

living women in one great harem. If ever the actual poor move to destroy this evil, they will do it with the object not only of giving every man private property but, very specially, private property; they will probably exaggerate in that direction; for in that direction is the whole humor and poetry of their own lives. For the Revolution, if they make it, there will be all the features which they like and I like: the strong sense of English cosiness, the instinct for special festival, the distinction between the dignities of man and woman, responsibility of a man under his roof. If you make the Revolution, it will be marked by all the things that democracy detests and I detest: the talk about the inevitable, the love of statistics, the materialist theory of history, the trivialities of sociology, and the uproarious folly of eugenics. I know the answer you have; I know the risk I run. Perhaps democracy will never move. Perhaps the English people, if you gave it beer enough, would accept even eugenics. It is enough for me for the moment to say that I cannot believe it. The poor are so obviously right, I cannot fancy that they will never enforce their rightness against all the prigs of your party and mine. At any rate, that is my answer. I am not a socialist, just as I am not a Tory; because I have not lost faith in democracy.

G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936) was a playwright, poet, novelist, journalist, editor, theologian, philosopher, and Christian apologist. Fr. Ian Boyd, C.S.B., is the editor of the Chesterton Review.

## COMMONWEAL

### Death and Life of a Great Urban Thinker

by Steven Greenhut

The death on April 25 at the age of 89 of Jane Jacobs, author of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* and several other books, has already set off a debate over her legacy. Admirers from the New Urbanist movement see her primarily as an advocate for compact, vibrant cities. They cite Jacobs as inspiration for their war against urban sprawl. These folks have been the ones mostly called upon to eulogize her, and the casual observer would be left to think that she was one of them.

Others—myself included—recognize that Jacobs was, of course, an advocate for urban life, compact cities, and other things the New Urbanists promote but believe her biggest legacy is one of standing up for the average urban citizen against the coercive designs of city officials, planners, architects, and bureaucrats. She was, first and foremost, an advocate for freedom and individual decisionmaking. Her blasts against government planners are as stinging as those written by Ayn Rand, although they display a subtlety that Rand could never master and an understanding of community that Rand could not grasp.

In 1961, when Jacobs wrote *Death and*

*Life*, the big planning fads of the day were those advanced by the likes of New York planner Robert Moses. The poor should not be forced to live in ugly tenements, with their kids playing in the streets. They shouldn't have to endure the awfulness of crowded streetscapes with too few parks and a mixture of business and residential uses. The planners knew that what the poor needed was lots of open space, modern apartment buildings, and residential areas cordoned off from the unseemly world of commerce. Big, broad boulevards and freeways were in, as were tall, Bauhaus-style office buildings and unadorned housing blocks.

Today, we all shake our heads in dismay at urban renewal. I remember the fruits of it back East, where public housing was plopped in the middle of settled ethnic neighborhoods, where poor but vibrant areas were cleared away by bulldozers to make way for new offices. Some activists referred to urban renewal as "Negro removal." I recall one Eastern city where a couple of old buildings stood amid a sea of government parking lots, with most of the city's downtown destroyed—all thanks to the planners and their powers of subsidy, eminent domain, and central planning.

Many older cities saw their downtowns obliterated as four-lane freeways blasted through the neighborhoods, often blocking the waterfronts from the streetscape. Urban renewal, the epitome of top-down government planning, was a disaster that wrecked countless communities, many of which have never recovered.

Jacobs was at first something of a gadfly in her hometown of New York City. The *Los Angeles Times* obituary recalls the incident in which Robert Moses announced a plan to put a freeway through Washington Square in Manhattan, and Jacobs and other protesters rushed the podium. The *Times* cites an AP interview in which Jacobs recounts the imperious Moses arrogantly dismissing those who opposed the destruction of their neighborhood as "a bunch of mothers!" (How dare a group of mere mothers stand up against the designs of the elite!)

In *Death and Life*, Jacobs describes an interview with the residents of an East Harlem housing project. Officials couldn't understand why the tenants particularly despised the rectangular lawn at the project. Then one articulate tenant revealed:

"Nobody cared what we wanted when they built this place. They threw our houses down and

## LIBERAL ARTS

### PRESIDENT EXPECTED TO REMEMBER LOT'S WIFE

"*With This Ring*, the world's first magazine catering to every kind of wedding—be that same sex, interracial, or interfaith—continues with Launch [sic] plan despite obvious lack of support from White House.

"President Bush is slated to strongly [sic] reaffirm his opposition to gay marriage today and once again attempt to push through a constitutional amendment defining marriage as a union solely between a man and a woman, putting yet another obstacle in the way for those interested in same sex marriage.

"Jonathon Scott Feit, Chief Editor and Publisher of *With This Ring* magazine, says that 'President Bush is, once again, out of touch with the pulse of the people he is supposed to represent.' . . .

"*With This Ring* will be the first-ever bridal publication to broaden the scope of the traditional 'White Wedding' and reach—both from an editorial and advertising standpoint—an open-minded audience that views same sex couples, interfaith couples, interracial couples and even couples looking for a non-traditional wedding as fundamentally equal."

—from a press release for *With This Ring*, by Rachel Cone-Gorham

pushed us here and pushed our friends somewhere else. We don't have a place around here to get a cup of coffee or a newspaper even, or to borrow 50 cents. Nobody cared what we need. But the big men come and look at that grass and say, Isn't it wonderful! Now the poor have everything!"

This tenant was saying what moralists have said for thousands of years: Handsome is as handsome does. All that glitters is not gold.

She was saying more: There is a quality even meaner than outright ugliness or disorder, and this meaner quality is the dishonest mask of pretended order, achieved by ignoring or suppressing the real order that is struggling to exist and to be served.

My favorite quotation from *Death and Life* is: "As in all Utopias, the right to have plans of any significance belonged only to the planners in charge." Jacobs was writing about the Garden City, British designer Ebenezer Howard's conception of a new kind of town, based around small villages. Such towns have a form that many of us find appealing, but there is more to the life of cities than their form, as Jacobs understood.

Yes, form is important. She wrote about the old Italian neighborhood in Boston, with its crowded streets, apartments above storefronts, and lack of parks. She loved the vibrancy of the neighborhood but wrote about how the planners at Harvard and elsewhere were aghast because Boston's North End lacked all the things that smart people believed neighborhoods should have. That meant big parks, the separation of stores from homes—the sorts of things that led to awful urban-renewal projects and drove planning ideas in suburbia, where neighborhoods are cordoned off from churches and stores, where every shopping center is designed to handle the number of cars that might visit on a busy Christmas-shopping-season evening. Fortunately, the planners never got their way, and the North End is a highlight of Boston.

Now, however, planners have swung in the opposite direction. They believe that they have embraced the spirit of Jane Jacobs because they want to use the same central-planning powers to require cities to build Jacobs-approved features, such as houses with front porches and only small yards so that kids are forced to play on the

street. The Smart Growthers and New Urbanists gladly use eminent domain to condemn older suburban areas in order to replace them with the types of New Towns they like. In Brea, California, for instance, the city bulldozed its old downtown and built a decidedly New Urbanist downtown. But the old downtown, like older downtowns in other nearby cities, had a sense of quirkiness and vibrancy. The new downtown is totally corporate and fake. Sure, the new houses have design features from the past, but the main street is basically a bunch of fancy subsidized movie theaters, and the stores are chains that people can find anywhere. Folks crowd the area to go to the movie theaters and nearby restaurants, but the place has no soul, no life, no sense of adventure. Only the planners in charge have the right to decide which businesses go where. In real cities, anyone can open a business; anyone can pursue his dreams. As Jacobs wrote, "All that glitters is not gold."

Remembering Jacobs, Leonard Gilroy of the libertarian Reason Foundation wrote in the *Wall Street Journal* that,

Sadly, many in the Smart Growth and New Urbanism movements cite Jacobs as the inspiration for their efforts to combat so-called "urban sprawl" and make over suburbia with dense, walkable downtowns, mixed-use development, and varied building styles.

But Gilroy notes that,

While Jacobs identified these as organic elements of successful cities, planners have eagerly tried to impose them on cities in formulaic fashion, regardless of their contextual appropriateness and compatibility with the underlying economic order.

Exactly. Jacobs knew what made cities great. Not central planning, not subsidies and highfalutin architectural designs: It was ordinary people, pursuing their lives in their own ways. It was the churches and homes and small businesses. As she noted, cities have an "intricate social and economic order" that wells up from the bottom but cannot be imposed from the top. The elites do more damage than good when they try to create utopias. These are the real lessons from Jacobs. And, as she wrote in the last line of *Death and Life*, "[L]ively, diverse, intense cities contain

the seeds of their own regeneration, with energy enough to carry over for problems and needs outside themselves."

Steven Greenhut, senior editorial writer and columnist for the Orange County Register in Santa Ana, California, is the author of *Abuse of Power: How the Government Misuses Eminent Domain*.

## IMMIGRATION

### A Liberal Policy

by Joe Prussing

In regard to the recent controversy over illegal immigration, allow me to offer a few liberal proposals.

The problem could be easily and immediately solved by putting all illegal aliens to work constructing a wall across the entire southern border. (They make up 25 percent of the construction industry, anyway.) And, at below minimum wages, what a bargain! But I'm afraid the ACLU and 12 million other illegal aliens just wouldn't see the humor, or irony, in it.

As a prerequisite to citizenship, we could have all aliens (legal or otherwise) serve a minimum of two years in the U.S. Armed Forces. Not only would that help us fight the "War on Terror," but it would help protect our own borders—which, by the way, is what the military is supposed to be doing.

Or we could just do what Mexico does: Outlaw all immigration; close our borders; punish the bad guys; ban all protests; and throw anyone who disagrees with us in jail. But wait! Isn't that what's causing the problem to begin with—the Mexican government? Oh, well, so much for NAFTA.

And last but not least, we should consider "profiling" all illegal immigrants and allow only the good-looking and smart ones to come in. Hey, we already have a surplus of ugly and stupid people. The smart ones, of course, will work hard, pay taxes, have kids, and send them to public school, where they can learn, among other things, that Davy Crockett was a war criminal, Texas was stolen from Mexico, and the rest of us are racists. And the good-looking ones... well, who cares what they do? As long as they look good doing it and can still mow our lawns. ¡Si, se puede!

Joe Prussing writes from Port St. Lucie, Florida.