

# Urban Design at Fifty: A Personal View

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*In Memory of David A. Crane, 1927–2005*

Who can read the report on Harvard's First Urban Design Conference of 1956 without a sense of poignancy, knowing what was to follow? Although the participants ranged widely in interests and expertise, they shared an optimism for the future of cities and a belief that the way had opened for them, through funding and legislation, to achieve their vision for American cities.

"The political revolution has released all the constitutional powers we need to do anything that the designer wants to achieve," said Charles Abrams.<sup>1</sup> Frederick Adams believed that recent urban renewal legislation would make it "possible to control the actual form of the completed project and surrounding neighborhoods."<sup>2</sup> For Philadelphia planner Edmund Bacon, the one billion dollars appropriated by Congress to create a new urban environment entailed "a responsibility we cannot duck."<sup>3</sup> He seemed not yet to have discovered Sixtus V's plan for Rome (which was later to be the basis for his sweeping proposal for the reorganization of Philadelphia) and recommended as an urban model a less ambitious spine of connected walkways in Louis Kahn's Mill Creek project—though for the rest of Kahn's career Bacon obstructed him. In 1956, Bacon's planning for Independence National Historical Park was well under way, as was the planning for Pittsburgh's Gateway Center and Point Park, which that city's mayor, David Lawrence,