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## **The Green Big Apple: Cemeteries and City Parks in New York City, 1811-1898**

No other city in the United States is associated quite as strongly with change as New York City. Both celebrated and cursed as the powerhouse of American modernism, the metropolis is a symbol of America like no other. Since its inception as the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam, the city has been in permanent transition. Immigration fostered the growth of New York City, but also caused problems.

As the population grew, the need for outdoor recreation grew as well. In *The Politics of Park Design: A History of Urban Parks*, Galen E. Cranz points out that nineteenth century public policy relating to recreation within cities was mainly concerned with the acquisition and development of parks. Parks brought the aesthetic qualities of pastoral landscapes to the heart of the American city. Green spaces were conceptualized as places of regeneration. New York City's Central Park served as a model for many other naturalistic retreats that sprang up in the United States later on.

Even though the park was much vaunted for its design it failed to serve its primary function as a social center for the city's inhabitants. Built too far north on Manhattan Island, Central Park was not a convenient neighborhood retreat, but rather a place of excursions. Frederick Law Olmsted's idea of a democratic commons for recreation purposes was realized on a smaller scale within New York's various neighborhoods.

I will argue that comparatively small parks and open spaces, such as cemeteries and public squares, served the varied population of the city to a greater extent than Olmsted's centralized park structure. It is assumed that these places possessed a momentum that helped shape their neighboring communities. Furthermore, I will investigate the importance of the rising immigrant population to the appropriation of cemeteries and their transformation into parks.

My research rests on the assumption that the transformation of cemeteries into city parks took place at precisely at the moment when New York's cityscape was in the process of radical change; and that reform movements were just as significant to this development as were landowner concerns, city planning, property speculation and urban elites.