



Bulldozer: Demolition and Clearance of the Postwar Landscape

Francesca Russello Ammon

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Although the decades following World War II stand out as an era of rapid growth and construction in the United States, those years were equally significant for large-scale destruction. In order to clear space for new suburban tract housing, an ambitious system of interstate highways, and extensive urban renewal development, wrecking companies demolished buildings while earthmoving contractors leveled land at an unprecedented pace and scale. In this pioneering history, Francesca Russello Ammon explores how postwar America came to equate this destruction with progress.

The bulldozer functioned as both the means and the metaphor for this work. As the machine transformed from a wartime weapon into an instrument of postwar planning, it helped realize a landscape-altering “culture of clearance.” In the hands of the military, planners, politicians, engineers, construction workers, and even children’s book authors, the bulldozer became an American icon. Yet social and environmental injustices emerged as clearance projects continued unabated. This awareness spurred environmental, preservationist, and citizen participation efforts that have helped to slow, though not entirely stop, the momentum of the postwar bulldozer.

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