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# The moral high ground in Albany: rhetorics and practices of an 'Olmstedian'™ park, 1855-1875

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### Abstract

The mid-nineteenth century park movement represented a reaction to the tensions of growing, industrializing urban spaces. Parks provided a concrete way of aligning moral agendas with the built urban form, and a vehicle for varied and sometimes contradictory elite and middle class concepts of the purposes of public space. This paper describes conflicting strands in the rhetorics and practices of the 'Olmstedian'™ Washington Park in Albany, NY, placing them in the broader context of park ideologies. Contradictory strands in its discourses and moral agendas were never resolved, but they accomplished their fundamental purpose of creating a rhetorical space for civic leadership, and exclusive residential and public spaces for the middle class. Park regulations clearly expressed the culture of 'refinement'™ which accompanied the emergence of middle class sensibilities in the era before the electric streetcar. The park realigned elite residential

development and guided Albany's subsequent social geography.



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