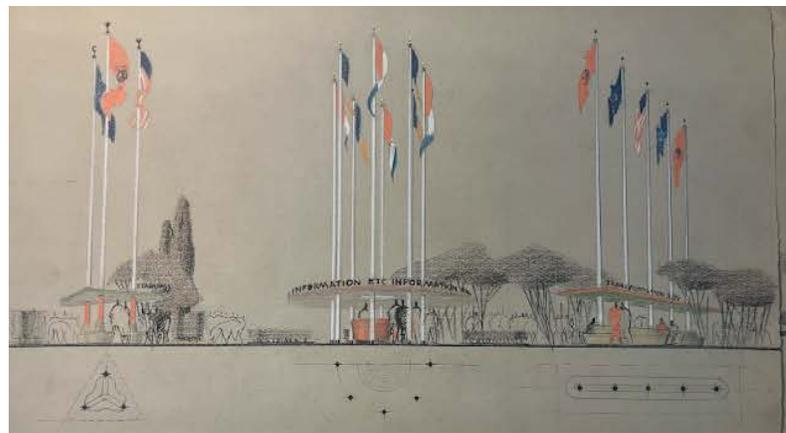


Figure 21. Drawing of concession stands with different flag combinations. The three governmental flags on the left (US, State of New York, City of New York), five 1939 Fair flags in the center and five foreign flags on the right, undated.

⁹⁹ George Rehm, Architecture, *Foreign Service Journal*, March 1938, Box 1881, Folder 1, NYPL-NYWF.

¹⁰⁰ Board of Design, Sculpture Location Diagram, undated, Box 2387, Folder 1, NYPL-NYWF.

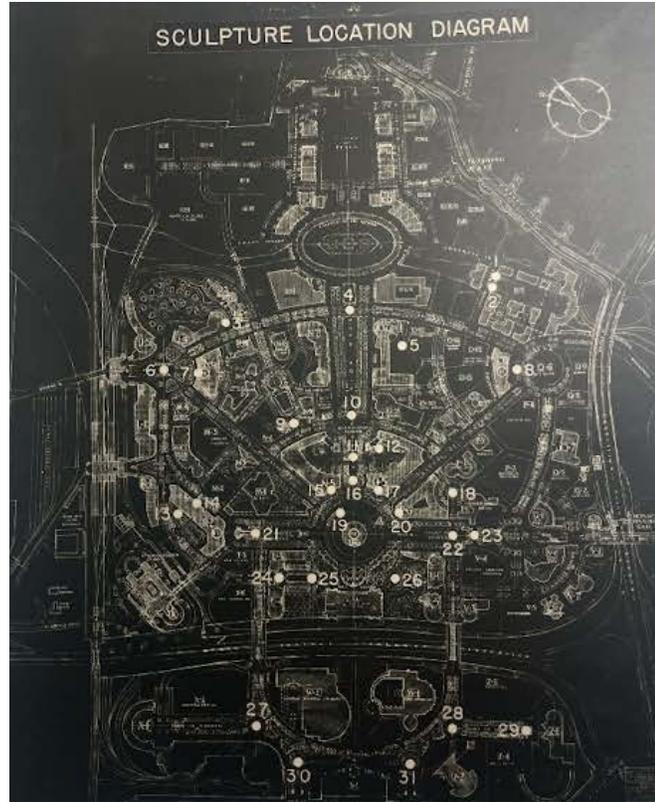


Figure 22. Sculpture Location Diagram.¹⁰¹

The German American Bund, a pro-Nazi organization, rally at Madison Square Garden on February 20, 1939, provides a local context to these displays of foreign, authoritarian power at Flushing Meadows. The rally was centered around George Washington or, as the Bund considered him, America's first Nazi¹⁰² [Figure 23] and took place just two months before the Fair celebrated its opening day, also centered around George Washington and scheduled to include a dedication of a 65-foot statue of him at 4:30 PM [Figure 24].¹⁰³ While these two organizations were in no way aligned, the use of the same symbol for different purposes show how within the US, and more specifically, within New York, there were conflicting versions of the past that were spilling over into the Fair. Mayor LaGuardia, who was half-Jewish and

¹⁰¹ Board of Design, Sculpture Location Diagram, undated, Box 2387, Folder 1, NYPL-NYWF.

¹⁰² Arnie Bernstein, *Swastika Nation: Fritz Kuhn and the Rise and Fall of the German-American Bund*, 1st edition (New York, N.Y: St. Martin's Press, 2013), 2.

¹⁰³ News Release, no. 706D, Opening Day Program, Monday April 30, 1939, Box 2109, Folder 6, NYPL-NYWF.

outspokenly against Hitler, chose not to interfere in the rally despite the protests against the event claiming that "... [I]f we are for free speech we have to be for free speech for everybody and that includes Nazis."¹⁰⁴ It represented a moment where American Constitutional values did not reflect ordinary Americans' opinions and, similarly, the Corporation's design policies did not reflect American culture or architectural style. The architects of the Trylon and Perisphere stated that they found inspiration for the Perisphere in the "domes of Venice" and an architectural magazine compared the main esplanade of the Fair, Constitution Mall, to Versailles, presenting a claim to beauty within European design.¹⁰⁵ As political scientist Murray Edelman explains, it represents how symbols "focus on a narrow set of socially reinforced perceptions [to] help resolve (...) anxiety" but "take on quite disparate meanings for different people and diverse social situations."¹⁰⁶

The 1939 season of the World's Fair closed on October 31, 1939 and reopened for a second season on May 11, 1940. Turning now to look at how the meaning of the Fair changed when the Second World War arrived at Flushing Meadows, it is important to keep Edelman's perspective in mind. The "symbol" of the Fair was not just its Trylon and Perisphere, or its statue of George Washington, the whole event acted to mirror local and, in the Government Zone, US power. As fairgoer Hattie Levine describes:

*In those thousand acres (...) of marshland, [the 1939 Season] laid out in hugely compressed pressurized form of exactly what this country was, just what we'd managed to accomplish, (...) just what we had to show for ourselves after all.*¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Fiorello LaGuardia quoted in Bernstein, *Swastika Nation*, 178.

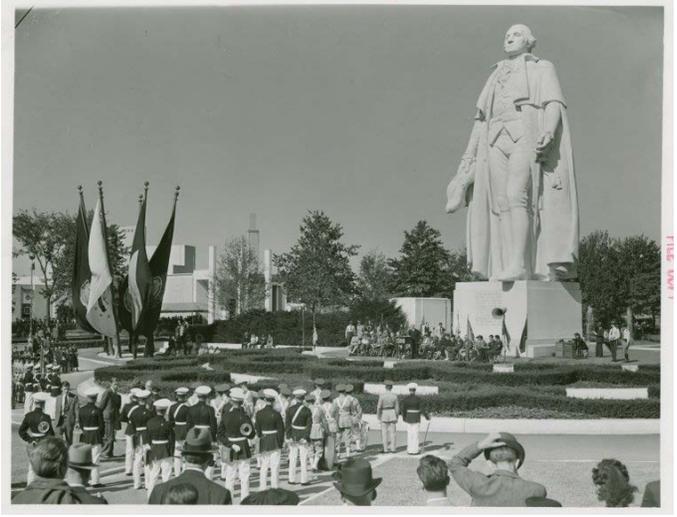
¹⁰⁵ W.K. Harrison and J.A. Foulhoux, 'The Architect's Story,' News Release no. 94-B, March 16, 1937, Box 1944, Folder 1, NYWF-NYPL.

¹⁰⁶ Murray Edelman, *From Art to Politics: How Artistic Creations Shape Political Conceptions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 74.

¹⁰⁷ Hattie Levine quoted in Gelernter, *1939, The Lost World of The Fair*, 47.



Figure 23 (left).
Figure 24 (right).



Stage of the Pro American Rally, February 20, 1939.
65-foot statue of George Washington at the Fair, undated.

Chapter 2: The Destruction of the 1940 Season of the Fair



Figure 25. Poster for the 1940 Season depicting Fair mascot, Elmer.

When Germany and the USSR invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, marking the beginning of WWII, multiple pavilions adapted their exhibitions in response. The Corporation reacted to the war most significantly during the 1940 Season, changing the Fair theme to “For Peace and Freedom,” its symbol from the Tylon and Perisphere to Elmer, a “living symbol” of the ‘typical American fairgoer’ [Figure 25], and negotiated new Exhibit Agreements with foreign nations.¹⁰⁸ In this chapter, I look at how the Corporation adapted the Fair in the context of the Second World War and apply the critical theory in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* to evaluate their success in maintaining the power they held through the reclamation and transformation of Flushing Meadows into a World’s Fair. Horkheimer and Adorno describe how, during this Age

¹⁰⁸ Duranti, ‘Utopia, Nostalgia and World War at the 1939-40 New York World’s Fair,’ 675.

of Science,¹⁰⁹ the “man of science” understood things—concepts, world events, objects—to the extent that he can “make” them.¹¹⁰ They argue that in the *transformation* of something by this “man of science,” the essence of it is revealed “as always the same, a substrate of *domination*.”¹¹¹ Analyzing the Corporation’s “chamber of commerce men” as the American versions of this modern man and their transformation of the experience of Flushing Meadows, I argue that the Corporation continued to exert power over the Fair and, thus, embed their vision of the future—with the United States at its center—into Flushing Meadows. In this regard, the power of international actors and events in the 1939 Season became neutralized or “Americanized” in 1940.

1. The War’s Intrusion into the Site of the Fair

Edward J. Orth, in his article “Recollections of a World’s Fair Buff,” noted how around the time of the reopening of the Fair, Hitler opened his Blitzkrieg of the Low Countries “relegating the Fair news to secondary status.”¹¹² News of the Fair and the World War intersect, however, in the “frequent” illustrations of the demolition process of the USSR pavilion after the Soviet’s withdrew from the Fair, leaving its 100,000 square foot lot and 5,000 square foot space in the Hall of Nations empty. It depicted how the war was altering the Fair’s landscape and, simultaneously, how the Fair could capitalize on the free shape to fulfill the promise of another 1938 advertising line: while the nation’s of the world’s “plans call for destruction—the Fair’s plans call for construction” [Figures 26 and 27].¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ It signaled the replacement of the Age of Enlightenment which “understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters,” Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 1.

¹¹⁰ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 6.

¹¹¹ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 6.

¹¹² Edward J Orth, ‘Recollections of a World’s Fair Buff,’ c.1967, Container 846-30, QBPL-NYWF.

¹¹³ Underwood & Underwood, 1938. Pilgrimage to tomorrow: 1939 New York World's Fair souvenir diary and photo album (New York: Gemloid Corporation. Pictorial Collections Department), ADM-WF.

As a result of the USSR's withdrawal, the Corporation now had more free space to designate among the various actors in the Court of Peace. The space in the Hall of Nations was given to Poland [Figure 28],¹¹⁴ a victim of authoritarian aggression, and, instead of designating the former USSR lot a 'Relaxation Hall' as one fairgoer suggested¹¹⁵ or leaving the demolished remains as a reminder of the war across the Atlantic, the 100,000 square foot space was kept by the Corporation.¹¹⁶ It was turned into the American Common, a performance venue that referenced the Boston Common and was designed to "extol the virtues of American cultural pluralism."¹¹⁷ Given the significance of the "Joe the Worker" statue, which had been dismantled and shipped to Moscow in January 1940,¹¹⁸ it is symbolic that the American Common included a monumental flagpole, taking over from the USSR's statue in the role of presiding over the Government Zone¹¹⁹ [Figures 29 and 30]. The transformation of the lot was part of a powerful, but discrete, strategy by the Corporation in 1940 to entrench an American vision of internationalism within the site. Additionally, events similar to those held in the Court of Peace during the 1939 Season would now be held in the American Common or the New York City Building Plaza,¹²⁰ strengthening the site's local actors' association with peace.

¹¹⁴ Section of the Board of Design's 1940 Plan of Federal, Foreign and States Governments Participation, revised from February 17, 1938 and revised May 7, 1940, Box 1391, Folder 8, NYPL-NYWF.

¹¹⁵ A.M.K. Manhattan to Grover Whalen, undated, Box 763, Folder 17, NYPL-NYWF.

¹¹⁶ Section of the Board of Design's 1940 Plan of Federal, Foreign and States Governments Participation, revised from February 17, 1938 and revised May 7, 1940, Box 1391, Folder 8, NYPL-NYWF.

¹¹⁷ Robert W. Rydell, 'Selling the World of Tomorrow: New York's 1939 World's Fair', *The Journal of American History* 77, no. 3 (1990), 968

¹¹⁸ Whalen, *Mr. New York*,

¹¹⁹ Box 764, Folders 2-8, NYPL-NYWF.

¹²⁰ Chairman of the Board to Miss Pearce, August 7, 1940, Box 763, Folder 17, NYPL-NYWF.



Figure 26. Dismantling of the USSR pavilion, c.1939.



Figure 27. Construction of the bandshell of the American Common, c.1940.



Figure 28. Section of the Board of Design's 1940 Plan of Federal, Foreign and States Governments Participation, revised from February 17, 1938 and revised May 7, 1940.



Figure 29. Crowd in the Court of Peace with Joe the Worker statue in the background, April 30, 1939.

Figure 30. Sketch of the American Common, c.1940.

As a consequence, the League of Nations’ pavilion turned into a “sad reminder of its ineffectiveness.”¹²¹ In another disregard for the Corporation’s actions on international organizations, the Fair returned in 1940 in violation of the BIE’s six-month exposition regulation with the goal to make enough money to repay \$27 million worth of bonds due in 1941 at a 4% interest rate.¹²² It is not surprising then, that in a letter to LaGuardia fairgoer Mrs. William Dangaix accused the Corporation of attempting to profit off of “war hysteria.” She argued that the management was “afraid” that people would stay at home if they did not broadcast war news over their loudspeakers.¹²³ Given that the 1939 Season attracted less than half of the expected 60 million visitors,¹²⁴ the Fair attempted to capitalize on the new changes—the introduction of war into the site—in an increasingly desperate plea to increase attendance. However, it had also

¹²¹ Robert H. Kargon et al., *World’s Fairs on the Eve of War: Science, Technology, & Modernity, 1937-1942* (Pittsburgh, Pa: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015), 80.

¹²² Mara, ‘City Diplomacy,’ 4.

¹²³ Mrs William Dangaix Allen to Fiorello La Guardia, May 22, 1940, received by the Fair Corporation May 31, 1940, Box 763, Folder 18, NYPL-NYWF.

¹²⁴ Note on complaints: General criticisms were “1. Restaurant Prices, 2. Poor and inadequate entrances to parking facilities, parking field hard to find; 3. Lack of information on the part of the city police officers who direct persons incorrectly to parking spaces; 4. Admission charge too high, 5. Post prices more conspicuously outside of Perisphere,” Administrative Assistant Donovan, General Criticisms, May 15, 1939, Box 764, Folder 1, NYPL-NYWF.

decreased the Fair admission fee from 75 cents to the standard 50 cent fair fee following many complaints showing how the Corporation would take fairgoer's desires and complaints more seriously in 1940. For example, two weeks into the 1940 Season the Corporation canceled its war news broadcasts and Director of Information Katherine B. Gray responded to Mrs. William Dangaix explaining the cancellation. Interestingly, Gray also offered an insight into the Corporation's unofficial policy by responding to Dangaix's additional claim that the 1940 theme was out of touch with the American people who "still believe[d] in a future world from which war [would] be abolished" and did not want to see the Corporation "transform halls of peace into halls of horror:"¹²⁵

*"There are a few war exhibits at the Fair. (...) as a reflection of the times in which we live, completely omitting any mention of the present crisis would be as one-sided as if we were to have omitted some other important phase of modern-day living. The stress, however, (...) is on "Peace." Those visitors who do not wish to be reminded of the war – even as a matter of contrast or of education – need not even be aware of it."*¹²⁶

From this moment forward, the Corporation transformed the intense awareness of the war outside of Flushing Meadows into "unawareness" within its boundaries. They reflected the outdated but survival-mode strategy of what Ekbladh describes as the post-World War One "information order:" it "provided a picture of events on the ground" and "allowed for authority and power to be applied in the right places."¹²⁷ The policy worked: one fairgoer wrote that "a couple of hours of peace and freedom at 50 cents begins to look like quite a bargain"¹²⁸ and complaints plummeted in 1940.¹²⁹ It was a more discrete form of war profiteering and, in the

¹²⁵ Mrs William Dangaix Allen to Fiorello La Guardia, May 22, 1940, received by the Fair Corporation May 31, 1940, Box 763, Folder 18, NYPL-NYWF.

¹²⁶ Katherine B. Gray to Mrs. William Dangaix Allen, May 31, 1940, Box 763, Folder 18, NYPL-NYWF.

¹²⁷ Ekbladh, *Plowshares into Swords*, 9.

¹²⁸ W.A. Mausfield to Fair Corporation, May 27, 1940, Box 763, Folder 17.

¹²⁹ There were three folders for Criticisms (1940) in Boxes 763 and 764 and thirty two folders in Criticisms (1939) within Boxes 764-768, Public Relations division.

Dialectic of Enlightenment theoretical framework, another *transformation* of the Fair experience that reflected the Corporation's *domination* over Flushing Meadows—as a symbol.

The Corporation was so successful in implementing this policy and capitalizing on public desires that after the intrusion of violence into the Fair with the discovery of a bomb in the British Pavilion on July 4, 1940, a *New York Times*' article described how “most of the people who came to the Fair had no knowledge of the tragedy.”¹³⁰ It was the third bomb found in two weeks in New York and the deadliest, killing two detectives.¹³¹ Still, its headline read: “Crowd Unaware of Bomb Tragedy: Noise of the Explosion Taken as More of Fireworks That Had Been Heard All Day.” The *New York Times* detailed how the bomb created a “crater five feet wide and three feet deep” and blew off “every leaf and most of the bark” from the maple tree under which the bomb had been relocated.¹³² In the context of an architectural magazine's statement in 1938 that the Fair's trees would serve as the “living reminders” of the Fair, this description offers a sinister but necessary image of Flushing Meadows as a “living site.” The British Commissioner General said that “there was no thought of closing the pavilion” and, two days later, a second bomb was found with the note “When you open this, mail it to the address inside, Danke Schoen” that was not disclosed to the public.¹³³

This silence speaks volumes to the Corporation's focus on enforcing an experience of “Freedom and Peace,” rather than acknowledging the realities of the period. It is worth noting how this was a way for the Corporation to dictate a certain memory for the Fair to live on within

¹³⁰ ‘Crowd Unaware of Bomb Tragedy: Noise of the Explosion Taken as More of Fireworks That Had Been Heard All Day,’ *New York Times*, July 5, 1940.

¹³¹ ‘Bombing is Third Within Two Weeks in City; First Injured 9, Police Still Have No Clues,’ *New York Times*, July 5, 1940. Note: The other two were set off before the doors of a German commercial agency in the same building as the German Consulate General and outside the building that housed The Daily Worker, a newspaper published by the Communist Party USA.

¹³² ‘Crowd Unaware of Bomb Tragedy: Noise of the Explosion Taken as More of Fireworks That Had Been Heard All Day,’ *New York Times*, July 5, 1940.

¹³³ Bombing of British Pavilion report, July 4, 1940, Box 2091, Folder 6, NYPL-NYWF.

the site. In June 1940, the City joined the Corporation in this mission by working with the Japanese Government to turn its pavilion and gardens into a permanent feature of the future Park [Figure 31].¹³⁴ The Japanese pavilion was considered a tranquil, orderly and beautiful representation of foreign participation at the Fair. As art historian Kendall Brown notes, Japanese gardens were the most-visited and best-publicized examples of Japan at International Expositions and led to associations of Japan as “natural and proper.”¹³⁵ By July 10, 1940, the City had accepted Japanese architect Yasuo Matsui’s proposal and was prepared to discuss expanding the pavilion to include a “small ceremonial tea house” [Figure 32].¹³⁶ It represented a moment when the Parks Department was not acting as a boundary to the Corporation’s ambitions, but working with them to transform Flushing Meadows from “Dump to Glory.”

The beauty of the Japanese lot also “neutralized” its government’s influence over the site, affirming how the Corporation’s vision of “order and harmony” for Flushing Meadows was embedded into the site by 1940. Brown argues that there is a correlation between the Japanese displays at American International expositions, from the Louisiana Purchase Exposition (1904) to the New York and San Francisco fairs in 1939 and 1940, and an American reluctance to place embargoes on Japan despite their displays of war in Asia during these periods.¹³⁷ A Japanese progress report dated June 1, 1938, supports this claim by explicitly stating that participation in the New York and San Francisco fairs was “crucial” to “alleviate the negative feelings of the Americans towards Japan.”¹³⁸ While, the attack on Pearl Harbor derailed the Corporation and City’s plan and led to the prompt demolition of the pavilion, fairgoer Edward Orth offers the

¹³⁴ Robert Moses to Rexford G. Tugwell, June 18, 1940, Box 276, Folder 8.

¹³⁵ Kendall H. Brown, ‘Fair Japan: Japanese Gardens at American World’s Fairs, 1876–1940’, *SiteLINES: A Journal of Place* 4, no. 1 (2008), 15.

¹³⁶ Yasuo Matsui to Allyn R. Jennings, July 11, 1940, Box 276, Folder 8, NYPL-NYWF.

¹³⁷ Brown, ‘Fair Japan: Japanese Gardens at American World’s Fairs, 1876–1940’, 16.

¹³⁸ Akiko Takenaka, ‘The Construction of a War-Time National Identity : The Japanese Pavilion at New York’s World’s Fair, 1939-40’ (Thesis (M.S.), Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Department of Architecture., 1997), 66.

most valuable conclusion to the role of the Japanese pavilion at Flushing Meadows: around 1967 he wrote that the people who demolished the Japanese pavilion “should have known better.”¹³⁹ It highlights just how influential beauty and the design of the Fair was to the experience of the site and, in the Corporation’s power over it in 1940, how local actors neutralized the perceived threat of “soft power” from foreign actors at Flushing Meadows and influenced some fairgoers’ recollections of the Fair.

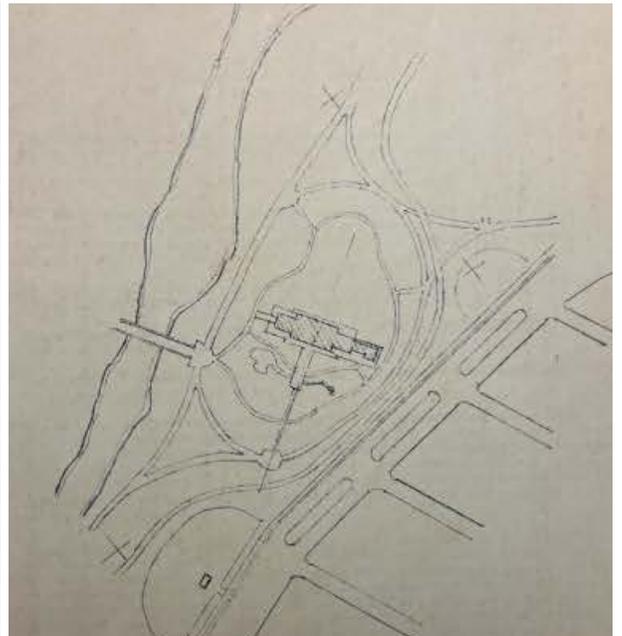


Figure 31 (left). Exterior of the Japanese Pavilion.

Figure 32 (right). Site plan for the Japanese pavilion and its extended garden and pathways, July 10, 1940.

2. Flushing Meadows as a ‘Battleground’: The Corporation Versus the City

Drawing on Horkheimer and Adorno’s theory, the Fair was *transformed* in a process that revealed its essence: the Corporation’s *domination* of the site’s commodities. Thus, the only true “battleground” that emerges at Flushing Meadows is not between international and local actors, but between local actors—the Corporation and City’s desires to control the size, designate the space, and design Flushing Meadows after the 1940 Season of the Fair in accordance with their

¹³⁹ Edward J Orth, ‘Recollections of a World’s Fair Buff,’ c.1967, Container 846-30, QBPL-NYWF.

vision. To use Park Commissioner Robert Moses' terminology, Flushing Meadows would "inherit" the broad malls, avenues of mature trees, and great formal gardens from the Fair for Flushing Meadows Park.¹⁴⁰ Although Moses eventually completed Flushing Meadows Park, I argue that the Corporation continued to exercise power over the site in the Fair's final months and immediate aftermath (1940-1942). They capitalized on the changes from the 1940 Season—the intrusion of war—to turn Flushing Meadows into a local "battleground" and disrupt Moses' plan for the park.

The Corporation still felt that there was a need to declare victory at Flushing Meadows. Despite lowering its fee and listening to fairgoers' complaints, only 44 million people visited the Fair in 1940 which, in contrast to its projection of 50 million visitors for the 1939 Season alone, was a huge failure.¹⁴¹ Thus, when the City enforced its contractual rights to claim income from admission, rents and concessions to repay its investment into the Fair, the Corporation had to declare bankruptcy.¹⁴² The Corporation turned to what it had left to offer the site: "Fair Preservations," as the archive folder calls them, in the form of its ephemeral structures.

In a letter dated May 7, 1940, Robert D. Kohn, Corporation Vice President and former Chairman of the Fair's Committee on Theme, wrote to Wharton Green, Liaison and Demolition Engineer, proposing that "our" Lagoon of Nations fountain show should be made a "permanent feature of the park." He argued that it would have the same effect as Versailles, where "hundreds of thousands of people" go out for the "few Sundays in the year when the fountains "play."¹⁴³ While it is possible that Moses considered this suggestion, especially since he planned that the area "temporarily occupied" by the main Fair Exhibits in the Versailles LeNotre style, there is

¹⁴⁰ Robert Moses to Frederick Keppel, June 23, 1938, Box 275, Folder 36, NYPL-NYWF.

¹⁴¹ Florian Groß, "The Future That Was Lost: Newness, Seriality, and the 1939-1940 and 1964/1965 New York World's Fairs", in *Modernities and Modernization in North America*, ed. Ilka Brasch and Ruth Mayer (Heidelberg: Winter, 2018), 310.

¹⁴² Mara, 'City Diplomacy,' 5.

¹⁴³ Robert D. Kohn to Wharton Green, May 7, 1940, Box 276, Folder 15, NYPL-NYWF.

little indication that Moses wanted to incorporate much more than was planned in 1938.¹⁴⁴

Kohn's territorial language and commercial focus on attendance also suggest that the Corporation and the City's values were misaligned. In fact, Kohn's additional suggestion to keep the Court of Peace as a "background" to the Lagoon of Nations' fountain show and allow for "a new kind of park, one with new kinds of exhibit and recreation attractions," definitely conflicted with Moses' plan.¹⁴⁵

Moses' park was met with significant public pushback, stemming from the fact that the Fair in 1940 was an uncontested display of American power. One fairgoer appealed to Harvey Gibson, the Demolition Organization's Chairman of the Board, to keep the Fair running for another three to five years, arguing that it could "help to stabilize a world stricken with grief." He wrote how he "lived in the Fair in 39" and was a "regular customer in 40" and would have "no place to go" in 1941, explaining how fairgoers' lives and identities came to be rooted in the Fair.¹⁴⁶ Caitlin McGrath, analyzing the home movies of the Fair, supports this point, writing that home movie makers did not view the Fair with nostalgia; rather, "they were intent on capturing and asserting their presence in the vision of the future."¹⁴⁷

In a letter to the Chairman of the City Planning Commission, Rexford Tugwell, on June 18, 1940, Moses wrote that, in light of further "whimsical" statements from the Corporation that "the Fair should be continued or that certain temporary structures should be retained, [the Corporation] should realistically face the fact that the immediate improvement of Flushing Meadows Park is an obligation which cannot be slighted."¹⁴⁸ Nevertheless, he himself was "realistic" about the Fair's popularity, writing in the same letter to Tugwell that the park would

¹⁴⁴ Robert Moses to Frederick Keppel, June 23, 1938, Box 275, Folder 36, NYPL-NYWF.

¹⁴⁵ Robert D. Kohn to Wharton Green, May 7, 1940, Box 276, Folder 15, NYPL-NYWF.

¹⁴⁶ C. Fox to Harvey Gibson, July 21, 1940, Box 276, Folder, 15, NYPL-NYWF.

¹⁴⁷ McGrath, "I Have Seen the Future", 59.

¹⁴⁸ Robert Moses to Rexford Tugwell, June 18, 1940, Box 276, Folder 8, NYPL-NYWF..

include a larger “heritage of permanent buildings” than planned.¹⁴⁹ The New York City Building, Amphitheatre, and New York State Exhibit, all built by governmental agencies, would be adapted to provide services in the park while, “through the generosity of foreign and industrial exhibitors,” a number of Fair-built structures would be retained in primarily decorative capacities.¹⁵⁰ The remaining twenty-eight Fair buildings together with “concession stands, temporary bridges, statuary, fountains etc” were bound for demolition. A five-page letter from Moses to Gibson outlining the demolition procedures described how the process would be a violent and visceral one.¹⁵¹ First the Corporation would have to remove all temporary buildings, structures and foundations to four feet below the surface and, then, fill all excavations within four months after the close of the Fair.¹⁵² It represented a razing and leveling of the site—a reclamation of the fairgrounds by the City that, in its extreme nature, gave the Corporation leverage, in addition to the context of an ongoing war and public support, with which to dictate the plans for the site in 1940.

The *New York Times* reported on August 19, 1940 that the Corporation “would very much like to see some of [the Corporation’s] materials used for national defense.”¹⁵³ The article described how Fair buildings were constructed to “permit the re-erection of salvaged materials” and,¹⁵⁴ true to its word, the Corporation negotiated with the highest bidder to strip the Trylon and

¹⁴⁹ Robert Moses to Rexford Tugwell, June 18, 1940, Box 276, Folder 8, NYPL-NYWF.

¹⁵⁰ The list goes: “the Japanese Pavilions and its gardens (which will be enlarged by the Japanese Government after demolition of adjacent temporary construction); the Turkish Fountain; the Polish Tower and Equestrian Statue; the Argentine Pylon; the Budd steel shelters and the Goodrich motor testing track (which will become a permanent bicycle track) have been offered to and accepted by the Park Department. In the same category is the Avintion Building which, with some remodeling, will be used as an indoor softball diamond, and the Star Pylon.” Robert Moses to Rexford Tugwell, June 18, 1940, Box 276, Folder 8, NYPL-NYWF.

¹⁵¹ Robert Moses to Harvey Gibson, October 8, 1940, Box 1391, Folder 4, NYPL-NYWF.

¹⁵² Robert Moses to Harvey Gibson, October 8, 1940, Box 1391, Folder 4, NYPL-NYWF.

¹⁵³ Sidney M. Shalett, ‘Use of Fair’s Steel in Defense Likely,’ *New York Times*, August 19, 1940.

¹⁵⁴ Sidney M. Shalett, ‘Use of Fair’s Steel in Defense Likely,’ *New York Times*, August 19, 1940.

Perisphere of their gypsum surfaces and turn them into 40,000 tons of steel for the American war effort in the form of ships, shell casting and gun forgings [Figure 33].¹⁵⁵



Figure 33. Steel framework of Trylon and Perisphere.

Another suggestion by Fair officials to turn Flushing Meadows into a military camp, was not tolerated by Moses, resulting in a public “angry controversy” between Moses and Gibson in August 1940 that was fully outlined in a *New York Times* article on August 26, 1940.¹⁵⁶ Moses accused Gibson of attempting to “take advantage of war hysteria” as part of a “cute device by which a financially bust World’s Fair will escape its responsibility for clearing the site so as to pay an extra dividend to Mr. Gibson’s friends.”¹⁵⁷ In an appeal to the site itself and its distinguishing features, Moses emphasized how turning the site into a temporary camp for the duration of the Second World War would be of “tremendous expense and substantial destruction to the Flushing Meadows area”¹⁵⁸ and create an unnecessary “colossal mess” in the “heart of the

¹⁵⁵ Sarah Wasserman, ‘The Menace of the New: Mourning “The World of Tomorrow” at the 1939 New York World’s Fair’, in *New York, New York! Urban Spaces, Dreamscapes, Contested Territories*, ed. Sielke (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2016), 75.

¹⁵⁶ ‘Army, Navy Spurn Fair as Camp Site, Ending Clashes Here,’ *New York Times*, August 26, 1940.

¹⁵⁷ ‘Army, Navy Spurn Fair as Camp Site, Ending Clashes Here,’ *New York Times*, August 26, 1940.

¹⁵⁸ ‘Army, Navy Spurn Fair as Camp Site, Ending Clashes Here,’ *New York Times*, August 26, 1940.

city.”¹⁵⁹ Gibson responded to Moses’ statement, published in the *New York Times* but sent to the Corporation in advance,¹⁶⁰ by drawing on Fair history: he noted that the Golden Gate Exposition was proposed as a site for President Wilson’s World War One preparedness program.¹⁶¹

The Federal government promptly stepped in, however, to end the conflict. Two months before the opening of the 1940 Season, the House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs agreed to continue the US’s participation in the Fair, but reduced the funding to cover the “restoration and reconditioning” of the Federal Building and surrounding grounds from \$425,000 to \$275,000.¹⁶² It deviated from a \$450,000 appropriation outlined in a letter from the Secretary of State just two weeks earlier that included “extraordinary expenses in connection with the maintenance of the Army-Navy Camp.”¹⁶³ While the Army had set up a military encampment on the site in 1939 [See Figure 37] by 1940 Congress saw the Fair for what it was: a commercial failure where they no longer wanted to advertise their military. Unfortunately for Gibson, neither did the Secretary of the Navy who told the *New York Times* that Flushing Meadows was an inconvenient location for a base or the Army who turned the proposition “down flat.”¹⁶⁴ In the context of the true “battle” in Europe, a satirical piece in the *New York Herald* summarized the Gibson-Moses dispute as a fictional military blitzkrieg by Moses on the Fair, resulting in the surrender of Gibson.¹⁶⁵

In an apparent victory over the Corporation, the City turned to the demolition of the site and the creation of Flushing Meadows Park on October 28, 1940, the day after the Fair closed its

¹⁵⁹ ‘Army, Navy Spurn Fair as Camp Site, Ending Clashes Here,’ *New York Times*, August 26, 1940.

¹⁶⁰ Moses statement to Fair Corporation, for release August 26, 1940, Box 276, Folder 8, NYPL-NYWF.

¹⁶¹ ‘Army, Navy Spurn Fair as Camp Site, Ending Clashes Here,’ *New York Times*, August 26, 1940.

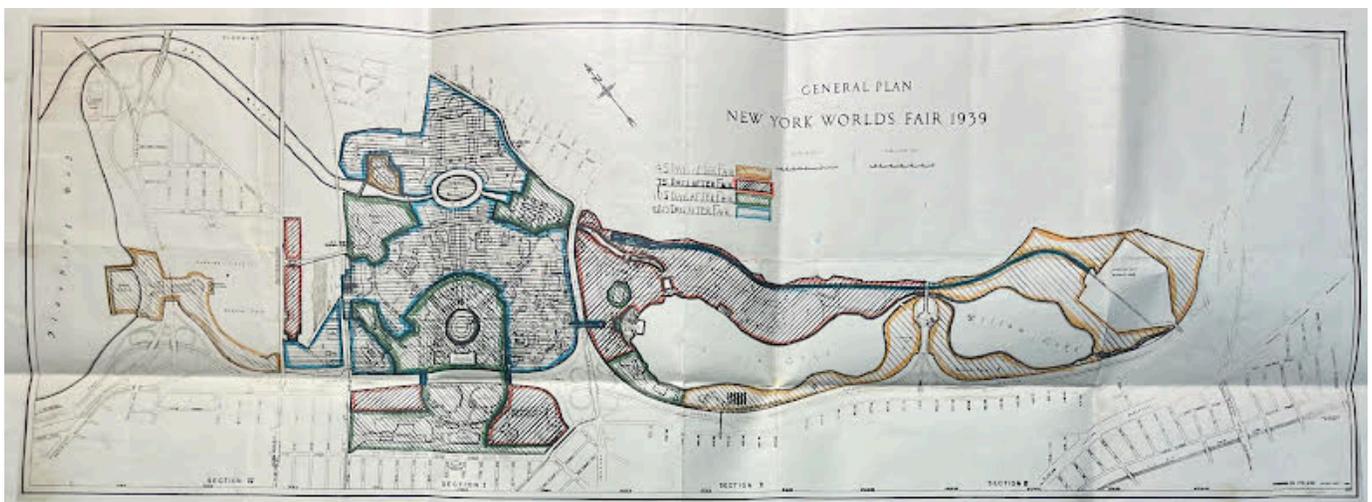
¹⁶² Report No. 1892 submitted by Mr. Bloom from the Committee on Foreign Affairs to the 3rd Session of the 76th Congress of the House of Representatives, March 27, 1940, Container 846-10, QBPL-NYPL.

¹⁶³ Cordell Hull to Sol Bloom, March 8, 1940 in Report No. 1892 submitted by Mr. Bloom from the Committee on Foreign Affairs to the 3rd Session of the 76th Congress of the House of Representatives, March 27, 1940, Container 846-10, QBPL-NYPL.

¹⁶⁴ ‘Army, Navy Spurn Fair as Camp Site, Ending Clashes Here,’ *New York Times*, August 26, 1940.

¹⁶⁵ Duranti, “Utopia, Nostalgia and World War at the 1939-40 New York World’s Fair”, 682.

gates. Although the Park Department took over the lease on this day, thereby releasing the Corporation from all liabilities and obligations, the Corporation still had to, finally, carry out the demolition procedures.¹⁶⁶ Moses provided Gibson with multiple maps outlining the timeline for this process including one that divided up the fairgrounds into four sections—45 days, 75 days, 105 days, and 120 days after the Fair—that corresponded with the least built-up (in yellow) to most-built up areas (in blue) [Figure 34].¹⁶⁷ The main Exhibit and Government Areas were in blue, harking back to the original site map of areas of “good foundation” and the planning of the Fair as a consequence [See Figure 8]. The Corporation and Park Department had collaborated on this plan and schedule, both agreeing in 1938 that the Government Area needed to be placed last due to the “massive character” of the buildings and the expectation that foreign governments would “take down their buildings and re-erect them in their own countries.”¹⁶⁸ In other words, the “second life” of the exhibits—to use the term given by Brown to describe Japanese gardens’ survival in ephemeral expositions¹⁶⁹—was given priority, reaffirming the Corporation’s power over the site throughout the Fair in its meticulous planning stage.



¹⁶⁶ Robert Moses to Rexford Tugwell, June 18, 1940, Box 276, Folder 8, NYPL-NYWF.

¹⁶⁷ General Plan for Demolition, undated, Box 276, Folder 8, NYPL-NYWF.

¹⁶⁸ Chief Engineer and Director of Construction to The President, October 14, 1938, Box 275, Folder 37, NYPL-NYWF.

¹⁶⁹ Brown, ‘Fair Japan,’ 13.

Figure 34. General Plan with areas for demolition divided into four time sections, undated.

On September 27, 1940, Moses sent another map to Gibson. It highlighted in red the areas where all the pavement would have to be removed, excluding large pathways, the foundations of the agreed-upon permanent buildings, and the area of the former USSR/American Common lot, the Czechoslovakia pavilion and the Japanese pavilion which is particularly noteworthy given the way the war intervened intensely within those three plots of land [Figure 35].¹⁷⁰ The Japanese and Czechoslovakian pavilion's pavement were kept due to the permanent plans to keep the Japanese pavilion and extend onto the Czechoslovakian plot. The former USSR/American Common was the site of one of two proposed playgrounds [Figure 36].¹⁷¹ While this decision was a practical one, allowing for accessibility from the western highway,¹⁷² the symbolism must not have been lost on Moses: whereas Gibson argued in his *New York Times* response to Moses that national defense was more important than "softball games and bicycle paths,"¹⁷³ Moses designated the most contested site of the Fair as territory for community use. In fact, the plan for the extended Japanese Pavilion's pathways, finalized in July, 1940, encroached even further into the former American Common/USSR lot [See Figure 32]. In another symbolic gesture, the "Military Encampment" on the site was shaded in red [Figure 37].¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ City of New York Department of Parks to Fair Corporation, General Plan revised March 8, 1940, September 5, 1940, Box 1460, Folder 9, NYPL-NYWF.

¹⁷¹ City of New York Department of Parks to Fair Corporation, Flushing Meadows Park Distribution System, undated, Box 1460, Folder 9, NYPL-NYWF.

¹⁷² Robert Moses, *The Saga of Flushing Meadow, the Valley of Ashes* (New York: Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority, 1966).

¹⁷³ 'Army, Navy Spurn Fair as Camp Site, Ending Clashes Here,' *New York Times*, August 26, 1940.

¹⁷⁴ City of New York Department of Parks to Fair Corporation, General Plan revised March 8, 1940, September 5, 1940, Box 1460, Folder 9, NYPL-NYWF.

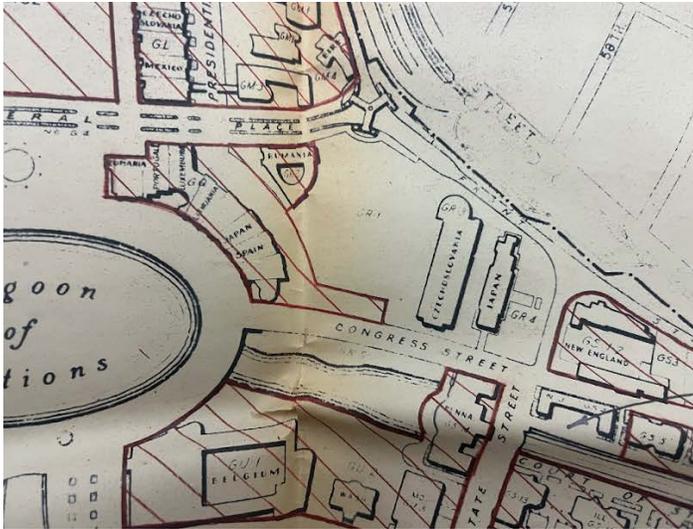


Figure 35 (left). Section of USSR/American Common-Czechoslovakia-Japanese former lots, 1940 General Plan, revised March 8, 1940.



Figure 36 (right). Section of USSR/American Common-Czechoslovakia-Japanese former lots, Flushing Meadow Park Distribution System, undated.

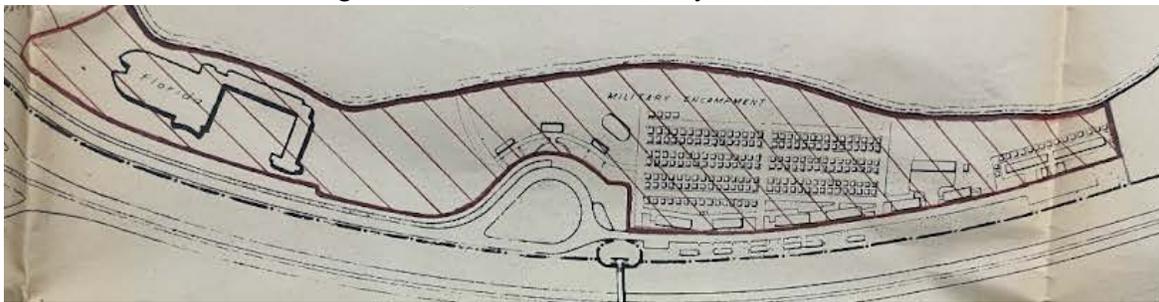


Figure 37. Section of the Military Encampment former area, 1940 General Plan, March 8, 1940.

In a final turn in the ‘battle’ between the Corporation and the City over Flushing Meadows, the Corporation got the final word. Only a few days into the demolition process, an internal Corporation exchange detailed how the Park Department communicated concern about “refuse being blown onto landscape areas and generally littered up streets.”¹⁷⁵ According to an internal response on the issue, strikes, a lack of Corporation funding allocated to demolition equipment, and the alternative of having the New York City Sanitation Department “come in,” meant that the Corporation did make any changes and accepted that “demolition operations

¹⁷⁵ E.J. Carrillo to Maxwell B. Harvey, October 31, 1940, Box 275, Folder 5 - Equipment Maintenance (1940), NYPL-NYWF.

[would] present an unsightly condition.”¹⁷⁶ The disregard for maintaining the site was a problem that troubled the Parks Department throughout the Fair’s two seasons, growing Moses’ publicly stated fear that the entire area would become an “eyesore and a shambles” after the close of the 1940 Season¹⁷⁷—a return to the site’s original condition as a dump. The earliest complaint about the lack of maintenance outside the Exhibit Area and a large loss of trees was met this response from Wharton Green on August 19, 1939:

*Without question all of the areas outside the Exhibit Area have suffered from lack of proper maintenance. I believe this was absolutely proper – that if anything were to be neglected it should be those areas outside of the Exhibit Area. (...) No guarantee of replacement, as far as I know, was ever made to the Park Department.*¹⁷⁸

Green’s authoritative tone and reference to an earlier guarantee reinforces Chapter 1.1’s claim that the foundation for the Corporation’s extensive power lay in the site itself and the sly attitude set between the Corporation and City during lease negotiations.¹⁷⁹ While the demolition process for the Fair was completed by 1942 construction on the park remained minimal [Figure 38]:¹⁸⁰ the Corporation defaulted on a \$4,000,000 payment to the City for the purpose of completing work and the war upset the schedule for construction set by Moses .¹⁸¹ After the attack on Pearl Harbor, and President’s Roosevelt’s announcement that “Dr. New Deal has been replaced by Dr. Win the War,” the World’s Fair stepped into the past.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁶ E.J. Carrillo to Maxwell B. Harvey, November 1, 1940, Box 275, Folder 5 - Equipment Maintenance (1940), NYPL-NYWF.

¹⁷⁷ ‘Clear Site on Time, Moses Warns Fair,’ *New York Times*, August 15, 1940.

¹⁷⁸ Wharton Green to James Dawson, August 18, 1939, Box 1382, Folder 1, NYPL-NYWF.

¹⁷⁹ Moses wrote to the Corporation’s counsel that “the preparation and success of the Fair must rest on mutual good faith, good judgment and good will,” Robert Moses to Paul Windels, June 11, 1936, Box 1382, Folder 2, NYPL-NYWF.

¹⁸⁰ 1941 Schedule of Design and Construction for Flushing Meadow Park, Box 2387, Folder 4, NYPL-NYWF.

¹⁸¹ Mara, ‘City Diplomacy,’ 4.

¹⁸² Kargon et al., *World’s Fairs on the Eve of War*, 81.

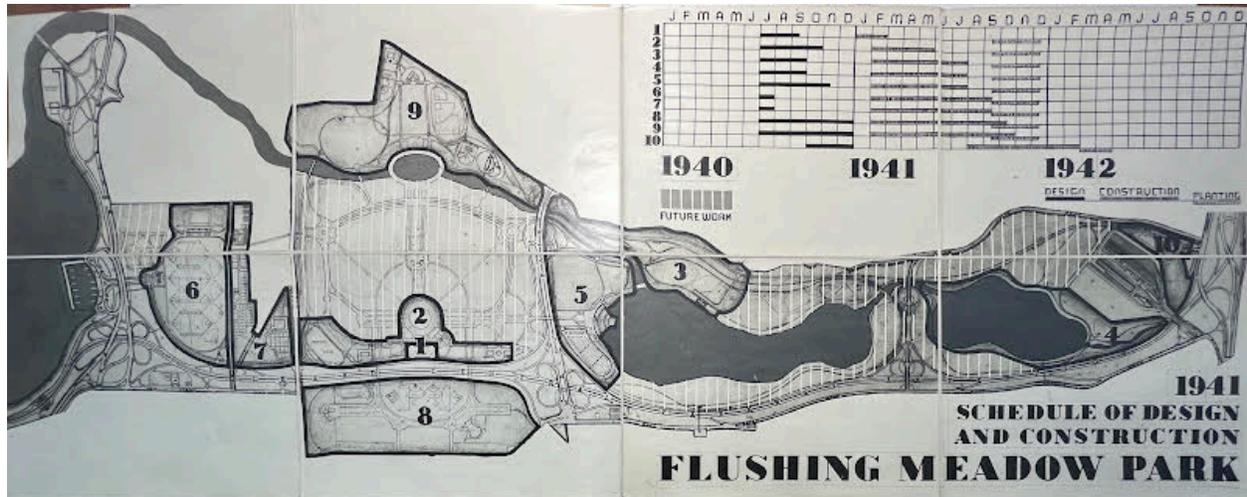


Figure 38. 1941 Schedule of Design and Construction for Flushing Meadow Park.

This chapter has argued that during the 1940 Season of the Fair, the Corporation managed to strengthen its power over the site by using the Second World War as a tool to *transform* its ephemeral structures into a source of *domination*. As “chamber of commerce men,” they acted in a similar capacity as Adorno and Horkheimer’s “man of science,” prioritizing their commercial interests over representing reality. As Sarah Wasserman states in her chapter on the Fair within a larger book on New York’s contested territories, “the ephemeral nature of the Fair’s structures gave them life; but more precisely, it granted them the ability to die and therefore be mourned by the millions who marveled at their majesty – and by those who never had the chance.”¹⁸³ To this latter point, a 1989 satirical article about the 1939-1940 Fair offers some insight: “even if you were born in 1956, in your heart you can picture yourself waiting in line to enter the Futurama.”¹⁸⁴ The following chapter will explore how the Corporation continued to exert power over the site in the memory of the Fair and, through it, the additional plans for a monumental end worthy of the site’s origin as a reclamation project.

¹⁸³ Wasserman, “The Menace of the New,” 76.

¹⁸⁴ John Perreault, ‘Confessions of a World’s Fair Czar,’ *Voice Art Special*, Fall 1989, Container 864-30, QBPL-NYWF.

Chapter 3: The Afterlife of the Fair (1949-1967)

The end of the Second World War introduced new sources of anxiety in the post-war decades, with the atomic age and the Cold War challenging the progress represented by technology and modernity.¹⁸⁵ Looking back at the 1939-1940 Fair, many people honed in on the authoritarian tendencies of Whalen, the propagandistic pavilions of Italy, the USSR, and Japan, and the Fair's extreme commercialism to amplify its dystopian elements.¹⁸⁶ While these memories of the site remained and were explored in Chapters One and Two, this chapter argues that even after the Fair, the site continued to be envisioned as an escape from the harsh realities of the midcentury. After all, Moses once said "as long as you're on the side of parks, you're on the side of the angels. You can't lose."¹⁸⁷

The Corporation's vision of the future with the US at the helm of the "Court of Peace" lived on within the memory of the Fair at Flushing Meadows, allowing Moses to continue to develop his park through two other monumental plans for the site: a United Nations' World Capitol and the 1964-1965 New York World's Fair. Thus, in the *sustained* planning of Flushing Meadows—being drawn up, reinforced, and developed across the midcentury—it continued to act as a "living site."

¹⁸⁵ Joseph J. Corn, ed., *Imagining Tomorrow: History, Technology, and the American Future* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1986), 1.

¹⁸⁶ Note walkthrough of the Fair: "Directly behind them was the Italian Pavilion, personally designed by Benito Mussolini. Down the road was the giant marble pavilion of the Soviet Union, bedecked with the likenesses of Stalin and Lenin, and with a statue of the Soviet Worker rising high above the meadow. Directly across the road was the pavilion of Japan with its beautiful Japanese Garden dedicated as "a permanent symbol of the eternal friendship of the people of Japan and the people of the United States." Near the main entrance were the Pavilions of the League of Nations and the Polish Pavilion, which was shut down shortly after the Nazi invasion." *The Big Fair Remembered...40 Years Later*, April 1979, *Newsday*, container 864-30, QBPL-NYWF.

¹⁸⁷ Robert Moses quoted in Robert A. Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*, First edition (New York: Knopf, 1974), 218.

1. The Post-War Years: Flushing Meadows Park and The United Nations

Without any funds to complete Flushing Meadows park in 1942, Moses' post-war concern was to keep public momentum going for a grand park in Queens. Analyzing Moses' various reports and publications, I argue he sought to leave a legacy that continued the Corporation's influence on the site: a dual mythologisation of Flushing Meadows by focusing on its size and exceptionality and "weeded" out negative international associations by highlighting peaceful ones.

In a *New York Herald Tribune* article published in May 1949, Moses outlined how more than half of Flushing Meadows Park was not in public use and many of the ambitious additions to the park, including the playgrounds in the former Government Zone and around a dozen Fair buildings, were abandoned in the park plan [Figure 39].¹⁸⁸ He also describes his critic's claims that the site was returning to "its primitive condition" as "a haunt of rabbits, foxes, and even possums."¹⁸⁹ Given the origin of the site as the Corona Dump, infested mosquitoes, a return to Flushing Meadow's natural marshland would represent the failure of the reclamation project and the local power it displayed at the 1939-1940 Fair. In order to combat both perceptions of failure, Moses understood that the site needed to be constantly maintained referencing Central Park as another reclamation projects and man-made park rather than "as most people think, a natural park."¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ Robert Moses, *Flushing Meadow Park: 10th Anniversary* (New York, N.Y.: Reprinted from The New York Herald Tribune, Sunday, May 22, 1949, 1949).

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

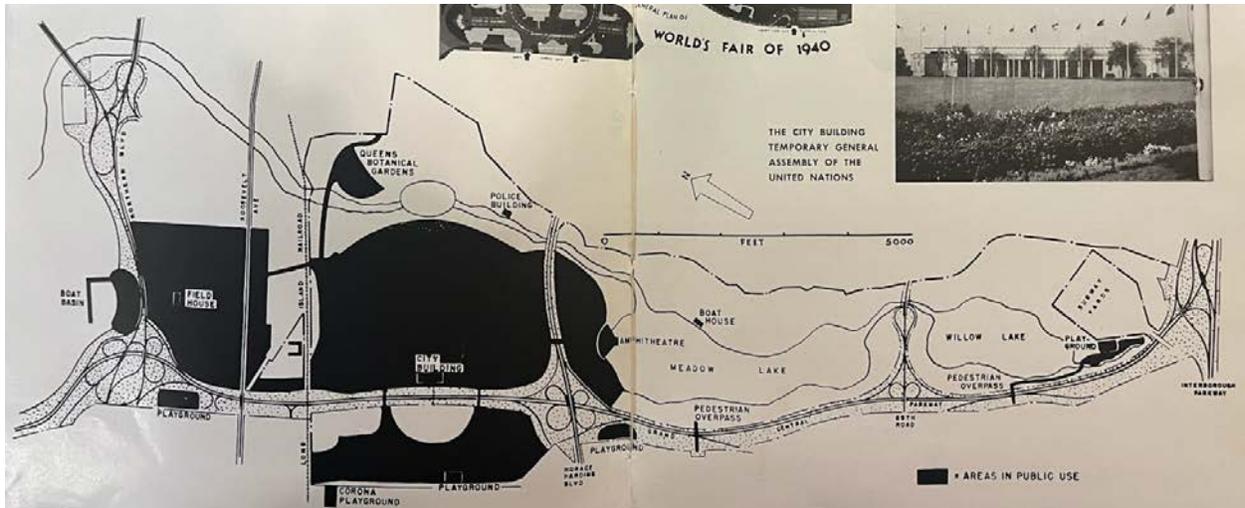


Figure 39. Map depicting the area of Flushing Meadows in public use, May 1949.

Moses proposed the City Building of Flushing Meadows for Mayor William O’Dwyer’s October 1946 campaign to have the United Nations locate its temporary headquarters in New York.¹⁹¹ The United Nations accepted and, at a city-borne cost of \$2,200,000, the building was transformed from a skating rink into a General Assembly.¹⁹² From October 1946 to 1949, while the site was used by the City of New York Building, Moses arranged for \$750,000 to be spent in parks development within the site.¹⁹³ He also took this time to capitalize on the site’s associations with an international, peaceful, and cooperative organization and downplay the public conflict between the Corporation and the City that characterized the final months of the Fair. In the same *New York Herald Tribune* article, he wrote that aside from “good-natured joshing and rather primitive practical joking,” the Corporation and the Parks Department, “got along famously.”¹⁹⁴ Brushing over the Corporation’s more controversial actions in regards to international actors, not mentioning that the UN’s predecessor, the League of Nations pavilion, had been designated a lot on the outskirts of the Fair and subject to public scrutiny. Now, in a symbolic turn of events, the

¹⁹¹ Caro, *The Power Broker*, 771.

¹⁹² Caro, *The Power Broker*, 771.

¹⁹³ New York (N Y.) Mayor’s Committee on Plan and Scope, *Plan for Permanent World Capitol at Flushing Meadow Park* (New York: The Committee, 1946).

¹⁹⁴ Moses, *Flushing Meadow Park*.

UN was not only located in the center of the former Fair site, but was dictating its development: Moses explained how the former Government Zone was “too far” from the UN Assembly to do any “ultimate landscaping and development.”¹⁹⁵ Publicized images of the City Building, surrounded by different nations’ flags, claimed their own territorial hold over the site and neutralized the banal nationalism the Fair’s flags had previously represented [See image(s) in Figure above]. For the internationalists involved in the Fair, these years proved its success in creating both the “World of Tomorrow” and calling “For Peace and Freedom” at Flushing Meadows.¹⁹⁶ Grover Whalen wrote his 1949 autobiography that New York was now the “home” of the United Nations and this, in addition to the Fair, served as a testament to “the greatness and the glory that will always be New York.”¹⁹⁷

In December 1946 the UN rejected Mayor O’Dwyer’s offer for 350 acres of Flushing Meadows to create a permanent World Capitol.¹⁹⁸ The report on the “Plan for Permanent World Capitol at Flushing Meadow Park,” highlights how the City had advertised the site to the UN using marketing lines similar to those of the Corporation, focusing on its size and location. The plan described how Flushing Meadows was connected to the City by “parkway, expressway and arterial highway, by rail, air, and water”,¹⁹⁹ making it both “accessible” and, as contemporary land economists Tough and Weintraub explained, a “discrete unit within [New York City’s] boundaries.”²⁰⁰ The report emphasized that the UN would benefit from the legacy of the Fair by outlining the tax exemptions and restrictions on private buildings that “protected” the site during

¹⁹⁵ Moses, *Flushing Meadow Park*.

¹⁹⁶ Historians also take this perspective, see Robert Rydell, ‘Self Becomes Nation: Sol Bloom and America’s World Fairs, 1893–1939’ in Leerssen and Storm, eds., *World Fairs and the Global Moulding of National Identities*, 217-236.

¹⁹⁷ Whalen, *Mr. New York*, 304-305.

¹⁹⁸ New York (N.Y.) Mayor’s Committee on Plan and Scope, *Plan for Permanent World Capitol at Flushing Meadow Park* (New York: The Committee, 1946).

¹⁹⁹ New York (N.Y.) Mayor’s Committee on Plan and Scope, *Plan for Permanent World Capitol at Flushing Meadow Park*.

²⁰⁰ Tough and Weintraub, ‘The United Nations and Changing Land Use in a Metropolis,’ 190.

the Fair and could be expanded to control, direct, and curb “untoward development” in Queens.²⁰¹ It also included a map of New York with marked locations in Manhattan for a United Nations Club and UN housing, UN Air Depots at LaGuardia Airport and Idlewild Airport²⁰² and two additional housing sites in Queens [Figure 40].²⁰³ In a metaphorical expansion into the city, the permanent World Capitol would expand beyond the boundaries of Flushing Meadows—carving out additional space for the utopian reclamation project to take hold.

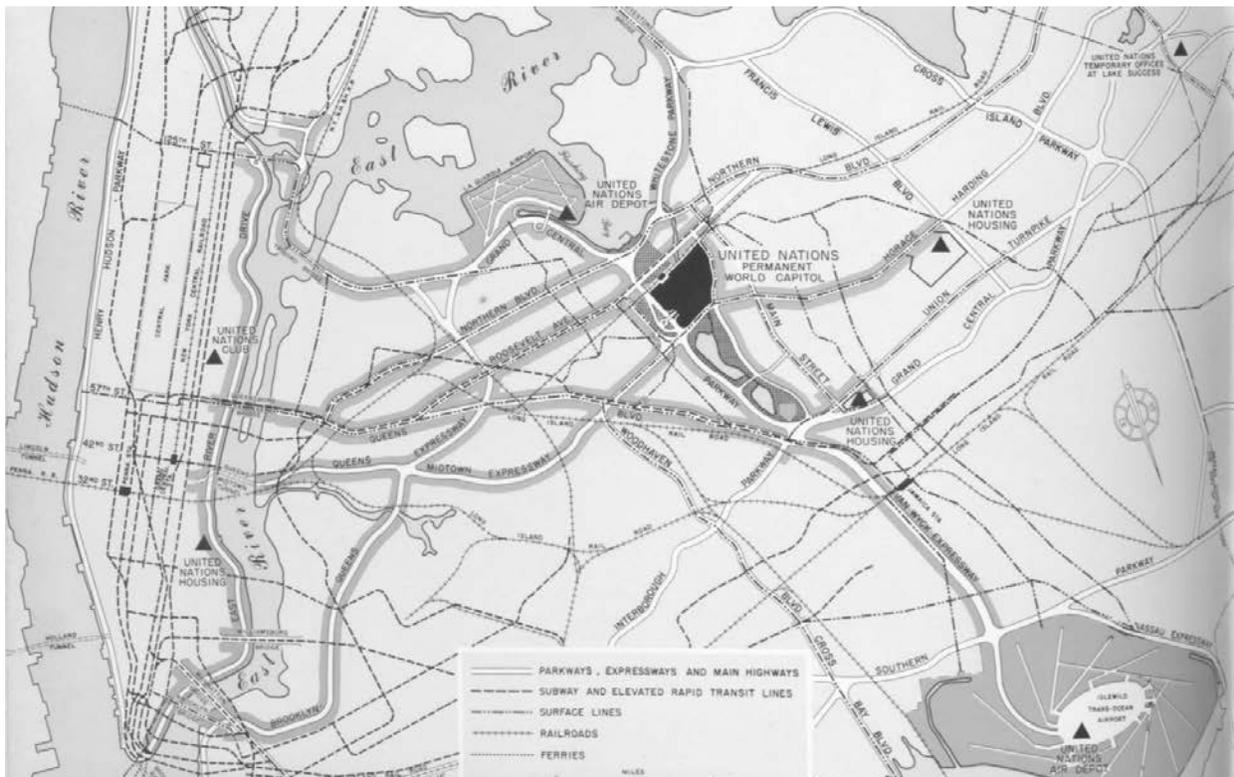


Figure 40. Map showing how the Flushing Meadows site would be connected to New York through its highway system and arterial UN sites (identified by a triangle), 1946.

The report also included a design plan that, though accompanied by a disclaimer that the City had “no pride in authorship or design,” laid an architectural stake to the development of the

²⁰¹ New York (N.Y.) Mayor’s Committee on Plan and Scope, *Plan for Permanent World Capitol at Flushing Meadow Park*.

²⁰² Now John F. Kennedy International Airport.

²⁰³ New York (N.Y.) Mayor’s Committee on Plan and Scope, *Plan for Permanent World Capitol at Flushing Meadow Park*.

Capitol if the UN accepted.²⁰⁴ The report included side-by-side images of the proposal and the 1939 Fair [Figure 41] and sketches by Hugh Ferriss, the main illustrator for the 1939 Fair, who seemed to carry on the Corporation’s policy of “unity without uniformity”—both sketches of monumental proportions, neo-classical in design (with the exception of the glass-facade of one part of the UN complex) and include a dome structure meant to represent the world [Figures 42 and 43]. Although the UN eventually rejected the proposal, its references to the site’s exceptionality, size, location, and utopian associations, demonstrate that the Fair’s plan as an orderly and harmonious “World of Tomorrow” continued to exert influence on the Flushing Meadows site.

²⁰⁴ New York (N Y.) Mayor’s Committee on Plan and Scope, *Plan for Permanent World Capitol at Flushing Meadow Park*.



THE PROPOSED WORLD CAPITOL

THE PROPOSED SITE DURING THE WORLD'S FAIR 1939-1940



Figure 41. Hugh Ferriss sketch of the proposed World Capitol next to an aerial photograph of the 1939-1940 New York World's Fair, 1946.

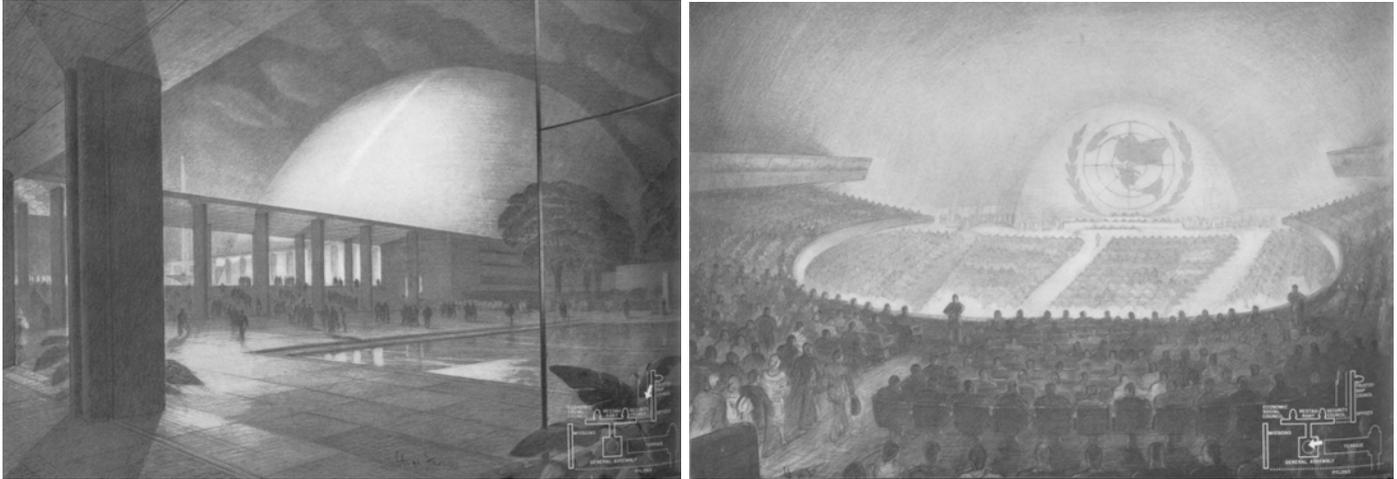


Figure 42. Hugh Ferriss exterior and interior sketches of the proposed spherical structure for UN that General Assembly, 1946.



Figure 43. Hugh Ferriss sketch of the Tylon and Perisphere; sketch of the Amphitheatre of the 1939-1940 Fair, c.1936.

By the 1950s, Moses had accumulated immense power in New York over his career in public service. Nicknamed the “dictator” and even “generalissimo,” he was the single most influential figure in the urban landscape of New York and had a national reputation for getting things done.²⁰⁵ It is no surprise that in 1959 President Eisenhower selected New York City, based on Moses’ proposal, to host the next American World’s Fair in Flushing Meadows and offered Moses the role as President of the Corporation. Moses accepted and took on a third opportunity to develop a grand park in New York. Similar to the Corporation in the 1940 Season of the Fair,

²⁰⁵ Samuel, *The End of the Innocence*, 7.

Moses would capitalize on anxiety over the future to reach this end, but this time using the Cold War, by successfully restoring a utopian memory of the previous Fair in the shadow of the 1964-1965 Fair.

2. Planning for a Park: The 1964 Fair as a Continuation of the 1939 Fair

In a talk delivered at Brandeis University on March 23, 1961 on the implications of the 1964-1965 Fair, Moses claimed that the arrival of avant-garde architecture was responsible for a decline in American values.²⁰⁶ He described their architects as people who “rage to break for the sake of breaking, and particularly breaking with the past,” lamenting that “(...) nothing is any longer sacred, and political propaganda [is] everywhere.”²⁰⁷ It establishes how Moses identified local and international worries during this period and planned to return to a sense of tradition and optimism about the future in a World’s Fair. Dickstein, along with other historians of the 1964 Fair, attribute this combination to the conservative officials in the Corporation and their attempt at a “final grasp” of American post-war innocence.²⁰⁸ While this evaluation holds true, various continuities in the planning stage of the later Fair suggest that the 1939 Fair was a large influence and, thus, speaks to Flushing Meadows’ role as a “living site.” Moses outlines this perspective in following description of the two Fairs’ theme centers:

*The Trylon and Perisphere of 1939 did not encompass everything the authors had put into words. So we ended up with a huge permanent Armillary Sphere of stainless steel outlining the continents, orbited and ingeniously lighted to stimulate movements and change, rising from fountains, to be called Unisphere (...)*²⁰⁹ [Figure 44].

²⁰⁶ Implications of the New York World’s Fair, Remarks of Robert Moses to Students at Brandeis University, March 23, 1961, Misc. photographs and other archival material, Box 5A, AA-HF.

²⁰⁷ Implications of the New York World’s Fair, Remarks of Robert Moses to Students at Brandeis University, March 23, 1961, Misc. photographs and other archival material, Box 5A, AA-HF.

²⁰⁸ See Samuel, *The End of the Innocence*, and Dickstein, ‘From the Thirties to the Sixties: The New York World’s Fair in its own Time’ in Rosemarie Haag Bletter and Queens Museum (1974-1990), eds., *Remembering the Future*.

²⁰⁹ Implications of the New York World’s Fair, Remarks of Robert Moses to Students at Brandeis University, March 23, 1961, Misc. photographs and other archival material, Box 5A, AA-HF.

In other words, Moses committed to putting 1939 authors' ideas "into words" in 1964, removing the Fair from its immediate context and placing it within the 1930s.



Figure 44. Model of Unisphere, NYPL-NYWF-DC.

However, instead of celebrating a national event like George Washington's inauguration, the 1964 Fair was scheduled to coincide with historical moments of local significance: "the three-hundredth anniversary of the founding of New York, the twentieth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations headquarters in New York" and with the promise to "complete Flushing Meadows Park."²¹⁰ It comes to represent Moses' strategy of keeping his ambitions for the Fair local and manageable, and, as an official record from 1960 outlines, Moses preserved "what is valuable left over from the 1939-1940 Fair and the park which succeeded it" to "represent both conservation and progress." To this end, the Corporation's "General Information for Exhibitors" document can be separated into two categories: profit maximisers such as a \$4.00 (\$3.00 for the International Area) per square foot per year rental fee and

²¹⁰ Ibid.

“landscaping” maximisers for the site like the 40% minimum landscaping commitment for every lot.²¹¹

Moses stressed his opposition to the “longing of theoretical planners” to create a grand Fair plan that would “influence architecture for all generations.”²¹² Instead, he reused the layout of the 1939 Fair [Figure 45] but allocated ninety per cent of Fair space to exhibitors and allowed them to exercise architectural freedom (subject to the Corporation’s final approval).²¹³ These concessions did not loosen Moses’ tight control over the Fair and Flushing Meadows, it simply allowed the exhibitors to do his task for him: build up most of the Fair and, in the diversity of their architecture, visually reflect the Fair’s theme of “Peace through Understanding.” It even deflected architectural criticism from the Corporation’s own contributions. In *Design in America*’s article, Katherine Kuh criticized the Fair as “dated, repeating all the “modernistic” bromides that were beginning to pall a quarter century ago” but could only point to the “pompous avenues bedecked with flags” and the “usual fountains” as evidence for the Fair’s failure.²¹⁴ Ada Louise Huxtable of the *New York Times* blamed Moses’ laissez-faire policy for the Fair’s “inferior” architecture but similarly could not point to specific structures.²¹⁵ Exhibitors’ freedom on the design of the Fair meant that Moses could exercise stricter control over the construction and demolition procedures without receiving too much criticism.

²¹¹ New York World's Fair 1964-1965: 588 days to opening, September 12, 1962, Hagley Museum and Library, AMD-WF.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Katherine Kuh, ‘The day Pop Art died’, 23 May 1964, Special Collections Research Center, Henry Madden Library, California State University, Fresno, AMD-WF.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ada Louise Huxtable quoted in Samuel, *The End of the Innocence*, 41.

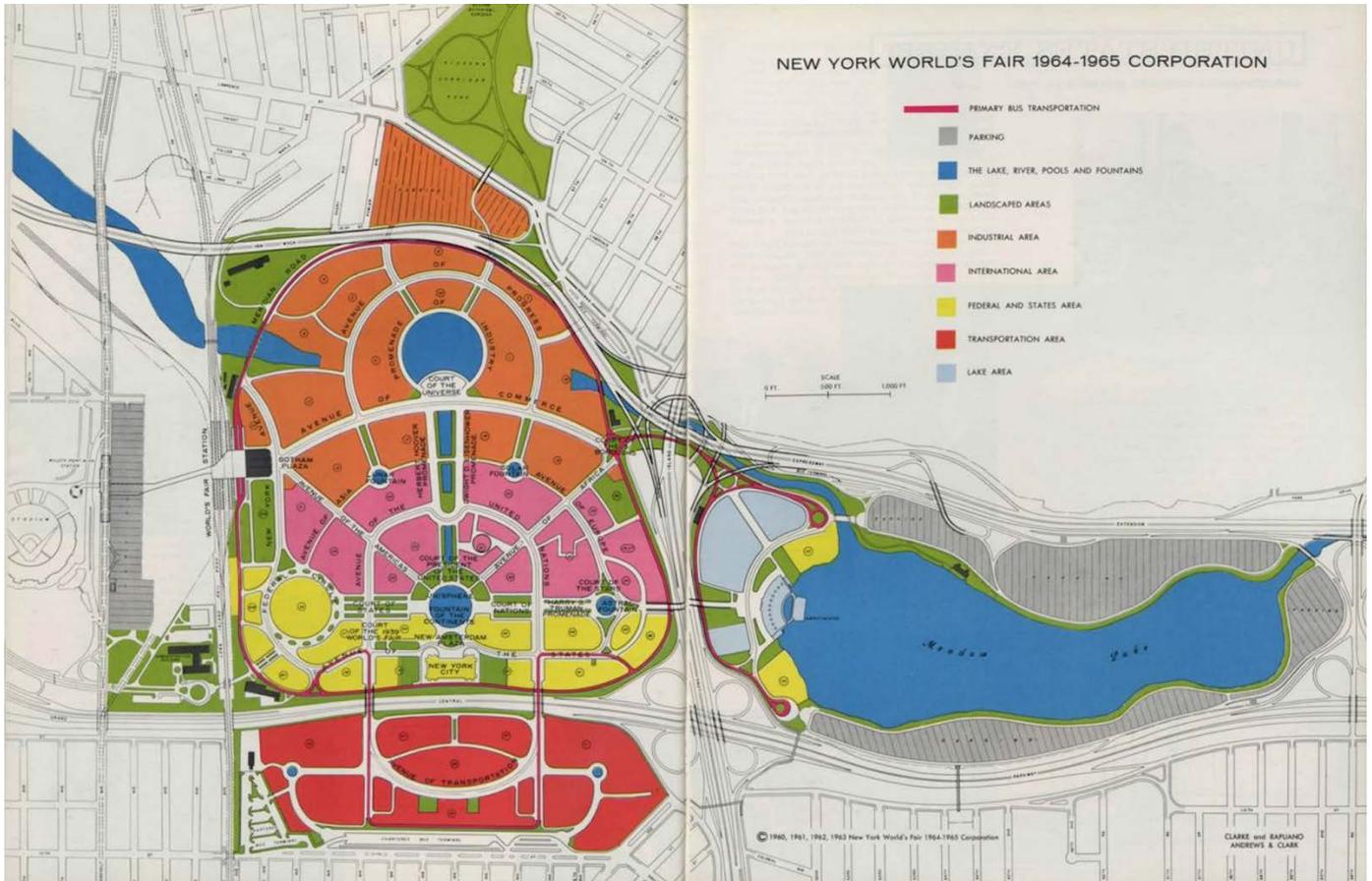


Figure 45. Map of the 1964 Fair showing its 1939-1940 Fair layout and different exhibition areas: Industrial Area (orange), International Area (pink), Federal and States area (yellow) and Transportation area (red), 1949.

Due to Moses' primarily local ambitions, he was not concerned when the BIE rejected the Fair's bid as an international exposition, dismissing it as a "grossly distorted" controversy.²¹⁶ It meant that nations had to participate under private or quasi public auspices in an extra layer of protection from the "political propaganda" he referred to in his speech at Brandeis. It is worth noting, however, that two authoritarian countries did express interest in participating. Francisco Franco's Spain, which erected the most architecturally praised pavilion at the Fair, ignored the BIE's restrictions, reflecting a certain continuity in the 1939 Season's locales of power.²¹⁷ Similar to Whalen, Moses was able to capitalize on Spain's participation to satisfy public expectations

²¹⁶ *New York World's Fair 1964-1965: 454 days to opening*, 24 Jan 1963, Hagley Museum and Library, AMD-WF.

²¹⁷ Caro, *The Power Broker*, 1108.

for a grand Fair—he took advantage of the pavilion’s architectural success to travel to Madrid after the 1964 Season, present Franco with the World’s Fair Gold Medal, and convince him in person to ship new major Spanish works of art for the 1965 Season.²¹⁸ It was part of Moses’ larger strategy to increase attendance for the second season by convincing European exhibitors to display art at their pavilions. Through Moses’ personal relationship with New York’s Cardinal Francis Spellman, he even secured the personal intervention of Pope John XXIII to arrange the display of Michelangelo’s *Pieta* at the Fair for the first time outside of Italy since its creation in 1499.²¹⁹

The second authoritarian power to display interest in participating was the USSR that, abiding by the BIE’s restrictions because of their own BIE-approved Moscow 1967 Fair, proposed a pavilion by their Chamber of Commerce. Although the USSR eventually withdrew from the Fair in 1963 and canceled its Fair in April 1962, the USSR-US dynamic that arose from negotiations is particularly interesting as a continuity with the 1939-1940 Fair. In an internal Corporation memo, Moses explained that the USSR Committee toured the site in February 1962 and asked for 70,000 square feet instead of the proposed 50,000 square feet and for approval to exceed the Corporation’s 80 foot height restriction. By March, the Corporation accommodated the USSR’s request, allowing “certain parts” of the building to reach a maximum of 120 feet but wrote to the Deputy of the US Secretary of Commerce that it was “needless to say” that a similar waiver would be “inserted in the United States’ participation agreement.”²²⁰ The Corporation was not afraid of confrontations of Cold War power at the Fair and, in fact, welcomed them by

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Joseph Tirella, *Tomorrow-Land: The 1964-65 World’s Fair and the Transformation of America* (Guilford, Connecticut: Lyons Press, an imprint of Globe Pequot Press, 2014), 48. Note: the Fair had ended its first season in a deficit and needed to generate interest to increase admission, which was achieved. The artwork at the Fair was credited for this.

²²⁰ W.E. Potter to Herbert W. Klotz, March 30, 1962, Moscow Fair - 1967, Fair Planning, Administration, Box 101, NYPL-NYWF-64.

waiving its restrictions. Moses even lamented at the “chance that healthy rivalry without protocol would produce lasting friendships” between the USSR and the US when the USSR dropped out of the Fair in 1963, following the Cuban Missile Crisis.²²¹ In a letter to President John F. Kennedy in August 1961, Moses had even leveraged the USSR’s participation and the proximity of the expected 1967 Moscow World’s Fair to support his requests for funds from Congress for a US Pavilion.²²² Not only did President Kennedy ask Congress *twice* to appropriate funds, he got involved in the planning for the pavilions exhibition on American presidents.²²³ As such, during the two year window when the USSR suggested participation, Moses masterfully capitalized on Cold War competition to funnel money and participation into the Fair from the highest levels of federal power.

As a result of the increased interest in and funding for the Fair, Moses appealed to local government authorities to amplify the *scale* of the Fair and Flushing Meadows influence over New York’s landscape. Lawrence R. Samuel explains how Moses used “weird math” to arrive at a 70 million attendance estimate for the 1964 Season²²⁴ and convince Federal, State, and City governments to prepare for the Fair by investing \$120,000,000 in Queen’s highway system [Figure 46].²²⁵ Within the \$1 billion Fair budget, Moses allocated funds to develop a network of six parks, LaGuardia Airport and build a marina in Flushing Bay. At one point in 1961, the Fair’s official logo depicted the highway network around Flushing Meadow,²²⁶ reflecting how, during the planning years of the Fair, strengthening the site’s key features—its size, accessibility and

²²¹ New York World's Fair 1964-1965: 454 days to opening, January 24, 1963, Hagley Museum and Library, AMD-WF.

²²² Moses to President John F. Kennedy, August 19, 1961, Moscow Fair - 1967, Fair Planning, Administration, Box 101, NYPL-NYWF-64.

²²³ Samuel, *The End of the Innocence*, 125.

²²⁴ He took the 1939 Season’s attendance, added a 38% national population growth increase and subtracted 11% to account for the four-times greater admission cost. Samuel, *The End of the Innocence*, 9-10.

²²⁵ Caro, *The Power Broker*, 920.

²²⁶ Bill Cotter and Bill Young, *The 1964-1965 New York World’s Fair: Creation and Legacy*, Images of pAmerica (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2008), 27.

location—were central to the Corporation’s work.²²⁷ Although Moses argued that the investment on arterial connections “would have been built anyway” and were only “expedited to meet Fair schedules,”²²⁸ Moses went above and beyond, expediting the development of *New York* by designating Lincoln Center and Jones Beach State Park the official satellites of the Fair.

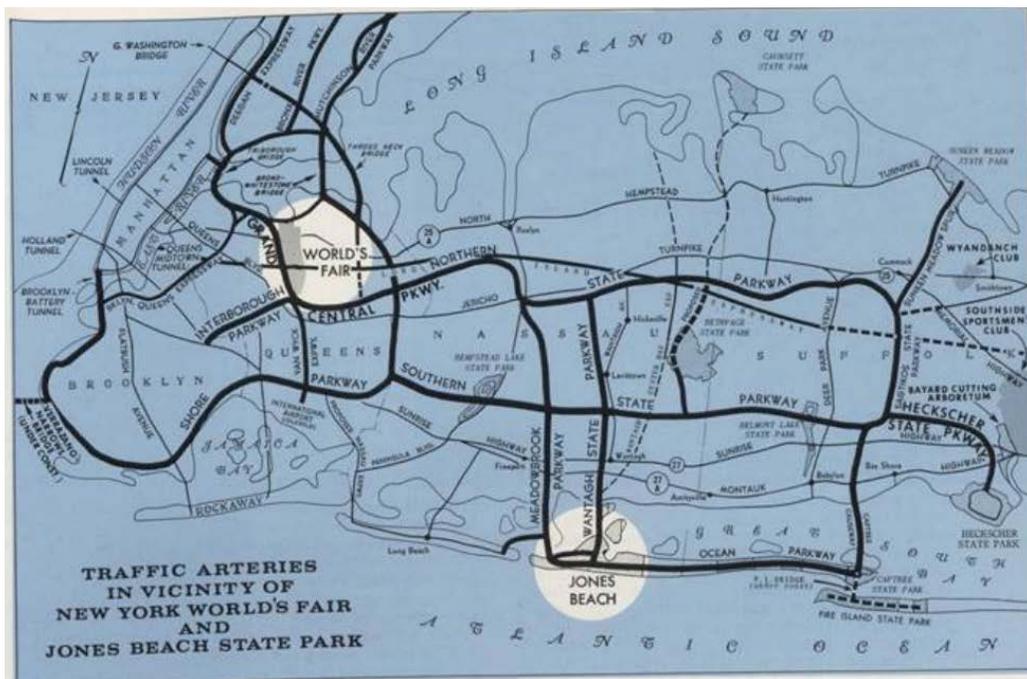


Figure 46. Traffic Arteries in the vicinity of Flushing Meadows and Jones Beach State Park, 24 January 1963.

As a result of the 1939-1940 Fair and various threats that the site would return to its “natural” and “primitive” state, Moses learned that Flushing Meadows had to be constantly maintained to offer the city an artificial natural oasis. In this capacity, the 1964 Corporation mirrored the success of the 1939 Corporation by achieving its goals at the expense of international and federal actors’ funds and ambitions. In his final publication on Flushing Meadows in 1966, *The Saga of Flushing Meadows*, Moses urged his readers to not “for a moment assume that New York is inhospitable or unfriendly” but to instead focus on its “heart:”

²²⁷ New York World's Fair 1964-1965: 588 days to opening, September 12, 1962, Hagley Museum and Library, AMD-WF.

²²⁸ Implications of the New York World’s Fair, Remarks of Robert Moses to Students at Brandeis University, March 23, 1961, Misc. photographs and other archival material, Box 5A, AA-HF.

the two World's Fairs.²²⁹ The 1964 Fair represented New York as a utopia—with multiple civil rights, women's rights and Vietnam peace protests at the Fair reminding fairgoers of this reality—and Moses had to rely on the New York Police Department to keep the Fair positive and politics-free.²³⁰ His ambition for the Fair, which was more about “conservation” than “progress,” followed the 1940 Fair's policy of creating a sense of “unawareness” and an escape from reality. From this controlled memory of the Flushing Meadows as a haven in the city, one where international and local conflicts were neutralized, Moses was able to complete his own artificial park. Flushing Meadows was again a place to...

*Pick up your left foot,
pick up your right.
Walk away from every care.
This is your fun time, you are entitled to it,
Fair is Fair.*

—The official world's fair song, “Fair Is Fair,” by Richard Rodgers.²³¹

3. 1965-1967: The Planning of Flushing Meadows-Corona Park

Moses offered New Yorkers the feeling of an “entitled” escape from reality through the 1964-1965 Fair by capitalizing on contemporary fears and appealing to a mythical past where *local* historical events were comforting reminders of America's strength. As a result, when the Fair closed on October 17, 1965, after \$220,000,000 worth of permanent improvements to the site,²³² the demolition of the Fair meant that the entire construction on Flushing Meadows Park would immediately follow. To explore how this period marked the end of the sustained ambitious

²²⁹ Robert Moses, *The Saga of Flushing Meadow, the Valley of Ashes* (New York: Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority, 1966).

²³⁰ Samuel, *The End of Innocence*, 15.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

²³² Robert Moses, *The Saga of Flushing Meadow*, 7.

planning of the site, I analyze how many features of Moses' 1936 plan for Flushing Meadows [Figure 47] resurfaced in the finalized plan for the park in June 1965 [Figure 48].

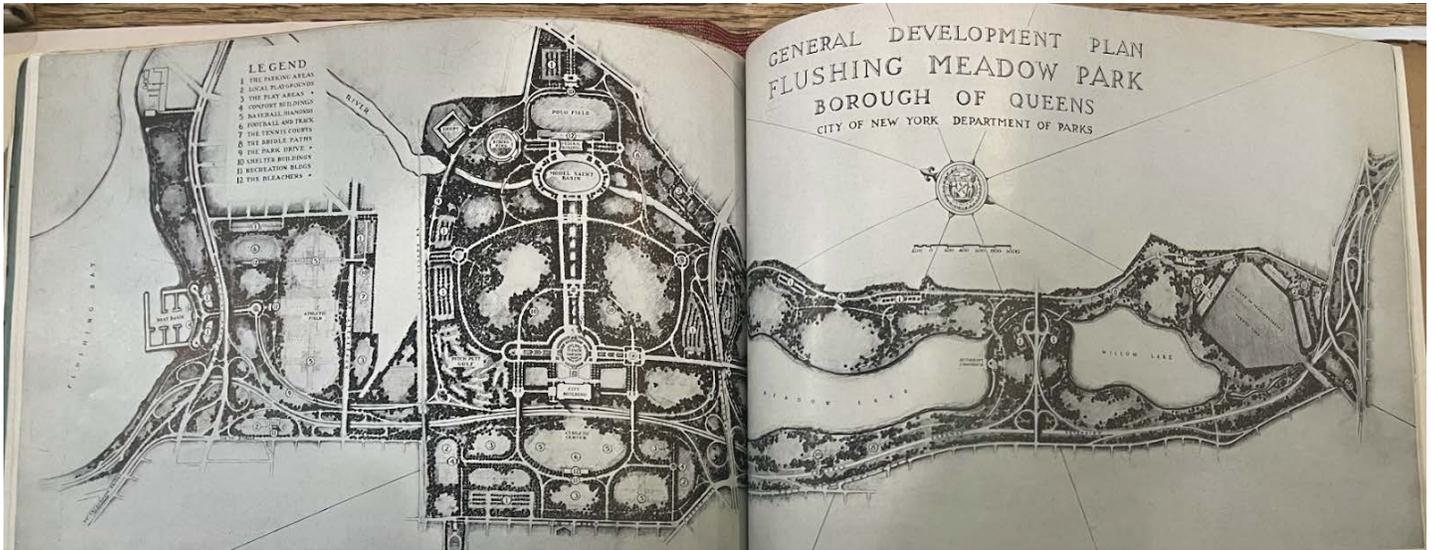


Figure 47. General Development Plan, Flushing Meadows Park, 1936.



Figure 48. Plan for Flushing Meadows park after the close of the 1964-1965 Fair, June 1965.

Moses kept the framework of the 1939 Fair in a move that allowed him to invest in the park in more substantial ways than the previous Fair had. His desire to complete the 1936 plan, however, was not compromised by the expansion of the site to 2,816 acres by incorporating Kinnessa Corridor Park, located above the former Court of Peace, into the 1964 Fair lease.²³³ The May 1949 map of the park shows how Moses began work on a Queens Botanical Garden in the

²³³ Samuel, *The End of Innocence*, 37.

former Government Zone, an awkward placement that disrupted the LeNotre design for the 1939 Exhibit Area [See Figure 39]. The Corporation transplanted many of the trees planted for the 1939 Fair to Kissena Corridor Park during the construction stage of the 1964-1965 Fair²³⁴ and, at the close of the Fair, hired architect William Delano, who had designed some of the most impressive mansions in the Northeast, to design the Queen's Botanical Garden.²³⁵ Not only did this relocation allow for Moses to stick to the 1936 layout for the park, but completed his desire to have Flushing Meadows include a "nature preserve" modeled on the Garden of Versailles²³⁶ and, in its contained but substantial size, Kissena allowed for the latter to materialize within Flushing Meadows' Exhibit Area.

Joseph Tirella also explains how Moses wanted a second nature preserve modeled on the Japanese Garden, but was not achieved due to the Corporation's costly demolition procedure.²³⁷ Moses wanted to retain only one aspect of Japan's 1964 pavilion—the Japanese Wall—as “the main feature of a Japanese garden” and, in this small capacity, the proposal did not justify the cost of storage for the Japanese Government.²³⁸ The Corporation already obliged exhibitors to cover all demolition costs, resulting in many defaulting on their obligations and leaving their pavilions at the site.²³⁹ Similar to the Corporation's experience with the designs of the Italian and USSR pavilions in 1939, the Fair was confronted with the harsh reality that their agreements were not legally binding but their lease of Flushing Meadows was. However, before abandoning their pavilions or accepting defeat in a costly demolition process, exhibitors attempted to sell

²³⁴ New York World's Fair 1964-1965 Fair Corporation, ed., *Post-Fair Engineering Report -- Flushing Meadow* (New York: The Fair Corporation, 1965), 10.

²³⁵ Mara, 'City diplomacy,' 3.

²³⁶ Tirella, *Tomorrow-Land*, 27.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

²³⁸ New York World's Fair 1964-1965 Corporation, *Post-Fair Engineering Report -- Flushing Meadow* (New York: The Corporation, 1965), 6.

²³⁹ Bill Cotter and Bill Young, *The 1964-1965 New York World's Fair: Creation and Legacy, Images of America* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2008), 98.

their pavilions—as a whole or in parts—in a similar fashion to the 1940 Demolition Organization led by Gibson. According to *Time Magazine*, this represented the greatest sale of surplus goods since the postwar auctions of military gear.²⁴⁰ The site contestation, in the tension between construction and destruction—peace and war—continued in this capacity. Even the pavilions and remnants of the Fair that were supposed to be relocated went missing with rumors that, for example the Tower of the Four Winds that stood over the display area of Disney’s lot, was “cut up and thrown in the nearby Flushing River during demolition.”²⁴¹ While the Corporation had been careful not to face the years-long demolition process of the previous Fair—for instance, by demolishing pavilions that lagged behind on construction in 1963—the default of many exhibitors on their agreement with the Fair meant that the Fair had to ask the city for two extensions.²⁴² It also forced a near-bankrupt Corporation to spend more of the Fair’s \$27.5 million revenue on the development of Flushing Meadows by covering demolition instead of, as the lease stated, New York schools.²⁴³ Again, the site almost returned to its original state as a dumping ground.

What remained of the Fairs in Flushing Meadows is particularly important in the context of its ephemeral legacies and its ambitious plan. The Amphitheatre and City of New York Pavilion remained from the 1939-1940 Fair as did three local exhibitors’ buildings from the 1964-1965 Fair: the New York State Pavilion, the Greyhound building, the U.S. Rubber Ferris Wheel and the Heliport. Buildings built by the City or Corporation were also kept, including Moses’ beloved Hall of Science and the Press Building. The Unisphere remained at the center of the site and was designated a New York landmark by the New York City Landmarks Preservation

²⁴⁰ *Time Magazine* in Samuel, *Tomorrow-Land*, 82.

²⁴¹ Bill Cotter and Bill Young, *The 1964-1965 New York World’s Fair: Creation and Legacy, Images of America* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2008), 106.

²⁴² Bill Cotter and Bill Young, *The 1964-1965 New York World’s Fair*, 106.

²⁴³ Samuel, *Tomorrow-Land*, 37.

Committee in 1995. Although it is the world's largest globe, for Moses, the Unisphere combatted the theory "that Flushing Meadows was inlaid with oil, uranium or gold."²⁴⁴ Exhibitors could depict the conquering of inhabitable lands in their pavilions but the Corporation made sure that Flushing Meadows would not be exploited but rather maintained and (re)developed as he envisioned.

On June 3, 1967, after decades of development Flushing Meadows was formally turned over to the city and construction on the park began.²⁴⁵ Flushing Meadows-Corona Park became, at this point, what it was intended to be in the long-term: an, albeit artificial, natural haven in New York.

²⁴⁴ New York World's Fair 1964-1965: 588 days to opening, September 12, 1962, Hagley Museum and Library, AMD-WF.

²⁴⁵ Robert Moses, *The Saga of Flushing Meadow, the Valley of Ashes* (New York: Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority, 1966), 7.

Conclusion

On April 30, 1939, in his opening day speech for the 1939 New York World's Fair, President Roosevelt reflected on the success of the American Constitution. He described how it was "planned [to] (...) fit to a constantly expanding nation" and had allowed the United States to grow from thirteen states at the time of Washington's inauguration, 150 years prior, to forty-eight in 1939.²⁴⁶ Like many monumental projects in the United States during the New Deal, the reclamation of Flushing Meadows "From Dump to Glory" was another attempt to direct the future of the nation into a better "World of Tomorrow" by controlling its landscape. This thesis analyzed the Fair from this broader perspective, challenging its traditional perception as a contested site due to international actors and contexts' effect on the Fair, by honing in on a key object of permanence: its site.

In **Chapter One**, I looked at how the natural features of Flushing Meadows were used by the Fair Corporation and the City of New York to exercise a unique level of power in a liberal state, combining a reclamation project with a utopian construction project. I addressed how various international actors tried to do the same but, ultimately, failed to dilute the power local actors took from the site including its nationalistic reference and a future-forward understanding of the urge in American culture to "achieve – and proclaim – the quantifiably superlative," as Zelinsky explained in 1973.²⁴⁷

In **Chapter Two**, I detailed how the Second World War intruded onto, and led to transformation of the fairgrounds. However, in the transformation of the space, and in the construction of the experience and memory of the Fair, the Fair Corporation's vision dominated,

²⁴⁶ Franklin D. Roosevelt, Opening of the New York World's Fair, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/209645>.

²⁴⁷ Wilbur Zelinsky, 'The Cultural Geography of the United States' (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1973), quoted in Greenhalgh, *Fair World*, 69.

even challenging the power the City held as the surveyors of the lease and owners of the site. Even when confronted by the political implications of the war, the Corporation transformed the intense awareness of the war outside of Flushing Meadows into “unawareness” within its boundaries, allowing the Fair to provide a reprieve from international conflicts.

In **Chapter Three**, I focused on how Moses harnessed the City, State, and Federal resources from 1947-1967, allowing Moses to continue to develop his park through two other monumental plans for the site: a United Nations’ World Capitol and the 1964-1965 New York World’s Fair. Thus, in the *sustained* planning of Flushing Meadows—being drawn up, reinforced, and developed across the midcentury—it continued to act as a “living site.”

By looking at the allocation of space, design policies, and conflicts that emerge at Flushing Meadows, I conclude that, despite the international acts and events that manifested at the site, the story of Flushing Meadows is ultimately one of local power. The Corporation’s “chamber of commerce men” transformed Flushing Meadows, continually exerted power over the various monumental projects at the site, and thus, embedded their vision of “order and harmony” into the site.

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