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From Paris to New Haven: Maurice Rotival and the Longue Durée of Urban Renewal

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FROM PARIS TO NEW HAVEN:
MAURICE ROTIVAL AND THE LONGUE DURÉE OF URBAN RENEWAL

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FROM PARIS TO NEW HAVEN:
MAURICE ROTIVAL AND THE LONGUE DURÉE OF URBAN RENEWAL

SENIOR ESSAY
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

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1898: Ebenezer Howard published *Garden Cities of To-Morrow*

1904: Eugéne Hénard presents plan for Paris

1910: Olmsted Jr. and Gilbert publish *Plan for New Haven*

1913: Rotival graduates from L’École Centrale and joins the army as a cartographer

1933: Le Corbusier publishes *Ville Radieuse*

1939: Rotival presents his first master plan for Caracas

1942-1944: Rotival conducts comprehensive study of New Haven culminating in *Tomorrow is Here*

1946: Rotival returns to Caracas to update 1939 plan

1953: Richard Lee is elected as New Haven’s Mayor, serving until 1970

1955: Rotival updates plan for New Haven and publishes *Rebirth of New Haven*

1958: Rotival puts forth *Planning Doctrine and Method of Work*

1957-1962: The Wooster Square and Oak Street Connector projects are implemented

1967: Riots break out in New Haven in response to substandard living conditions
Introduction

A French urbanist, Maurice Rotival was the head of planning in New Haven during a critical time in the city’s development, overseeing its transition from an aging industrial city to a national showcase of urban renewal. Rotival’s work in New Haven from the 1940s to 1960s must not be viewed in isolation. Rather, his approach as a master planner is embedded in the “longue durée” of modernism and planning theory. The transformation of New Haven after World War II was as much a product of urban planning ideas from Europe at the turn of the twentieth century as it was a response to so-called urban blight in the postwar period. By tracing his early influences, Rotival’s significant contribution to modern urban design is best understood and placed in its proper context.

In 1941, facing the challenges posed by industrial decline, lower wages, and traffic congestion, New Haven Mayor John Murphy commissioned a coalition of experts to propose redevelopment solutions. Led by Rotival, the committee conducted a six-month study, offering recommendations for economic development, population density, and traffic circulation. Influenced by European urbanists such as Eugène Hénard, Ebenezer Howard, and Le Corbusier, the Rotival committee presented its master plan in 1942. Hugely impactful, the Rotival plan served as the foundation for New Haven’s redevelopment over the next several decades. However, it was not the first twentieth-century attempt to modernize New Haven.

Relying on late nineteenth century City Beautiful and Beaux-Arts principles, Cass Gilbert and Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. were the first architects to present New Haven in a modern frame. In their comprehensive 1910 Plan, known for its grand avenue connecting the New Haven Green to Union Station, Gilbert and Olmsted Jr. stressed the importance of improving transportation in

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redeveloping modern infrastructure. Among other features, their proposal for the central business district would have increased the size of Temple Street and developed a subway system to manage local and suburban traffic.²

![Image of maps showing urban plans](image)

Figures 1 and 2 – Gilbert and Olmsted’s 1910 Plan for New Haven with scheme connecting the Green to Union Station (left, highlighted) and 1942 Map of New Haven Traffic arteries by Maurice Rotival courtesy of the New Haven City Plan Commission (right)

The 1910 Plan put forth by Gilbert and Olmsted did not take hold with city officials, leaving the status quo in place. From Rotival’s perspective, the 1910 plan lacked a fundamental feature: the development of a dynamic highway network that would connect New Haven to people, places, and markets beyond the town and the state. In his view, the last effective comprehensive plan dated back to the city’s founding in 1638.³ Though earlier plans had nudged New Haven’s development, Rotival envisioned a new urban order grounded in a wealth of detailed statistical analyses. Accordingly, Rotival attempted to elevate the field of urban planning from an art to a quasi-science.

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³ Maurice Emil Henri Rotival Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, Box 202B.
By creating direct-access highways and expanded thoroughfares, Rotival’s 1942 plan envisioned a more accessible New Haven for commuters and visitors alike. Calling for an overhaul of the existing infrastructure, Rotival’s plan essentially viewed New Haven as a blank canvas. From Rotival’s perspective, his interventions would offer practical and effective solutions to the economic stagnation that had lingered in New Haven after the Great Depression. With a top-down, paternalistic approach to urban infrastructure, Rotival hoped to reshape the identity of New Haven. Modernizing the urban environment would best address the problems of decay, congestion, and suburbanization affecting New Haven and other American cities.

Rotival’s interventions in New Haven have heretofore been viewed in isolation, if considered at all. In reality, his philosophy as a master planner was influenced by European pioneers in modern urban design. Rotival was a direct disciple of Eugene Hénard. Hénard, Ebenezer Howard, and Le Corbusier put forth modern planning concepts that became essential to Rotival’s approach. All of them envisioned a modern city of tomorrow that would break free from the older models that shaped urban form and design. Though Corbusier’s French-Swiss modernist approach has been put in opposition to the work of Jane Jacobs as well as linked to the actions and ideas of his disciple Robert Moses, the phenomenon of urban renewal remains curiously detached from the longer history of urban planning.

The City of Tomorrow: Modern Urban Utopias

As Ebenezer Howard noted in his 1898 book Garden Cities of To-Morrow, the old city had “done its job.” What Howard meant was that the cities of old had reached their capacity and

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outgrown the functions and civic and commercial realities which shaped them. In Howard’s view, with the increased problems resulting from overpopulation, pollution, and a lack of green spaces, establishing a hygienic modern city was of paramount importance. Faced with changing urban dynamics triggered by technological breakthroughs, Howard worked outside of the existing framework, presenting a new system to promote sustainability and a more balanced urban structure on a regional scale. In Howard’s urban utopia, the “Garden City,” green spaces and public parks, mixed in with residential and industrial zones, would form the basis of a self-sufficient and sustainable town of no more than 30,000 residents. Once a Garden City reached its capacity, a new one would develop, ultimately forming a connected grouping of smaller cities, surrounded by the countryside and connected by transportation routes, known as the “greenbelt.”

Further, as sociologist and urban historian Lewis Mumford noted in a 1946 introductory essay to a reprinted edition of Garden Cities:

Howard attacked the whole problem of the city’s development, not merely its physical growth but the interrelationship of urban functions within the community and the integration of urban and rural patterns, for the vitalizing of urban life on one hand and the intellectual and social improvement on the other hand.

A disciple of sociologist and planner Patrick Geddes, Mumford identified with Howard who, for him, represented an unexpected connection between modern urban planning and sociology. Viewing the city as a living organism, Mumford embraced Howard’s vision of using spatial planning as way to foster mechanisms of social interaction in cities where it had been lost during the period of industrialization. Like Howard, Mumford believed that the infrastructure of the industrial city had outpaced its social capacity and needed to be destroyed. As Mumford explained, Howard’s decentralized approach did not represent an early vision of suburbanization. Rather, his

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7 Howard and Osborn, *Garden Cities of To-Morrow*.
8 Howard and Osborn, *Garden Cities of To-Morrow*, 34.
urban framework was “the antithesis of the suburb...[it was] a more integrated foundation of effective urban life.”

Seen this way, Howard’s *Garden Cities* presented an entirely new perspective on urbanity.

Mumford’s sociological view of the mid-nineteenth century city emphasized its broken nature, a critique similar to the one that Howard voiced half a century earlier in Europe. Written in 1938, Mumford’s *Culture of Cities* presented an historical analysis of the old city’s shortcomings and a perspective on counteracting those challenges in the modern-day city.

Mumford identified the fundamental problem sociologists struggled with at the time:

> Our capacity for effective physical organization enormously increased; but our ability to create a harmonious counterpoise to these external linkages by means of co-operative and civic associations on both a region and world-wide basis...has not kept pace with these mechanical triumphs.

Mumford highlighted a discontinuity between technological advances and social mechanisms, contextualizing the inherent problems of the old city that Howard encountered four decades earlier.

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9 Howard and Osborn, *Garden Cities of To-Morrow*, 34.

*Figure 3 – Ebenezer Howard’s model Garden City featuring public parks, green spaces, and six diagonal boulevards.*
Howard’s transformative view on regional planning influenced several great urban planners of the twentieth century, including Hénard, Le Corbusier, and Rotival. Instead of viewing urban space as strictly confined, Howard stressed a regional network of smaller towns connected by an efficient transportation network. Though Rotival’s approach to modern design operated within the framework of the existing city, his consideration of regional planning can be traced to Howard’s sprawling urban utopia.

Presenting his ideas thirty years after Howard, Le Corbusier offered a different vision for the future of cities. In *La Ville Radieuse*, first published in 1933, Le Corbusier constructed his own modern urban utopia.\(^\text{11}\) Though similar to Howard’s attempt to completely redefine the urban environment, Le Corbusier took a more futuristic approach, relying on advances in modern technology to establish a new economic, social, and cultural order. From Le Corbusier’s perspective, the old city was in a state of disarray.

Every day the anxiety and depression of modern life springs up a fresh: the city is swell, the city is filling up...The street becomes appalling, noisy, dusty, dangerous; automobiles can scarcely do more than crawl along it; pedestrians, heralded together on the sidewalks, get in each other’s way.\(^\text{12}\)

Le Corbusier identified the same problems as Howard and later Mumford. To solve problems of overpopulation, inefficiency, and chaos in urban centers, Le Corbusier proposed an architectural revolution centered around modern technology, including mathematics and machines.

Le Corbusier’s technical recommendations significantly influenced Rotival’s approach. In Le Corbusier’s view, “the pedestrian never meets a vehicle inside the city. The mechanical transportation network is an entirely new organ, a separate entity.”\(^\text{13}\) In his 1942 plan, following Le Corbusier’s model, Rotival carefully designed traffic routes into and out of the city that

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\(^{12}\) Le Corbusier and Jeanneret-Gris, *The Radiant City*, 91.
\(^{13}\) Le Corbusier and Jeanneret-Gris, *The Radiant City*, 94.
preserved the pedestrian experience within the urban center. As Le Corbusier noted, “il faut tuer la rue corridor,” meaning that the older model of organic and disorganized streets contributed to urban chaos and needed to be eliminated in the modern age.¹⁴ Like Howard, Le Corbusier stressed the importance of following a comprehensive and orderly plan, viewing city planning not as a haphazard pursuit, but rather as an intellectual and professional occupation.

The modern planning approach of Howard and Le Corbusier that inspired urban renewal initiatives has been criticized by anti-paternalistic thinkers, including the community activist hero Jane Jacobs. In Becoming Jane Jacobs, Peter Laurence reexamines the career and early work of Jane Jacobs culminating in the 1961 Death and Life of Great American Cities.¹⁵ Laurence notes that while Jacobs critiqued modern thinkers such as Howard and Le Corbusier, “she admitted their ideas about cities were the product of their times, particularly the epistemologies.”¹⁶ As Jacobs herself underscored in Death and Life:

It is understandable that men who were young in the 1920s were captivated by the vision of the freeway Radiant City, with the specious promise that it would be appropriate to an automobile age. At least it was then a new idea; to men of the generation of New York’s Robert Moses, for example, it was radical and exciting in the days when their minds were growing and ideas were forming.¹⁷

Though Jacobs has been portrayed as a staunch critic of modern urban planning, she did not blame planning theorists for their modern utopias. As Laurence explains, Jacobs did not view the damage done to the city as a direct result of the “antihistorical and utopian spirit of modernism.”¹⁸ Instead, as Jacobs noted in Death and Life: “Bankers and government administrative officials who

¹⁶ Laurence, Becoming Jane Jacobs, 7.
¹⁷ Laurence, Becoming Jane Jacobs, 8.
¹⁸ Laurence, Becoming Jane Jacobs, 28.
guarantee mortgages do not invent planning theories.” Rather, they “pick up their ideas from idealists, a generation late.”

Further, Jacobs recognized that modern thought alone was not the cause:

It is disturbing to think that men who are young today, men who are being trained now for their careers, should accept on the grounds that they must be modern in their thinking, conceptions about cities and traffic.

In Jacobs’ view, early modern theorists, such as Howard and Le Corbusier, may have been wrong in their approach to city planning, but their original take on the city was understandable and even exciting at the time. Jacobs noted in *Death and Life* that that she hoped to put forth “a system of thought about the great city” herself, following in the footsteps of Howard and Le Corbusier.

Better understood as a “neofunctionalist,” Jacobs shared many functionalist components of modern design. In *Death and Life*, Jacobs sought to understand the “relation of function to design in large cities.” Jacob’s neofunctionalist approach questioned the tremendous focus in modern design on the commitment to the master plan at all costs. Instead, Jacobs focused on improving functionality on a micro scale, namely the uses of sidewalks, parks, and neighborhood environments.

In Jacobs’ view, modern urban planning was disconnected from the actual function of cities on the street level. Though working in opposition to modernism, Jacobs appreciated the efforts of modern thinkers like Howard and Le Corbusier to confront urban challenges with a fresh perspective.

The urban utopias put forth by Howard and Le Corbusier provided the foundations for Rotival’s approach. Howard emphasized the importance of regional planning, and Le Corbusier

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offered dramatic technical solutions that Rotival relied upon during the period of urban renewal. In addition to the significant influence of Howard and Le Corbusier, the work of Eugéne Hénard provides an even more direct link to the development of Rotival’s planning philosophy. Rotival studied under Hénard at L’École Centrale Paris in the early twentieth century. Rotival considered himself a disciple. In this sense, the story of Rotival and urban renewal in New Haven can be understood, in part, by considering the work of Hénard at the turn of the twentieth century in Paris.

Paris 1904: Eugéne Hénard and Master Planning in Paris

After heading the planning of the 1900 Exposition Universelle international world’s fair in Paris, French urbanist Eugéne Hénard turned his attention to redesigning the city’s obsolete traffic system. By the turn of the twentieth century, Paris had become overpopulated, chaotic, and ill-equipped to cope with the growth of its metropolitan area and commuter traffic. In addition, with growing concerns about hygiene, Hénard hoped to establish new “espaces libre” and alleviate health issues for city dwellers. In his 1904 “Plan General des Transformations de Paris,” Hénard presented a contemporary approach in an effort to elevate Paris to modern standards. With his work in Paris, Hénard formalized the profession of comprehensive city planning, influencing a generation of urbanists in his wake.

Born in 1847, Eugène Hénard worked for the “Traveux de Paris,” the office of public works, where he planned and implemented significant structural changes to Paris’s traffic system. In his 1904 plan, Hénard expanded Haussmann’s boulevard network, creating diagonal thoroughfares to ease congestion within the city and connect the urban center to surrounding areas.

One of Hénard’s designs included a “grand croisée,” two large intersecting boulevards cutting through the heart of the city. The two radial roads were placed with spacing considerations and an emphasis on preserving important building structures. In the “grand croisée” proposal, Hénard was not concerned with creating an aesthetically symmetric design, but rather the most efficient and expedient traffic routes possible.

In addition to the “grand-croisée,” Hénard expanded on Haussmann’s boulevard system by proposing several new radial roads. In developing his plan, Hénard considered the difference between inbound and outbound traffic. While traffic moving into the urban center converged on one point, traffic flowing out of the city led to several distinct points. Accordingly, Hénard’s “grand-croisée” boulevards intersected at one point in the city center, but led to four distinct areas on the periphery. Unlike his predecessors, Hénard valued an urban traffic network that would connect to surrounding areas; with the rise of automobile traffic, Hénard viewed this as an essential feature of modern urban infrastructure. As his plan indicates, to create the most efficient traffic

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26 Wolf, Eugène Hénard and the Beginning of Urbanism in Paris, 1900-1914, 42.
pattern throughout Paris’s arrondisements, Hénard envisioned a combination of ring roads and diagonal thoroughfares.

With the population of Paris increasing from 1,800,000 in 1872 to 2,800,000 in 1911, Hénard proposed the expansion of “espaces libres,” which he defined as large parks and planted squares. Hénard admired the work of Haussmann in creating two major parks, the Buttes-Chaumont and Parc de Montsouris, as well as expanding the Bois de Vincennes and the Bois de Bologne.29

Despite the efforts of Haussmann, park space had decreased by nearly sixty-five percent in the period from 1789 to 1900. Hoping to reverse that trend, Hénard presented his “boulevard à redans,” a series of two ring roads with nine newly established parks alongside.30 Proposed in 1903, the “boulevard à redans” would not only improve circulation, but would also connect the network of newly established parks. Distinguishing Hénard’s “boulevard à redans” were the neighborhood parks he designed alongside the ring roads. In his innovative approach, Hénard proposed an alternating sequence of buildings and small parks, creating “espaces libre” along boulevards historically lined with building fronts. Hénard’s approach was tied to the Garden City movement advanced by Howard in England, which centered on redefining urban spaces to improve the health and welfare of city dwellers. Championed by Howard, Hénard, and Le Corbusier, the concept of incorporating green spaces into the city would become a cornerstone of modern urban redevelopment initiatives in the United States throughout the first half of the twentieth century, including Rotival’s plans for New Haven.

Also a pioneer of statistical urban studies, Hénard analyzed traffic patterns in Paris and compared them to other European cities such as London, Berlin, and Moscow. Notably, Hénard’s 1904 plan included a flow diagram, labeling roads according to their traffic intensity. Unlike planners of the previous generation, Hénard viewed master planning as interdisciplinary, a product of the work of multiple branches of city government. In Hénard’s view, the haphazard approach taken by his predecessors was inadequate for addressing the problems of the modern city. With little statistical information available, Hénard conducted studies himself by standing at intersections and documenting passing traffic. In addition to his theoretical contributions, Hénard’s revolutionary statistical approach significantly influenced the methods of his disciples.

In 1904, at the time Hénard proposed the “Plan General des Transformations de Paris,” the government apparatus needed to carry out a comprehensive infrastructure plan simply did not

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32 Wolf, Eugène Hénard and the Beginning of Urbanism in Paris, 1900-1914, 44.
33 Wolf, Eugène Hénard and the Beginning of Urbanism in Paris, 1900-1914, 44.
34 Wolf, Eugène Hénard and the Beginning of Urbanism in Paris, 1900-1914, 44.
exist. Nevertheless, through his efforts, Hénard created the first modern comprehensive master plan for Paris, providing a roadmap for the transformation that took place over the next several decades.35

Elevating the profession of master planning in Paris, Hénard offered original planning concepts and methods that would have a profound international influence during the twentieth century. One of Hénard’s most prominent protégés was Maurice Rotival. In 1939, Rotival accepted a professorship at the Yale Art and Architecture School in New Haven. Over the next several decades, Rotival’s planning concepts would transform New Haven. Rotival also created an architectural firm with an international practice responsible for comprehensive plans in other cities, notably Caracas. Placed in the fuller context of this “longue durée” of modern urban planning, it is clear that the ideas Rotival championed did not just materialize out of thin air, but rather represented a culmination of ideas and methods that emerged in Europe decades earlier.

**Becoming an Urbanist**

Graduating from L’École Centrale in 1913, Rotival was drafted into the army as a pilot in World War I. Without modern photographic technology, pilots like Rotival were asked to draw enemy positions from the sky.36 Through this experience, Rotival became highly skilled at sketching landscapes. When constructing city plans, Rotival relied on similar aerial images to inform his work. For example, before constructing his plan for Venezuela, Rotival made sketches that highlighted important topographic features of the terrain. His training as an army pilot set the stage for a comprehensive and visual planning approach that was literally top-down.

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The same challenges facing modern urban planners were present during Rotival’s experience in WWI. As Rotival noted: “the planner makes war against chaos and unhealthy conditions with time being a major factor for a valid intervention.”\(^\text{37}\) Reacting to overpopulation and congestion in cities, Rotival viewed the city as being in a state of disarray. Like a doctor performing surgery, Rotival sought to heal wounded urban spaces through dramatic action – i.e. redevelopment plans.

A militaristic approach to modern planning was also championed by Le Corbusier. As Yale Professor of Architecture Alan Plattus notes, Le Corbusier viewed “the old street as the enemy” and believe that “unsentimentally one must bypass the old street and have the boldness and vision to create a new street.”\(^\text{38}\) Plattus explains that Le Corbusier’s “militaristic attitude about the role of urbanism in unlocking the spatial energy and potential of the new city was not hamstrung by sentimentality.”\(^\text{39}\) Rotival’s military background informed his dramatic approach to urban planning, mirroring the mindset of Le Corbusier who believed that the problems of the city could be solved in one bold stroke. The mixed-use street created congestion and chaos. This needed to be eliminated, no matter the cost to preexisting infrastructure. In contrast, the Jacobs neofunctionalist approach resisted the comprehensive, top-down approach to city planning, focusing instead on understanding the existing infrastructure and offering more subtle reforms.


\(^{39}\) Plattus, “The Capitalist City and Progressive Urbanism.”
In 1919, as a response to the wartime damage to France’s infrastructure, the Law Cornudet was adopted, requiring French towns with over 10,000 inhabitants to develop master plans. The law also called for the formation of planning commissions to organize the planning process. Codifying the objective of building French cities of the future, the Law Cornudet was part of the larger healing process following the massive destruction of WWI. In turn, the role of the master planner became more important, making way for architects like Rotival to have a significant impact on reconstruction in the post-war era. With the increased demand for comprehensive plans, talented cartographers like Rotival were in demand. Capitalizing on his expertise, Rotival decided to pursue a career in urban planning.

Though influential in planning the redevelopment of Reims later in his career, Rotival’s professional ambitions went beyond reconstructing decayed French infrastructure. Rotival sought

Figure 8 - Rotival’s topographic sketch of Venezuelan landscape informed by his training as a cartographer in the war.  

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43 Panchasi, Future Tense. 50.  
to spread his approach internationally, impacting modern urban design on the grandest stage. Rotival’s 1939 Plan for Caracas was his first attempt to present his philosophy and demonstrate that the concepts he had learned during his time with Hénard in Paris could offer concrete modern solutions that transcended time and place.

**Caracas and the Formation of Rotival’s Regional Approach**

Rotival received a commission from the Venezuelan government to create a master plan for Caracas in the mid 1930s. The main feature of his 1939 plan was a monumental boulevard cutting through the heart of the city. Modeled on the Parisian Avenue des Champs-Elysees, the newly established artery would first and foremost alleviate traffic concerns. Known as the Avenida Principal, the boulevard would measure thirty meters wide, replacing ten decaying city blocks.

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45 Maurice Henri Rotival Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, Box 198
with commercial frontage. Rotival’s plan stressed the importance of a diagonal axis cutting through the city. Like urban renewal initiatives seen later in New Haven, Rotival’s plan for Caracas required cataclysmic demolition and significant displacement.47

Following a spike in oil from discovered reserves, the Venezuelan government sought to establish legitimacy; Rotival’s proposal for the capital was meant to symbolize the country’s newfound wealth and project strength and stability both at home and abroad. Still reliant on foreign technology to procure its significant oil reserves, the Venezuelan government faced foreign pressure to maintain stability. At the same time, with oil money pouring into public coffers, citizens demanded public investment to improve infrastructure. By creating the Avenida Principal, a grand boulevard leading to a redeveloped government square with several government administrative buildings, Rotival’s plan would project national prestige and signal the power of the Venezuelan government.48 Just as the Champs-Elysees leading to the Arc de Triomphe symbolized French wealth, Rotival’s grandiose Avenida Principal would establish Caracas as an important capital of South America.

Further, Rotival’s grand Avenida Principal would improve automobile circulation through the heart of the city. Le Corbusier’s concept of separating traffic and pedestrians was a focal point of the plan. The Avenida Principal improved commuter traffic into the city while establishing civic and commercial space for pedestrians.49 In the end, Rotival’s 1939 Plan for Caracas was never realized. With the coming of World War II, it became infeasible to implement the proposed massive infrastructure overhaul.50 Still, Rotival’s work had a lasting impact, serving as a foundational model for Caracas in the years to follow. In fact, in 1946, Rotival returned to Caracas

50 Hein, “Maurice Rotival Part I,” 258.
to expand on his earlier work and offer fresh solutions to address the increase in automobile congestion that developed in the post-WWII era.

The proposals put forth by Rotival in Caracas and New Haven were strikingly similar. With both cities facing the challenges of suburbanization triggered by the automobile, Rotival stressed urban centralization and circulation within larger regional, national, and even global concepts. The city, in short, needed to become more legible in an era of increasing global awareness and capital growth.

In 1947, Rotival and his colleagues published the *Case for Regional Planning with Special Reference to New England*, which, as the title suggests, stressed the importance of regional considerations in conjunction with city planning. Just as Howard focused on developing a sustainable regional network, Rotival’s approach to urban planning reached beyond the city walls. Rotival attacked the current administrative structure, arguing that a “pooling of all powers and resources” was necessary to achieve “effective regional planning.” In doing so, Rotival raised the stakes of modern urban planning:

> Planning and action at the national level, activities which are carried on in the region, the state, the metropolitan community, and the local neighborhood unit… still have a paramount importance in conditioning the extent to which the people of any given area can achieve basic democratic values.

Not only were urban planners expected to improve transportation, housing, and industrial infrastructure, but they also sought to promote the goals, objectives, and values of a given community, region, or nation. Like Howard and later Mumford, Rotival’s approach addressed the “accelerating technological improvement, and corresponding institutional changes that began to

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52 McDougal and Rotival, *The Case for Regional Planning*, 4.
disrupt whatever logic there had been in the economy of these early administrative units.”

In other words, the technological revolution had advanced parts of society at an unsustainable rate, and Rotival viewed regional planning as a way to mold “the physical environment to the satisfaction of human needs.”

Rotival was not the first to view urban centers in the larger context of their geographic region. Mumford’s mentor, Patrick Geddes, discussed the “megalopolis,” which he viewed as a stage of human development and the evolution of laws governing the social development of humankind. Writing in 1915, Geddes noted that the development of the megalopolis was inevitable:

> The expectation is not absurd that [in] the not very distant future [we] will see practically one vast city-line along the Atlantic Coast for five hundred miles, and stretching back at many points; with a total of…many millions [in] population.

Geddes viewed the megalopolis as a natural phenomenon, a network of smaller towns that developed into larger regions, or what he called “conurbations.” Reflecting Howard’s decentralized Garden City concept, Geddes argued for a sustainable and regionally focused urban environment. In contrast, Rotival stressed a more centralized approach with larger cities anchoring regional activity. Nevertheless, though offering different approaches, the sociologist Geddes and modernist Rotival, both rejected a view of the city in isolation of its regional context.

Rotival also thought globally: “New England as a geographic concept may be best visualized against the larger background from which it is inseparable.”

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54 McDougal and Rotival, *The Case for Regional Planning*, 23.
order to bring the organism to a state of equilibrium, “values, institutions, and resources” must be “structured into functional components, as interrelated and indispensable.”

Rotival’s career as an international planner reflects this philosophy. Like Howard and Mumford, Rotival did not limit his goals to redefining physical space.

For example, Rotival’s work in Europe after WWII illustrated his global approach to modern planning, which was centered around the geographic, economic, and political characteristics of a given region. Stationed in Berlin as part of a commission to shape Europe’s redevelopment in the post-WWII era, Rotival viewed regional, cross-border planning as a means to further peace and economic development in Europe. Just as the New England region fit within the larger context of North America, Rotival proposed the reorganization of Europe into more productive geo-political zones. Rotival believed that nationalistic planning of old was inadequate, and that a more interconnected Europe would produce peace, prosperity, and a new state of equilibrium. Though Rotival’s vision for Europe never received official support, his regional perspective developed in the 1930s and early 1940s became the basis for his work in America in his post-war career. Once more, as a man ahead of his times, Rotival portended the evolution of the European Union, which connected European nations economically and eventually opened up borders through the 1985 Schengen agreement.

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Similarly, with potential to develop as a capital of South America, Rotival viewed Caracas through a regional and global frame. Returning to Caracas in 1946, Rotival double-downed on his

59 McDougal and Rotival, The Case for Regional Planning, 36.
61 Carola Hein, “Maurice Rotival: French Planning on a World-Scale (Part II),” Planning Perspectives 17, no. 4 (October 1, 2002): 326.
62 Hein, “Maurice Rotival Part II.” 326.
modern planning approach. During Rotival’s time in Europe, a housing project known as El Silencio had been built in Caracas. Designed by modernist architect Carlos Villaneuva, El Silencio partially disrupted Rotival’s initial axis plan centered around the Avenida Principal. In addition, Rotival’s projections from 1939 regarding increased traffic needs for Caracas had been largely surpassed. Rotival’s major criticism at the time focused on the lack of a diagonal distributor to channel traffic to the Avenida Principal.

In response, Rotival devised a plan to streamline traffic on the Avenida Principal through the building of Centro Simon Bolivar, a shopping and transportation center that included a bus station and a helicopter landing area. Referred to as the “Venezuelan Rockefeller Center,” the Bolivar would allow traffic to pass underneath a pair of twin towers, with designated shopping and transportation areas on the first floor. Rotival’s ambitious design reflected his belief in the centralization and circulation he found lacking in pre-modern cities. Rotival went so far as to criticize the design of Rockefeller Center in New York, noting: “what a difference if this city had been settled on a system of platforms, garages, circulation, etc., which would have gradually been related on the external highways.” In Rotival’s view, even a renowned metropolis like New York could benefit from a modern design promoting efficiency of space and an interconnected transportation network.

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63 Hein, “Maurice Rotival Part II.” 327.
64 Hein, “Maurice Rotival Part II.” 327.
65 Hein, “Maurice Rotival Part II.” 327.
66 Hein, “Maurice Rotival Part II.” 327.
Developed years later, the Le Corbusian-influenced Empire State Plaza in Albany offers a point of comparison. Breaking ground in 1959 and fully completed in 1976, the Empire State Plaza was commissioned by Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller and designed by Wallace Harrison, a colleague of Le Corbusier on the design of the United Nations in the early 1950s. Mirroring the Centro Simon Bolivar, the Empire State Plaza included a transportation center, a shopping mall and a highway artery running under four office towers. Harrison’s modern design hoped to reinvigorate Albany’s downtown after years of decay. Like Rotival’s Centro Simon Bolivar, the construction of the Empire State Plaza required the clearing of a large swath of land. The projects in Caracas and Albany focused on the modernist priorities of centralization, leveling, efficiency of space, and circulation. As the Empire State Plaza example illustrates, the Centro Simon Bolivar was Corbusian in nature, sharing Le Corbusier’s futuristic urban vision. Rotival showed a willingness to test these modern ideas early in his career. Significantly, the Empire State Plaza

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67 Maurice Henri Rotival Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, Box 198
illustrates the international genesis of modern planning ideas, which later took root in the United States.

The Bolivar also emphasized the free flow of traffic, containing movement similar to the roundabout that Hénard included in his plan for Paris. Traffic passing underneath the Bolivar was undisturbed by the building structure. In Paris, Hénard carefully studied the intersection and concluded that circular routes would enable automobile traffic to be in constant motion. Though offering different solutions, Rotival and Hénard both stressed circulation. Rotival’s design clearly represented the influence of Le Corbusier and Hénard, stressing centralization of civic functions and efficiency of movement.

Rotival’s proposals in Caracas reimagined the old city. Integral to Rotival’s work is the homogeneity of his approach, regardless of time and place. Like Howard, Le Corbusier, and

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Hénard, who put forth transformational modern urban utopias, Rotival championed a modern planning philosophy that could be utilized in different geographies, economies, and cultures. As the Caracas plan illustrates, centralization, circulation, and regionalism became the foundational components of this approach.

Rotival’s commitment to modern planning doctrine explains his distinguished international career. Petitioning for a project or plan, Rotival could communicate his philosophy convincingly, offering a formula to solve major problems of the old city. However, Rotival’s theoretical approach would deliver mixed results in New Haven. There, during the period of urban renewal, it decimated existing neighborhoods to create his ambitious modern metropolis.

**New Haven Proposal 1: Tomorrow is Here**

The 1942 Plan for New Haven culminated in a report released in 1944 entitled *Tomorrow is Here*. As the title indicates, the report represented an aspirational attempt to comprehensively modernize New Haven’s infrastructure on a local and regional scale. The report analyzed historical economic trends to prepare “for future demands on the city in all fields of activity such as highways, industrial districts and residential areas.”

In 1638, John Brockett presented the first plan for New Haven featuring a nine-square grid. The first city plan in America, Brockett’s proposal guided New Haven’s initial urban development. The 1944 report presented itself as a modern-day update of the nine-square plan that “has lived for 300 years.” Though in 1910 Gilbert and Olmsted Jr. offered their version of a master plan, Rotival viewed this work as ineffective in changing New Haven’s urban environment. By viewing

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72 Maurice Henri Rotival Papers, “Tomorrow is Here,” Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, Box 202B.
73 Maurice Henri Rotival Papers, “Tomorrow is Here,” Box 202B.
74 Maurice Henri Rotival Papers, “Tomorrow is Here,” Box 202B.
75 Maurice Henri Rotival Papers, “Tomorrow is Here,” Box 202B.
New Haven through a regional framework, Rotival hoped to effect significant change through a modern urban planning initiative.

Like the 1947 *Case for Regional Planning*, the 1944 report raised the stakes; the fate of urban dwellers, according to the report, depended on the effectiveness of modern planning solutions. As the report noted: “prosperous, livable and healthy cities make a stable nation… rundown, congested cities breed trouble.”

The success of cities rested on effective urban planning, which set out to do more than just alter the physical structure of New Haven, but to also foster the economic, social, and cultural conditions of vibrant and sustainable urban life.

The 1944 report recommended improvements to New Haven’s transportation, sustainability, business, industry, and housing.

As a prelude to the discussion of the report’s five main focal points, Rotival emphasized his fundamental belief in centralization. Rotival viewed the success of the Central Business District (CBD) in New Haven as essential to recreating a vibrant urban core. As the report noted, though the “center has everything…it has decayed.” Further, the CBD was failing “because it needs better access highways, more parking facilities, modern stores, less auto and pedestrian congestion, and better shopping services.” Rotival observed that the city of old could not address today’s problems.

To 1890—no traffic problems. Central business area was compact and healthy…about 1900—Trolley lines were laid through the city streets. Congestion appeared. Business started out along trolley lines…Today—30,000 cars jam the same old streets. Congestion is strangling the downtown. Business is moving away, leaving an obsolescent core in the center.

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76 Maurice Henri Rotival Papers, “Tomorrow is Here,” Box 202B.
77 Maurice Henri Rotival Papers, “Tomorrow is Here,” Box 202B.
78 Maurice Henri Rotival Papers, “Tomorrow is Here,” Box 202B.
79 Maurice Henri Rotival Papers, “Tomorrow is Here,” Box 202B.
Fixing the congestion in the CBD required the introduction of three new road types: circumferential routes, radial thoroughfares, and inter-regional highways. Circumferential routes would “distribute traffic around the city by connecting existing streets to form continuous streets.” Similarly, Hénard and Howard included the roundabout in their plans for Paris and Letchworth in the early twentieth century. The circumferential route would allow traffic to flow undisturbed, improving the circulation of automobile traffic. Next, the radial thoroughfares would “feed the center of the city from residential areas through existing streets, widened and properly controlled for fast traffic movement.” Incorporated in the plan for Caracas, as well as Hénard’s Paris design, the radial thoroughfares represented modern planning in full form. The clogged artery in the urban center would be relieved with diagonal thoroughfares allowing traffic to flow from the periphery.

The third remedy for urban congestion operated outside of the city’s confines. The inter-regional highway would “carry large numbers of cars at high speed into and out of the city from neighboring towns and cities, and residential areas.” Without an interstate expressway system, the transfer times to New Haven were exceedingly long, leaving the city isolated from New York, Hartford, and Boston. For example, before the construction of the Merritt Parkway in 1939 and the opening of I-95 in 1958 it could take up to four hours to drive from New York to New Haven on the country-ish profoundly local road, Route 1. In large part due to the efforts of planners like Rotival and Robert Moses, the dynamic regional expressway network that took shape in the mid-twentieth century completely transformed the regional relationship between American cities of the

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80 Maurice Henri Rotival Papers, “Tomorrow is Here,” Box 202B.
81 Howard and Osborn, Garden Cities of To-Morrow, 31.
82 Maurice Henri Rotival Papers, “Tomorrow is Here,” Box 202B.
While I-95 sections were completed in the early 1950s, the interconnected expressway opened in 1958.
Northeast. Rotival emphasized that a mid-size city like New Haven needed to be connected to an expressway network to maintain relevance on a regional and global scale.

Another major challenge facing modern planners of the mid-twentieth century was the circulation of goods. In a more technologically advanced and globalized world, the city served as the epicenter for importing and exporting goods and services. In 1944, 68% of Americans lived in cities. Consequently, the inflow of resources from the periphery was essential to ensure the livelihood of urban dwellers. Rotival’s solution for the increased demand of goods and services was to establish a new marketplace. In Rotival’s view, existing marketplaces were “strangled by a network of narrow city streets…cramped by lack of space for efficient operation.”

A well-placed terminal market containing refrigeration units, storage space, and shipping operations would secure the inflow and outflow of goods in a centralized fashion. In turn, the marketplace would help create a more sustainable system. Howard promoted the idea of sustainability in his garden cities, which were designed to function as a network of self-sufficient towns. In contrast to Howard’s decentralized approach, Rotival viewed the marketplace as a means to centralization. If goods and services could flow efficiently and be distributed effectively, cities could better accommodate a large urban population.

Maurice Henri Rotival Papers, “Tomorrow is Here,” Box 202B.
Accordingly, faced with high land costs and a lack of suitable industrial space, Rotival hoped to find an area that “could be zoned for this use exclusively, giving industry a chance to spread out and develop as the use of the land changed.” By developing new industrial zones, “established industry would have space for expansion as it outgrew present locations in other parts of the city.” A fundamental tool of modern design, zoning allowed urban planners to separate the different functions of land in urban spaces. The 1926 Euclid v. Amber Realty U.S. Supreme Court decision empowered local governments to define single-use zoned areas, paving the way for large-scale urban planning. Urban renewal initiatives two decades later relied on the ability of government to seize and repurpose land for certain uses. From the perspective of modern planners,

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85 Maurice Henri Rotival Papers, “Tomorrow is Here,” Box 202B. The colors (blue, red, green, yellow and purple) represent a number of components Rotival considered in his urban plans. A specific key did not appear in the Rotival Papers. However, in context of his other plans for New Haven, it is clear that green designated areas for transportation, yellow represented space for industry, and red specified fundamental public and private infrastructure (government buildings, markets, transportation center etc.). Blue and purple are unclear.

86 Maurice Henri Rotival Papers, “Tomorrow is Here,” Box 202B.

single-use zones allowed for separate components to contribute to a balanced organism. The mixed-use infrastructure of the old city was archaic. In the modern metropolis, chaos could be contained by a separation of functions. The Le Corbusian ambition to eliminate the mixed-use street reflected this modern approach to urban design. Zoning allowed Rotival and his colleagues to suggest the separation of functions in New Haven, hoping to establish a more structured, balanced, and productive urban form. An industrial zone was eventually created during the Wooster Square redevelopment project in the late 1950s, which included the construction of I-91, separating the neighborhood into distinct industrial and residential sections to the east and west, respectively.

In order to better accommodate New Haven’s urban population and attract people back to the city, the 1944 Rotival report put forth a plan for major housing redevelopment. At the time, New Haven faced a housing crisis. Four out of five dwellings were over twenty-five years old and the total value had been steadily decreasing since 1928.88 Further, the report addressed the blighted areas that were too run-down for rebuilding or conversion. For example, in his mapping statistics for a plan to clear Wooster Square, Rotival sought to “design a highway with [the] least relocation problems and at the same time [remove] a high-percentage of sub-standard dwellers.”89 Rotival’s interventions would not only make room for new infrastructure, but also eliminate deteriorating housing that contributed to urban decay.

Viewed historically, housing redevelopment as a part of urban renewal in New Haven was a product of modernist ideals, rather than a war against poor and minority populations. (That may be of little consolation to those displaced, typically Jews and Italians.)90 Rotival actually recorded

88 Maurice Henri Rotival Papers, “Tomorrow is Here,” Box 202B.
89 Maurice Henri Rotival Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, Boxes 190-197.
displacement statistics for the initial plans to clear Olive Street in Wooster Square, predicting less than one percent of the non-white population would be effected.\textsuperscript{91} From 1950 to 1970, the white population in New Haven precipitously declined, often moving to nearby suburbs.\textsuperscript{92} In turn, this change in demographics caused a disproportionate number of minority citizens to be affected by the implementation of the redevelopment projects. For Rotival, the clearance of decayed neighborhoods was not meant to target a particular demographic, but rather fit the logic of modern planning.

With a bustling commercial center, a dynamic transportation network, a market district, a defined industrial area, and redeveloped housing, Rotival’s approach was theoretically compelling. In practice, however, the report failed to acknowledge the cataclysmic demolition that would be required. The destruction of existing buildings and displacement of city dwellers would take a huge toll on the physical and social fabric of New Haven. Like Howard and Le Corbusier before him, rather than offering a subtler rehabilitation plan, Rotival proposed a dramatic change to the urban environment.

Though influential, the 1944 \textit{Tomorrow is Here} report failed to have an immediate impact. The proposals took place before federal funds became available through the Housing Acts of 1949 and 1954 and the Highway Act of 1956, which triggered urban renewal programs throughout the United States. Further, the election of Mayor Richard Lee in 1953 led to strong support of redevelopment projects in the late 1950s. Nevertheless, grounded in Rotival’s detailed analysis, \textit{Tomorrow is Here} foreshadowed urban renewal initiatives that would take place in the next two decades.

\textsuperscript{91} Maurice Henri Rotival Papers, \textit{Tomorrow is Here}. Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, Box 202B.  
\textsuperscript{92} Rae, \textit{City}, 341.
Mayor Richard Lee’s New Haven Machine

Two developments activated Rotival’s plans: the introduction of federal housing and highway acts, and the rise of Mayor Richard Lee. The Federal Housing Act of 1949 authorized the expenditure of up to one and a half billion dollars in loans and grants for city redevelopment projects, giving city officials the capacity to carry out ambitious urban renewal plans. Under the 1949 Act, the cities themselves were only responsible for one-third of the cost, incentivizing city officials to take on ambitious redevelopment projects. The 1954 Housing Act and 1956 Highway Act increased the federal funds available for urban renewal projects.

At the time of the 1949 Housing Act, New Haven’s mayor was the Republican William Celentano. Seeking to claim political power in New Haven, Democrats viewed urban redevelopment as an initiative with significant political firepower. Serving as the floor leader for New Haven’s Board of Alderman, Richard Lee proposed the establishment of a redevelopment agency, setting in motion the effective organizational structure that Lee created during his tenure as mayor from 1954 to 1970.

Lee did not just support urban redevelopment for its political benefits. He was also personally alarmed by the state of New Haven’s decomposing infrastructure. Campaigning in 1951, Lee voiced his concerns about urban decay, noting in reference to a building on Oak Street:

Why, the smell of this building; it had no electricity, it had no gas, it had kerosene lamps, light had never seen those corridors in generations…And there, there I really began…right there was when I began to tie in all these ideas we’d been practicing in city planning for years in terms of human benefits that a program like this could reap for a city.

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94 “Housing Act of 1954” (Senate and House of Representatives of the United States, August 2, 1954).
95 Dahl, *Who Governs?*, 120.
Political in nature, Lee’s campaign rhetoric was meant as a call to action to galvanize New Haven’s citizens in support of urban redevelopment. After his election in 1954, Lee established the Citizens Action Committee (CAC) to formally incorporate New Haven citizens into the structure of the Redevelopment Agency. In a 1957 report, the CAC described itself as the “grass roots” organization providing the democratic foundation for urban renewal initiatives in New Haven. In reality, the CAC represented New Haven’s elites, not the people who would be directly affected by urban renewal projects. Composed of business leaders and including Yale’s President Whitney Griswold, the CAC demonstrated Lee’s ability to bring New Haven’s major forces into the fold, eliminating the possibility of significant pushback.

In addition to the CAC, Lee organized New Haven’s development committees into a formidable and effective government machine. Appointed in 1955, Ed Logue, an alumnus of Yale College and Yale Law School, served as Development Administrator, overseeing the Redevelopment Agency, City Plan Commission, and Rotival’s consulting firm. An intense and

98 Rae, *City*, 329.
unforgiving leader, Logue took center stage in the day-to-day operations of urban renewal projects, serving as the backbone of Lee’s administration.

To reshape New Haven’s urban infrastructure, Logue relied heavily on the leadership of Ralph Taylor. Recruited from Massachusetts in 1955, Taylor took over as CEO of the Redevelopment Agency. Having previously served as the head of planning for his hometown, Somerville, New Jersey, Taylor was known for his energy, resourcefulness and dedication. Logue respected Taylor’s qualities, and Taylor eventually played a key role in negotiating federal funding for redevelopment initiatives. With the decisive leadership of Logue and Taylor, New Haven secured federal monies while other cities still debated the merits of urban renewal projects. Taylor skillfully cut through the bureaucracy and exploited statutes and rules to New Haven’s benefit. For instance, although the 1949 Housing Act required cities to contribute one-third of redevelopment financing, Taylor managed to negotiate terms in which New Haven paid a far smaller portion. To do this, Taylor successfully included the two Euro Saarinen-designed Yale residential colleges, Morse and Stiles, as part of the local contribution match. The political acumen of Logue and Taylor significantly reduced the financial burdens imposed by urban redevelopment projects. Throughout Lee’s tenure, both men served as invaluable drivers of urban renewal initiatives.

In addition, from 1949 to 1951, Logue worked as chief administrator for Connecticut’s Governor Chester Bowles. At the time, Bowles was a major political force in Democratic politics and shared a close relationship with the Kennedy family. Through the connection to Bowles, Logue was able to advocate in Washington for the funding of New Haven’s redevelopment

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100 Rae, *City*, 322.
projects. With his Irish-Catholic heritage, Lee was also a kindred spirit with the Kennedy family. Indeed, in 1957, John F. Kennedy, then in the U.S. Senate, travelled to New Haven to campaign for Lee in his mayoral race. Further, according to New Haven’s Economic Development Administrator Matthew Nemerson, Yale College alumnus Robert A. Taft helped secure funding for New Haven’s redevelopment projects. Taft sponsored the 1949 Housing Act in Congress, hoping New Haven would serve as a national example of urban renewal initiatives.

Positioned as the architectural consultant in Lee’s government, Rotival played a crucial role in the formation of urban renewal plans. Nevertheless, though based in New Haven, Rotival’s architectural firm was international, leaving him overextended with other projects, including his work in Caracas. As a result, Logue and Rotival developed a strained relationship, with Rotival’s firm often failing to meet Logue’s high expectations and strict deadlines. In a letter written in April 1959 from Logue to Steve Carroll, the head of Rotival’s New Haven office, Logue complained that: “The CBD study outline you have given me is inadequate for me to evaluate it.” A few months later in August, Logue wrote Rotival expressing further irritation: If it is going to work to our satisfaction it is going to have to be set up much differently than it is today. I am disturbed at the time that is dragging, and I have got to settle it or make other arrangements very soon. When you return to the United States I wish you would call me and let us set a time when we can get this settled one way or another.

Clearly, Logue found Rotival’s inconsistent work habits quite frustrating.

In turn, Rotival expressed disenchantment with the shortsighted leadership of Logue and his prioritization of short-term results. In a 1959 letter to Logue, Rotival expressed his commitment to New Haven while also emphasizing the importance of following a master plan:

103 Matthew Nemerson and Jay Gitlin, Discussion of Robert A. Taft, n.d.
104 Maurice Henri Rotival Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, Box 35.
105 Maurice Henri Rotival Papers, Box 35.
As you know, I have always attached the greatest importance to the continuous work on master planning. I attribute the wonderful success of New Haven to the fact that there was a ‘Plan.’ Although I admit that every year money has been reserved by the City for that purpose, on your recommendation, the credits have been usually transferred, during the budgetary year, to other chapters, this being due to the procedure for ‘action implementation’ and the lack of sufficient funds for the planning purpose corresponding to it.  

The friction between Rotival and Logue, the planner and the pragmatist, illustrates the challenges confronting urban redevelopment projects. Logue’s interest in immediate results contrasted with Rotival’s long-term approach for more comprehensive change. In Rotival’s correspondence with Logue, Rotival makes clear his preference for a master plan, often in conflict with the ever-changing economic, social, and political conditions that confronted Logue. For example, in May of 1959, Rotival and his team expressed frustration with Logue’s narrow-minded approach to planning the CBD. In a meeting with Logue, Rotival’s office noted that Logue emphasized “that a general plan for the CBD was neither desirable or necessary…unless it will induce businessmen to tear down and rebuild.” Further, Rotival and his colleagues were convinced that “Logue is only really interested in documents and work products he can use for the coming election.” In spite of the significant tension between Logue and Rotival, the New Haven government machine functioned productively, carrying out dramatic redevelopment projects driven by Rotival’s ideas and Logue’s pragmatism.

Rotival’s relationship with Lee was considerably more cordial, and Rotival’s continued role in the planning of New Haven in the face of Logue’s criticism was partially due to his friendship with Lee. Following his reelection to a second term as mayor in 1957, Lee received a congratulatory note from Rotival. In turn, Lee responded by thanking Rotival: “My warmest

106 Maurice Henri Rotival Papers. Box 35.  
107 Maurice Henri Rotival Papers. Box 35.  
108 Maurice Henri Rotival Papers. Box 35.
personal regards to you, and once again, thank you for your kindness expressing your sentiment.”

As for pending urban renewal initiatives, Lee added that he was “confident the project is going to receive more support on all levels of life in our community than anything we have ever seen.”

The exchange demonstrates a mutual respect, as well as a shared mission to reshape New Haven’s infrastructure.

In *City: Urbanism and Its End*, historian and Yale professor Douglass Rae contends that urban renewal initiatives under Lee’s leadership “did more to change the built city than had any single intervention in New Haven’s three centuries of history.” Furthermore, as the largest institution in New Haven, Yale had a profound influence on urban renewal projects, and Rotival was, through it all, an employee of both the city and the university. Mayor Lee had previously worked in the public relations office at Yale. In addition, Yale President A. Whitney Griswold and proud alumnus Logue played central roles in shaping New Haven’s redevelopment. Just as Yale men Schulyer Merritt and Wilbur Cross influenced the construction of the Merritt Parkway, creating the first direct route from New York to New Haven, the Yale supporters of urban renewal saw redevelopment as a way to enhance Yale’s regional and global position. In this way, Rotival’s modern focus on New Haven’s trans-continental position fit Yale’s agenda to improve connectivity in the mid-twentieth century.

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109 Maurice Henri Rotival Papers. Box 35.
110 Maurice Henri Rotival Papers. Box 35. In addition, according to their correspondence, Lee had planned a trip to visit Rotival in Paris in 1960. It is unclear if Lee actually travelled to France. According to correspondence, Logue prevented Lee from using city funds to finance the trip, indicating that the trip was for personal, rather than professional, reasons.
111 Rae, *City*, 330.
Forming a Doctrine: The Rebirth of New Haven—Planning and Praxis

In 1955, Rotival and his associates released another report, Rebirth of New Haven, reinforcing the concepts of his previous plans. With federal funds now available, Rotival presented New Haven as a model city for urban renewal initiatives. Rotival noted that as “one of two-hundred medium-size cities in the United States, New Haven could serve as a national example for modern redevelopment.”¹¹² Under the leadership of Mayor Lee, New Haven became a testing ground for urban renewal projects.

Further, in the Rebirth of New Haven, Rotival reestablished his commitment to modern design. Even after years of lackluster planning, “we can still choose what kind of city we will want to live in tomorrow...we can continue to meddle along...or we can set with vigor today.”¹¹³ Further, as the title suggests, the report proposed the “rebirth of an old city,” which “is even more difficult to accomplish, as it happens less frequently.” Although he departed slightly from the rhetoric of “tomorrow’s city,” Rotival still clung to modernist concepts in the 1955 report. Rotival viewed himself as the city’s doctor, “whose job is to attend to the City’s need” and “achieve, not just a temporary cure of New Haven’s ills, but its rebirth.”

Published in 1958, Planning Doctrine and Method of Work represented Rotival’s consolidated perspective on urban planning. Building upon the concept of the city organism, Rotival set forth the desired state of urban equilibrium:

No system formed by man for his life in common is organically constituted unless it contains a certain equilibrium at all of the forces, which depend either on nature or on man, which act upon it – centrifugal and centripetal forces, internal and external circuits of all kinds. This mass of forces tends to create a ‘field’ similar to one magnetic of nature...These systems obey

¹¹² Maurice Henri Rotival Papers, “Rebirth of New Haven,” Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, Box 202B.
¹¹³ Maurice Henri Rotival Papers, “Rebirth of New Haven,” Box 202B.
uniform laws, which govern the areas between them, somewhat like stellar systems are subject to a pattern of complex actions and interactions.\textsuperscript{114}

By “equilibrium,” Rotival meant the proper coordination of urban infrastructure: a combination of public and private institutions, housing, industry, and transportation.

Figure 16 - Rotival Identified Five Factors in “Rebirth of New Haven.”\textsuperscript{115}

Further, according to Rotival the “vitality of the organism, its value and potential capacity will be measured in terms of partial ‘balances’ in the demographic, financial and social fields.”\textsuperscript{116}

Accordingly, in his planning doctrine, Rotival called upon urbanists, politicians, and business leaders to work towards equilibrium:

As the system develops, those organisms which allow deficiency or hypertrophy of one or another of their components, must reestablish equilibrium by increasing or decreasing some of the other...This is the reason why the financial intervention of more advanced groups...appears often indispensable to overcome the initial chronic disequilibrium of dependent territories.\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{115} Maurice Henri Rotival Papers, “Rebirth of New Haven,” Box 202B. Rotival’s approach consisted of three technical components: basic, service, and productive. The “basic” component comprised foundational governmental, social, and educational institutions necessary to promote community values and public discourse. The “service” component included transportation and commercial infrastructure needed to establish the efficient movement of people and goods. The third and final “productive” component specified areas for manufacturing and agriculture necessary to create sustainable jobs and to produce resources for local use and trade.
\textsuperscript{117} Rotival, \textit{Planning Doctrine and Method of Work}, 3.
In contrast, in *Becoming Jane Jacobs*, Laurence notes that Jacobs rejected the notion that “an architectural solution could solve a larger urban problem.”\(^\text{118}\) Instead, “Jacobs’ vignettes of the city also described the complex interactions between people, places, and practices that defined the diverse and lively human ecology.”\(^\text{119}\) Rotival and Jacobs shared a vision for social interconnectivity, but Rotival’s commitment to dramatic architectural solutions as a means to those ends differed from Jacob’s philosophy. Rotival argued that a balanced infrastructure would create certain social conditions, while Jacobs believed that urban form should follow a bottom-up process, thoughtfully altering pre-existing social and cultural dynamics. The divergence between the Jacobs and Rotival schools of thought helps explain the resistance to urban renewal initiatives that imposed a top-down, paternalistic approach to urban redevelopment.

In 1956, in an article entitled *The Missing Link in City Redevelopment*, Jacobs identified specific critiques of modern urban planning. Instead of viewing the city as a blank canvas, “she saw the old city as offering lessons for new planning and architectural ideas.”\(^\text{120}\) In another 1956 essay, *Pavement Pounders and Olympians*, Jacobs rejected the bird’s eye view and statistical analysis used by modern planners like Hénard, Le Corbusier, and Rotival. As she makes clear in *The Missing Link*, “the least we can do is respect – in the deepest sense –the strips of chaos that have a weird wisdom of their own not yet encompassed in our concept of urban order.”\(^\text{121}\) Nevertheless, though rejecting the modernist conception of functionalism, as Laurence notes:

These relationships, she emphasized, were *functional*. Whereas functionalist zoning and urban renewal projects destroyed the public spaces of the street, the subtle in-between, space of the stoop, the flexible functionality of the storefront building, and the complex social life all took place in multi-functioning public and semi-public spaces.\(^\text{122}\)

\(^{118}\) Laurence, *Becoming Jane Jacobs*, 136.
\(^{120}\) Laurence, *Becoming Jane Jacobs*, 200.
\(^{121}\) Laurence, *Becoming Jane Jacobs*, 200.
\(^{122}\) Laurence, *Becoming Jane Jacobs*, 200.
Rotival’s concept of equilibrium derived from an aerial view of urban environment and the use of advanced statistics. In contrast, Jacobs functionalist approach to urban design can be traced to her analysis of a prototypical store:

A store is also often an empty store front. Into these fronts go all manner of churches, clubs, and mutual uplift societies. These store-front activities are enormously valuable. They are institutions that people create, themselves.”\(^{123}\)

From Jacobs’ perspective, Rotival failed to consider the micro-dynamics of urban spaces, and the preservation of fundamental, pre-existing, social conditions.

Rotival, too, emphasized multiple components, but on a macro level. Just as Howard’s utopia included a network of “Garden Cities,” Rotival’s functionalist approach to the city contained a number of smaller organisms working in tandem. Rotival listed the several organisms that constituted a unified whole; the family group, neighborhood unit, sector, zone, and region. Drawing on *A Case for Regional Planning*, Rotival identified the region as “the most complete equilibrium” and “the diversity of human groups and varied combinations of productive and service units from which the balance of diverse components can be obtained”\(^{124}\) Rotival’s emphasis on the region highlighted his top-down approach to city planning, centered around the establishment of a dynamic transportation system and an efficient exchange of goods and services. In his plan for New Haven, Rotival sought to elevate the city’s geographic position as an important economic engine in the New England region.

**Urban Renewal Projects: The Results of Rotival’s Doctrine**

An analysis of Rotival’s planning philosophy must be paired with an evaluation of the practical impact of his ideas. In New Haven, Rotival’s interventions produced, at best, mixed results. The

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\(^{123}\) Laurence, *Becoming Jane Jacobs*, 200.

historical development of the two New Haven neighborhoods, Wooster Square and Oak Street, is illustrative. With both projects, Rotival sought to achieve a state of urban equilibrium by establishing an improved traffic network in place of a decaying urban neighborhood.

In the late 1860s, the forces of industrialization began to affect the Wooster Square area. Located near the harbor and rail lines, Wooster Square served as an ideal location for industry. Railroad lines were constructed during the period of industrialization, which cut off Wooster Square from New Haven’s center. In time, with new factories, breweries, and bakeries moving in along the transportation routes, Wooster Square was stripped of its initial aesthetic advantages, transforming the once beautiful neighborhood into a chaotic industrial hub. Further, great demographic changes took place during the period of industrialization. Increasing concerns of smoke, noise, and hygiene caused many residents to take flight to newer neighborhoods. Unoccupied houses often were converted into tenements, which served to house factory workers. Though the first wave of immigrants were Irish, by the 1880s, Italians started to move in. By 1900, the area was almost entirely Italian.

When the Great Depression hit in 1929, Wooster Square nearly collapsed. Single-family homes were transformed into multi-family units. As land prices dropped, enterprising Italians purchased much of the available land, further entrenching the Italian influence in the neighborhood. Wooster Square was left vulnerable and eventually declared a slum. In his 1942 plan, Rotival called for the redevelopment of Wooster Square, recommending the mass clearance of housing and the

development of a two-level vehicular rotary to provide access for automobile traffic from New
York, Boston, and Hartford.  

![Figures 17 and 18: Rotival’s sketches for the Wooster Square area. In the early 1940s (left) and completed in 1953, Rotival’s “Short Approach” Plan portended the development which finally took shape in 1959. Notably, the plan connected Wooster Square to the Green via Court St.](image)

Rotival continued his work in the 1950s, offering compelling redevelopment proposals for
Wooster Square. Released in 1953, Rotival’s “Short Approach” included a plan to connect
Wooster Square to the Green with the transformation of Court Street into a pedestrian walkway.
In addition, Rotival’s design passed over the railroad line, allowing pedestrian traffic to flow
undisturbed. The pedestrian thoroughfare was Corbusian in nature, offering a route separated from
automobiles for people to circulate within the city. In addition, the “Short Approach” also included
a highway bisecting the industrial and residential districts of Wooster Square. Further, Rotival also
included green spaces in his plan for Wooster Square, reflecting Howard’s “espace libres” concept.
Though taking years to implement, Rotival’s initial proposals served as the basis for the
redevelopment plan eventually adopted, particularly the placement of the highway.

128 Maurice Henri Rotival Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, Box 202B.
The allocation of federal funds from the Housing and Highway Acts allowed the project to begin in 1959. The final renewal plan for Wooster Square called for the clearance of a 235-acre area and the construction of a highway separating the sections to the east and west.\textsuperscript{129} While the east portion consisted of public housing and industry, the west side became a narrow oblong area composed of old residences.\textsuperscript{130} This watershed moment triggered the preservation movement for Wooster Square’s historic district to the west.

Sparked by Rotival’s ambitious designs, the rehabilitation plan for Wooster Square improved New Haven’s circulation, while preserving an historic neighborhood. In addition to providing a new route for traffic, the redevelopment spurred a revival in the western portion, with Wooster Square once again becoming an attractive neighborhood within the city’s confines.

However, the housing projects that Rotival proposed were never built. Today’s Wooster Square is a product of Rotival’s proposals and its construction during the period of urban renewal. The success of Wooster Square was as much a product of Rotival’s highway scheme as it was a result of preserving existing infrastructure within the neighborhood. With a distinct architectural flare, including houses designed by the renowned architect Henry Austin, Wooster Square’s urban renewal redevelopment was paired with a preservationist approach that Jane Jacobs would have endorsed. The success of the Wooster Square redevelopment illustrates the value of a multi-pronged approach, with both a modern overhaul of obsolete infrastructure and preservation of the social fabric of the community.

\textsuperscript{129}Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 29.
\textsuperscript{130}Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 29.
Though the Wooster Square project was a success, the renewal plans for the Oak Street neighborhood failed, dismantling much of the preexisting infrastructure without providing an effective entry into New Haven’s urban center. With initial plans drawn in 1957, the Oak Street Connector hoped to achieve Rotival’s vision for New Haven by creating an efficient commuter traffic route from Interstate 95 to the CBD. By connecting the city to an expanding expressway network, the Oak Street Connector represented Rotival’s regionalist approach to city planning. Further, the Oak Street Connector fit the logic of urban renewal perfectly. From a modern planning perspective, the Oak Street Connector rid the city of blighted areas while also improving circulation into the city. In fact, however, a review of the changes to the Oak Street neighborhood over time illustrates Rotival’s heavy-handed approach.

When West Creek in New Haven was filled in 1875, the adjacent road changed its name. Known as Creek Street, the avenue was renamed Morocco Street, a reference to the leather industry concentrated there. Later, it became known as Oak Street. In the early twentieth century, an

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influx of immigrants seeking industrial jobs challenged the Oak Street neighborhood to accommodate an increased population. Further, the rise of the automobile left older, central streets unequipped to handle increased traffic.\textsuperscript{132}

As illustrated in the 1950 neighborhood map, the Oak Street neighborhood was mixed-use: both a residential and commercial area. Oak Street was a dense working-class area with buildings lining the street to accommodate residential housing and local businesses, such as bakeries and machine shops. As the population in the Oak Street neighborhood increased, the need for multi-unit housing developed, dividing single buildings into a number of distinct units. Further, portending a trend of decentralization as a result of the automobile, a number of garages developed in the Oak Street area.

![Figures 20 and 21 -- Oak Street Neighborhood in before (left)\textsuperscript{133} and during demolition (right).\textsuperscript{134}](image)

Located near the city center, the Oak Street neighborhood was a convenient area for those commuting to industrial jobs. However, as the number of industrial jobs decreased, the Oak Street neighborhood became obsolete. As noted by Mayor Lee, a staunch supporter of the Oak Street Connector project, the Oak Street area in the mid-twentieth century was “decaying, dilapidated,

\textsuperscript{133} \textit{Oak Street before Redevelopment}, 1950, 1950. The Oak Street area was defined to the Southwest of the nine squares, stretching eastward towards the Long Island Sound.
\textsuperscript{134} \textit{Oak Street Area during Construction of the Connector} (New Haven Colony Historical Society, 1957).
abandoned structures which disgrace[d] our central city… everyone simply turned his eyes away as he drove through Oak Street.” As a result, Oak Street was declared a slum by city officials, leaving it vulnerable to urban renewal initiatives.

Like the Wooster Square project, the rise of Mayor Lee and the availability of federal funds finally made the Oak Street Connector project possible, transforming a mixed-use residential and business district into a direct-access highway accompanied by a redeveloped business district alongside. In comparison with the 1950 layout, the 1957 aerial shows a complete redefinition of the Oak Street neighborhood from the mixed-use Jacobs-like neighborhood to a more modernist form. No longer were houses and businesses blended into the fabric of the city streets.

With the demolition of the Oak Street neighborhood, planners and architects were handed a blank canvas. Rotival envisioned a diagonal thoroughfare in highway form leading into the city

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135 Rae, City, 335.
136 Maurice Henri Rotival Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, Box 202A. Date unknown.
with redeveloped housing and commercial buildings alongside.137 Once longstanding structures were cleared and the Oak Street Connector was built, there was a need for new businesses to occupy the redefined neighborhood. Completed in 1972, the New Haven Coliseum, pictured in the 1973 Sanborn map, reflected a yearning for modern redevelopment in the area. Opened in 1969 and designed by Kevin Roche and John Dinkeloo, the Knights of Columbus Tower followed a similar logic. Situated next to the New Haven Coliseum, the building represented modern architecture that often-accompanied urban renewal projects.138 As Mayor Lee noted, the structure fit the new identity of Oak Street perfectly: “you can’t put a small building near a superhighway.”139 The Knights of Columbus building represented the pinnacle of modern design in its scale and positioning adjacent to the highway.

It is impossible to evaluate Rotival’s planning philosophy without considering the significant consequences of urban renewal. The fabric of the Oak Street community was forever changed, and many justifiably question the end results. As is shown in the images below, the physical destruction caused by the Oak Street project was profound. The before and after aerial images highlight the dramatic physical change as a result of the Oak Street redevelopment project. Similarly, with the Knights of Columbus building in the periphery, the image showing the relocation of Louis’ Lunch illuminates the unfortunate consequences of modern urban redevelopment. The city of old may have been obsolete from the analytical perspective of modern planners like Rotival. Still, the preexisting structure that defined New Haven was swept away with a simple stroke of a pen.

137 Significantly, the Oak Street Connector did not stretch to the center of town. Coming from I-95, traffic is now halted by traffic lights starting at the intersection of Church. This serves as an example of Rotival’s frustration with the piecemeal planning that limited the impact of his approach.
However, in Rotival’s view, his plan on Oak Street was incomplete. For example, constructed in the late 1960s, the Knights of Columbus Tower and the adjacent New Haven Coliseum were built in place of Rotival’s proposed marketplace. From Rotival’s perspective, the Knights of Columbus Tower and the New Haven Coliseum served as a decentralizing force, creating a quasi-urban center outside of the CBD. In contrast, Rotival believed his marketplace would better serve New Haven by complementing the CBD.¹⁴⁰ Still, the demolition of the New Haven Coliseum in 2007 represented the rejection of the modern planning concepts that grounded the Oak Street redevelopment initiatives.

Considered in context, the Wooster Square and Oak Street projects first and foremost reflected the ideological goals of urban planners and the hope of reestablishing the importance of the city. Influenced by a long history of modern ideas, Rotival envisioned reshaping urban spaces to emphasize order and structure. The impact of Rotival’s ideas was dramatic, imposing top-down initiatives on populations with little ability to resist. In City: Urbanism and its End, Professor Rae undertook a detailed analysis of the impact of urban renewal initiatives on New Haven. In Wooster

¹⁴⁰ Maurice Henri Rotival Papers. Box 35.
Square and Oak Street alone, 2,710 and 886 households were displaced respectively and hundreds of businesses were also forced to relocate.  

Lee’s unwavering support of urban renewal initiatives eventually came to a halt in August of 1967 during the May Day riots. After years of effort, planning, and significant funding, New Haven was left with substandard housing, fewer jobs, and a higher percentage of poor blacks occupying the city’s redeveloped areas. In response, the victims of Lee’s initiatives rioted, vandalizing and looting commercial property in New Haven. Sam Chauncey, longtime Yale administrator and special assistant to Yale President Kingman Brewster from 1963 to 1977, developed a close relationship with Mayor Lee during their overlap in New Haven. Chauncey sadly recalls Lee visiting him at his house during the 1967 riots. Suffering from nervous collapse, Lee struggled with the harsh realization that the urban redevelopment initiatives he staunchly advocated for had failed to produce positive results for the citizens of New Haven. According to Chauncey, Lee never recovered from the grave disappointment, living the rest of his life with guilt and shame. Nevertheless, in Chauncey’s view Lee was “a good man” who sincerely believed that his redevelopment plans would be a force for positive change in New Haven.

As succinctly put by Yale Architecture Professor Vincent Scully, in practice urban renewal initiatives have “shown themselves to be obsolete…based upon three destructive fallacies: the cataclysmic, the automotive, and the suburban.” From Scully’s perspective, planners of the era proposed solutions that misunderstood the underlying causes of urban decay. Scully builds upon Jacobs’ critique, tracing the problem to a technical misunderstanding of urban design.

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141 Rae, City, 339.
144 Rae, City, 332-3.
The bird’s eye view perspective of modern planners remained detached from the street-level dynamics that Jacobs observed and treasured. Though the Oak Street Connector project made sense spatially, it unsentimentally destroyed an entire neighborhood. When Lee and Rotival visited decaying slums like Oak Street, they confirmed their preexisting notions of redevelopment. Instead of recognizing the social importance of the mixed-use street, featuring low-rise housing, stoops, store-fronts, and circuitous alleyways, modern planning advocates were blinded by the blight they saw and the dramatic functionalist doctrine they followed. The availability of funds through federal acts targeted at blighted areas emboldened this philosophy. The intention was not to harm those occupying these areas, but rather establish a more efficient use of space and revive cities in decline. Still, as is illustrated by the Wooster Square and Oak Street initiatives in New Haven, Rotival’s ambitious proposals have been much debated, and his work is remembered as controversial at best and catastrophic at worst.

**Conclusion**

The discussion of urban renewal has historically pitted city planners such as Robert Moses against resistance advocates like Jane Jacobs; in this story, Moses is the villain and Jacobs is the heroine. Though Moses and Jacobs did have a combative history, reaching its climax in 1962 when Jacobs villainized Moses’ proposed highway cutting through Lower Manhattan, this paradigm offers a limited perspective on the story of urban renewal. Taking shape in American cities in the post-WWII-era, urban renewal must be traced back to its grounding philosophy, which originated in Europe at the turn of the twentieth century. Facing rapid development following the Industrial Revolution as a result of technological advances, European planners grappled with a chaotic urban environment, and put forth radical solutions to shape tomorrow’s city. With cities internationally
facing similar problems of overpopulation and congestion in the first half of the twentieth-century, a modern functionalist approach emerged that underlay urban redevelopment projects.

The planning approaches of Europeans thinkers Howard, Le Corbusier and Hénard influenced a generation of urbanists to follow. The technical solutions that these men offered created a framework for repairing cities; after identifying and clearing deteriorated areas, they established modern traffic, housing, and commercial infrastructure. Taking an aerial view, modern planners rationalized solutions to urban strife through the implementation of master plans. A direct disciple of Hénard, Rotival represented the second generation of European urbanists to put forward a modern doctrine internationally. Paired with the sociological influences of Geddes and Mumford, Rotival’s approach was also interdisciplinary in nature. Reflecting the ideas of his Parisian mentor Hénard, Rotival’s doctrine emphasized traffic flow and circulation.

In contrast to the more localized approach to urban planning in the nineteenth century, modern planning ideas triggered newfound regional and global discourse. Through actors like Rotival, modern urbanism developed into a highly professional and philosophical pursuit with ideas being shared internationally. Rotival and his colleagues became international figures in modern planning, working on a trans-continental scale to reshape built environments. By contributing to this phenomenon, Rotival played an important part in a progressive movement in the field of urbanism.

Through enforcing heavy-handed interventions, modern urban planning also served as a mechanism for social control internationally. In 1909, Great Britain established the Housing and Town Act, based on the ideas of Ebeneezer Howard. In 1914, further recognizing the work of Howard and Geddes, the Town Planning Institute was founded.145 Three years later, Lord Lugard,

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the colonial administrator and governor-general of Nigeria, issued the Township Ordinance of 1917, which established principles for development and reinforced modern colonial management.\textsuperscript{146} Informed not only by rational functionalist thought, the Township Ordinance sought to mitigate public health concerns associated with tropical climates. The Township Ordinance relied on the modern urban planning ideas such as the segregation of land-use functions put forth at the turn of the twentieth century. For example, in the 1930s, the city of Lusaka in Rhodesia was planned as a garden city, reflecting the influence of Howard’s ideas on colonial urban planning. Taken to its extreme, Howard’s philosophy became a mechanism for the “intrinsic racism of colonial space” and a tool of imperial control.\textsuperscript{147} The dramatic approach of modern planners spread rapidly in the first half of the twentieth century, influencing urban dynamics on a global stage.

Significantly, in the United States, the 1967 riots in New Haven, and parallel resistance to major urban redevelopment projects in other American cities, also represented a rejection of modern planning ideas from Europe at the turn of the nineteenth century. Though Jane Jacobs rightfully placed the blame on those who misapplied modern technical solutions, the ambitious European men that put forth their visions for the modernized city made possible the dramatic redevelopment initiatives in the mid-twentieth century. Notably, Rotival not only developed his own theories, but also played a crucial role in the implementation of his plans and ideas. His approach was progressive and rational, but also paternalistic and out-of-touch with the street-level dynamics of cities. In contrast to Jacob’s street-level individualism, Rotival focused on macro

\textsuperscript{146} Bremner, Architecture and Urbanism in the British Empire, 77.
environments, regionalism, and the ironically machine-like organism as a whole. By viewing the “longue duree” of European modern planning ideas, the curtain is pulled aside and the forgotten actors and ideas in the story of urban renewal in the United States come front and center. It is in this fuller context that the legacy of Maurice Rotival is best understood.
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“Oak Street before Redevelopment.” 1950. 


SECONDARY SOURCES


BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY
My interest in urban planning history was sparked in the fall of my junior year when I enrolled in American Architecture and Urbanism. Taught by Elihu Rubin and offering a thorough history of urbanism in the United States, the course cemented my interest in urban studies.

My interest developed through a number of research projects. An assignment in “American Architecture and Urbanism” called upon students to trace the historical development of an urban development project. Growing up in New York City, I decided to write on the transformation of the West Side of Manhattan during the twentieth century. My research led me to Robert Moses, the master planner of New York, largely responsible for New York’s metropolitan highway and traffic system. I also studied the work of Jane Jacobs who rejected Moses’ dramatic proposals. I was fascinated by Moses’ ability to reshape New York’s infrastructure during his career, as well as the discourse about urbanity triggered by Jacobs’ criticism.

With an interest in highway planning, I decided to write my final paper in “Yale and America” on the history and development of the Merritt Parkway. Built in 1938 and spearheaded by two Yale men, Schuyler Merritt and Wilbur Cross, the Merritt Parkway created a more direct route from New York to New Haven. The project enhanced Yale’s regional and global position by better connecting New Haven to an expanding highway network. My research again led me to Robert Moses, responsible for building the Hutchinson Parkway in 1926, which eventually connected to the Merritt Parkway at the Connecticut border and formed a direct route from New York to Southern Connecticut. I worked closely with Yale’s Manuscripts and Archives, tracing the correspondence of Merritt and Cross. Through my research, I became familiar with New Haven’s urban identity and its regional and global position as a mid-sized city situated between New York and Boston.
My research on the Merritt Parkway in the early 1940s led me to the work of Maurice Rotival. In 1942, Rotival presented his first master plan to modernize New Haven’s urban infrastructure. I had first learned about Rotival’s 1942 plan in “American Architecture and Urbanism” and became interested in learning more about his approach.

When returning to campus for my senior year, I met with Professor Gitlin—who would become my trusted thesis advisor. In our discussion of urban planning, Professor Gitlin mentioned Rotival and his underappreciated contribution to urban renewal initiatives in New Haven. I then learned that Rotival had a significant collection of files, The Maurice Emile Henri Rotival Papers, located at Yale’s Manuscript and Archives. With this in mind, I chose Rotival as the subject of my senior essay.

Guided by Professor Gitlin, I supplemented the Rotival Papers with a number of secondary sources that contextualized Rotival’s work. My foundational research focused on three pillars of twentieth-century urban planning history: zoning, city politics, and urban renewal. Published in 1972, John Barry Culingworth’s Town and Country Planning in England and Wales provides a historical review of important events and legislation that contributed to zoning policies in the United Kingdom. Through several legislative acts, the British government allocated and repurposed land in a more centralized fashion. Building on Cullingworth’s discussion of zoning, Richard Babcock traces the development of zoning practices in the United States in his 1983 book The Zoning Game: Municipal Practices and Policies. Whereas in Europe the need for zoning arose from public health concerns, Babcock explains that zoning policy in the United States traced to a more functional approach to land use and the perceived need to control development at a local level. As I would learn, zoning served as an essential tool for the modernist approach adopted by planners such as Rotival.
The ultimate success of Rotival’s plan rested on the willingness of local politicians to carry out urban renewal initiatives. Robert Dahl’s *Who Governs?*, published in 1961, describes the changing nature of New Haven politics from the early nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. Dahl explains that Mayor Lee’s political rise reflected the ascendency of Irish-Catholics in New Haven. Yale professor Douglas Rae’s *City: Urbanism and Its End* (2003) embeds that political history in the context of urban history, evaluating the consequences of urban renewal projects initiated under the leadership of Mayor Richard Lee. Rae provides a statistical analysis, charting the displacement of families and businesses caused by comprehensive redevelopment projects. Though sympathetic to the idea of urban renewal, Rae offers a critical analysis of Lee’s initiatives, questioning the cataclysmic clearing undertaken in the name of urban renewal.

To better understand the story of urban renewal beyond the local history of New Haven, I looked at a number of books including Samuel Zipp’s 2012 *Manhattan Projects*. In his work, Zipp takes a balanced approach, placing the results of urban renewal against the initial intentions of planners and government officials. I found *Becoming Jane Jacobs* (2016) by Peter Laurence very useful for understanding the foremost opponent of urban renewal. Laurence explores the development of Jacobs’ street-level approach to urban planning.

To explore the roots of Rotival’s approach, I researched the foundations of European modernist urban design, including the work of Ebenezer Howard, Le Corbusier, and Eugène Hénard. Howard’s *Garden Cities of To-Morrow* presented the first and most influential modern framework of urban thinking and planning in England. In response to the congestion and health concerns of the industrial city at the turn of the twentieth century, Howard proposed a network of smaller urban settlements of no more than 30,000 people. Connected by a dynamic traffic system, Howard’s “greenbelt” approach incorporated open spaces into a more sustainable urban form.
Originally a disciple of Howard, Le Corbusier’s philosophy evolved over time, pushing ahead with a less sentimental and more materialistic approach to urban planning. In 1910, Le Corbusier put forth his “City Jardin” plan in France. In Ville Radieuse, published in 1933, Le Corbusier presented his full modern vision. Le Corbusier believed that all of the city’s problems could be solved with one broad stroke—a complete overhaul of preexisting infrastructure.

The work of Howard and Le Corbusier led me to Eugène Hénard, responsible for Paris’ 1904 master plan. Rotival was a direct disciple of Hénard, studying under him at École Centrale in Paris. In his 1968 book, Eugene Hénard and the Beginning of Urbanism in Paris, Peter Wolf analyzes Hénard’s work in Paris. As Wolf notes, Hénard drew on Haussmann’s Second Empire boulevard design, focusing on improved circulation within the city. Through Wolf’s study of Hénard, I was able to better understand the direct urban planning influences that shaped Rotival’s thinking.

The work of sociologist Lewis Mumford offered a different perspective on urban design. Written in 1938, Mumford’s Culture of Cities illustrated the sociologist’s perspective on city planning. Rotival incorporated Mumford’s thinking into his approach to planning, focusing on the social relationships affected by his interventions.

Researching and writing a senior essay was a richly rewarding process, if somewhat daunting. The Rotival Papers comprise nearly two hundred boxes of Rotival’s correspondence and project files, representing both his work in New Haven and internationally. Selecting which boxes to review became particularly important to my research efforts. After spending some time looking through his correspondence, I focused predominantly on the project files with plans, maps, and images. Rotival expressed himself visually through sketches and plans, and these materials were most helpful in understanding his urban planning mindset.
Through my research, I realized that the advent of urban renewal in the United States was rooted in the longer continuum of urban planning in Europe. With the benefit of my research and writing, I hope that those considering Rotival’s work in New Haven in the 1940s and beyond will also hark back to its European roots, particularly Paris at the turn of the twentieth century.