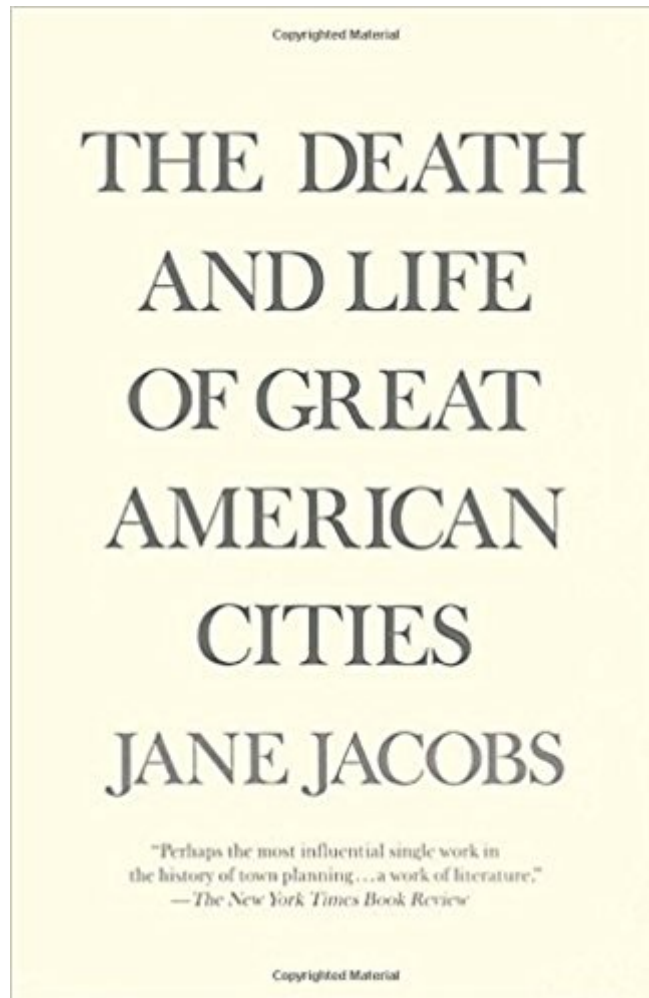




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# The Death And Life Of Great American Cities



## Synopsis

A direct and fundamentally optimistic indictment of the short-sightedness and intellectual arrogance that has characterized much of urban planning in this century, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* has, since its first publication in 1961, become the standard against which all endeavors in that field are measured. In prose of outstanding immediacy, Jane Jacobs writes about what makes streets safe or unsafe; about what constitutes a neighborhood, and what function it serves within the larger organism of the city; about why some neighborhoods remain impoverished while others regenerate themselves. She writes about the salutary role of funeral parlors and tenement windows, the dangers of too much development money and too little diversity. Compassionate, bracingly indignant, and always keenly detailed, Jane Jacobs's monumental work provides an essential framework for assessing the vitality of all cities.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"The most refreshing, provocative, stimulating and exciting study of this [great problem] which I have seen. It fairly crackles with bright honesty and common sense." — Harrison Salisbury, *The New York Times* "One of the most remarkable books ever written about the city... a primary work. The research apparatus is not pretentious — it is the eye and the heart — but it has given us a magnificent study of what gives life and spirit to the city." — William H. Whyte, author of *The Organization Man*

A classic since its publication in 1961, this book is the definitive statement on American cities: what

makes them safe, how they function, and why all too many official attempts at saving them have failed.

I have always wanted to read this book and now I have my chance. Jane Jacobs was a city planner's planner. One of our first supporters of multi-use buildings. Preservation, not destruction of older buildings. The word recycling plays at the top of Ms Jacobs' work. Buy it and read it.

A great work by someone who actually cares about people and cities, rather than money. This is an actual "Instruction Manual" on how to live in a city - but not just live in one, but to also be a part of the community. It is a bit dry, and I had to force myself to read some parts, but I think everyone should read this.

At one point I was reading this and I put the book down and gave Ms. Jacobs a round of applause. Even today, her ideas are extraordinary and ground breaking. The work she has done here is truly amazing and has really opened my eyes to city planning. I never cared much for city planners because I felt they are short sighted, and this book made me realize that they truly do make so many stupid mistakes. This book should be a mandatory read for any one looking to work with city planning in any capacity.

Everyone has opinions about their city and the different neighborhoods. Some areas are vibrant and energy giving, while others are so dreary they knock the wind out of you. Often the reasons seem clear and you just wish you could find the nincompoops responsible and make them spend the rest of their lives living in their creation. But other times you know you don't like it but the reasons are a little more nebulous. Jane Jacobs is able to quickly and expertly delineate it all in this wonderful book. You will look at cities with a new expert eye. This topic could be really tedious to read - but it's not! Within the first few pages I could tell I was in the hands of someone skilled and capable, a master at the nature of spaces and nimble with words and ideas. Jacobs was not a planner, nor an academic but a person who had been thinking and writing about architecture and cities for a long time with intelligence and with an equal gift in communicating. Her style is evocative and able to tease out subtle ideas in amusing, succinct and yet on-the-mark ways. She just nails it each time. Published in 1961 but for the most part, reads current. Her words, her thinking and writing are all contemporary, as even the older issues she discusses are now being deconstructed and it is interesting to read the origins of many of these ideas which seem like such obvious blunders you

just scratch your head at the powers-that-were who conceived them. As she puts it, "expressways that eviscerate great cities...These amputated areas typically develop galloping gangrene" and the "Low-income projects that become worse centers of delinquency, vandalism and general social hopelessness than the slums they were supposed to replace. Middle-income housing projects which are truly marvels of dullness and regimentation, sealed against any buoyancy or vitality of city life. Luxury housing projects that mitigate their inanity, or try to, with a vapid vulgarity. Cultural centers that are unable to support a good bookstore.""Monopolistic shopping centers and monumental cultural centers cloak, under the public relations hoohaw, the subtraction of commerce, and of culture too." Or one of my pet peeves, "Promenades that go from no place to nowhere and have no promenaders" - these seem prevalent around civic centers and drive me crazy as I walk for my transportation, the long expanses of concrete and lawn with a few concrete benches. In Paris they would put a little outdoor cafe and some trees in the middle so that one can cross that desert with an espresso pit-stop but too often there is nothing, and one starts across the huge block already fatigued wondering how it is possible that even the green of the lawn looks unappealing, that nature is devoid of its charm in these circumstances. That's not to say that Europe avoided these problems, they built tons of social housing or offices. I see examples of them every day where I live, in the middle of a vibrant city suddenly one comes upon a 1970s "super-block" with a few high rises planted in the middle of a vast patchwork of concrete and never-used lawn and bits of graffiti on lonely concrete benches. Walking these super-blocks feels like being plunged into jello, heavy, plodding and onerous. But now I understand there was thoughtful thinking behind these but like lots of theories, things just didn't work out as they hoped or were anemic budgeted and bureaucratized versions of the original vision. Thankfully, most cities are striving to be more livable now, it's too bad that a new problem has emerged, that they are losing diversity as they become unaffordable. She also goes into the suburbs, which along with small towns, now often seem to be the new repositories of those with no choice. Enough rant. She actually spends a lot of time talking about what is good, what works and why and that too is illuminating. You know you love these things about certain neighborhoods but you don't quite know all the reasons why, why exactly it feels more vibrant, alive, organic and a place where life can bloom. This is eminently relevant and readable. Another review complained about her use of language made it hard to follow. She is really descriptive, perhaps that could get tedious if read straight through, it's a good book to have at the bedside to read in chunks.

This book is a classic that argued in common-sense terms for the kind of "mixed-use" developments

(among other things) popping up everywhere in American cities today. The book shines in calling out the antiquated city planning "theory" of the 1950s and 60s. Where it tends to fall flat are the author's ideas about what to replace city planning practices with.

One of the most important books on city planning and related matters of the last century. Should be read by anyone interested in the subject. The book is, of course, not perfect and much has happened since its publication, much due to the influence of Jacobs herself, but it is still a great guide to cities in the US (and to a lesser extent elsewhere).

I think Jane Jacobs is brilliant and thoughtful. Her writing is a little repetitive but well worth the read. I recommend this if you are an Urban studies / Political Science major or minor.

Classic book on an outside perspective on urban planning. A must-read for anyone in the field.

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