
BRIEFING NOTE

About Jane Jacobs

Life

Jane Jacobs was born on May 4, 1916 in Scranton, Pennsylvania. After graduating from high school, she worked as a reporter for the *Scranton Tribune*. In 1934, she moved to New York City and settled in Greenwich Village. She took a general program of study at Columbia University but after two years she returned to work as a writer and editor. In 1942, she became a pamphlet writer for the Office of War Information. In 1952, she worked as associate editor with *Architectural Forum*. When New York's chief planner Robert Moses proposed running a highway through Washington Square and building a parking lot in Central Park she spoke out and helped save West Greenwich Village and Soho from demolition. Her protest resulted in a riot charge. Jane lacked formal education in city planning but wrote one of the twentieth century's most influential works on urban planning, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. She married Robert Hyde Jacobs in 1944 and had three children: James, Edward and a daughter Burgin. In 1968, during the Vietnam War Jacobs left New York with her family and settled in Toronto so that her sons could avoid the draft. She became a Canadian citizen in 1974. Her husband died in 1996. In 2006 Jane Jacobs died at the age of 89 in Toronto.

Central Ideas

Jane Jacobs witnessed the failures of post World War II urban renewal. She felt that a mix of residential, commercial and recreational areas that encourage citizens to cross paths and mix was needed for healthy neighbourhoods. There were four positive elements of urban neighbourhoods:

- mixed use was beneficial with residential, retail, civic and industrial buildings jumbled together and growing organically
- city blocks should be compact
- buildings should be diverse in age, condition and size
- population should be dense

She supported a planning approach that stressed the "protection of neighbourhoods and design details that truly matter to people". She was also praised for her practical, common-sense approach to urban issues.

Contributions to the City of Toronto

In the late 1960s, Jane Jacobs organized citizens and was influential in stopping the Spadina expressway expansion. To protect heritage buildings, protested demolitions that were planned for Old City Hall, Union Station and St. Lawrence Market. She spoke out against the removal of Toronto's streetcars and other urban expressways that were planned. In the late 1970s, Jane Jacobs helped to found Energy Probe Research Foundation, an environmental organization. A month long international conference called "Jane Jacobs: Ideas that Matter" was sponsored by The City of Toronto in the fall of 1997. The conference produced the Jane Jacobs Prize which provides \$5,000 for three years to a citizen who is engaged in an activity that contributes to the vitality of Toronto. In the spring of 2001 she helped to organize and was a key participant in a meeting of the mayors of five Canadian cities to discuss ways to empower cities. She worked on the 'New Deal for Cities Campaign' to persuade the federal government of the value of cities. She championed small business and helped to save a local neighbourhood café called Dooney's from being purchased by Starbucks. Mayor David Miller proclaimed May 4, 2007 as Jane Jacobs Day. Many free walks throughout Toronto neighbourhoods

were planned on May 5 in her honour. When she died in 2006 Mayor Miller noted that she will be “remembered as one of the great urban thinkers of our time. Her contributions and insights have forever changed the way North American cities are developed.”

Awards

- Sidney Hillman Foundation Award, for *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 1961
- Architecture Critics’ Medal from American Institute of Architects, 1975
- Los Angeles Times Book Prize for Cities and the Wealth of Nations, 1984
- Governor General’s Literary Award: Translation, 1996, for *Systemes De Survie: Dialogue Sur Les Fondements Moraux Du Commerce Et De La Politque*
- Officer of the Order of Canada, (Invested June 1998)
- Vincent Scully Prize in Architecture awarded by the National Building Museum, Washington, 2000
- Order of Ontario, 2000
- Community and Urban Sociology section of the American Sociological Association Outstanding Lifetime Contribution Award, 2002
- Writers’ Trust of Canada, Shaughnessy Cohen Prize for political writing, 2005

Archives

In 1995 Jane Jacobs donated her papers to the Burns Library at Boston College. The Papers include correspondence, clippings, manuscripts, research notes, photographs, awards, posters, audio and video cassettes.

Writings

- *Constitutional Chaff; Rejected Suggestions of the Constitutional Convention of 1787, with Explanatory Argument* (1940)
- *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961)
- *The Economy of Cities* (1969)
- *The Question of Separatism: Quebec and the Struggle Over Sovereignty* (1980)
- *Canadian Cities and Sovereignty Association* (1980)
- *Cities and the Wealth of Nations: Principles of Economic Life* (1984)
- *The Girl on the Hat* (children’s) (1989)
- *Housing on Toronto’s Main Streets* (1991)
- *Systems of Survival: A Dialogue on the Moral Foundations of Commerce and Politics* (1992)
- *A Schoolteacher in Alaska; the Story of Hannah Breece. Edited and with an Introduction and Commentary By Jane Jacobs.* (1995)
- *Toronto: Considering Self-Government [Introduction by Jane Jacobs and Mary Rowe]* (2000)
- *The Nature of Economies* (2000)
- *Dark Age Ahead* (2004)
- *A Short Biography of the Human Race* (in progress when she died)
- *Uncovering the New Economics* (in progress when she died)

Further Reading: Sources Consulted

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2. “Jacobs, Jane Isabel”. *The Canadian Encyclopedia Online* 2008.
3. “Jane Jacobs.” *Encyclopedia of World Biography Supplement*, Vol. 27. Gale, 2007. [Reproduced in *Biography Resource Centre*. Farmington Hills, Mich.: Gale, 2008.]
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5. Campbell, Robert. "Placing Jane Jacobs in a Larger Cultural Context." *Architectural Record* 194.6 (June 2006): 72-74. [Reproduced in Canadian Reference Centre. EBSCO].
6. "Jane, We Miss You Terribly," *Canadian Architect*. June 2006, p. 20 [Reproduced in Canadian Business and Current Affairs]
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http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jane_Jacobs
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<http://www.pps.org/info/placemakingtools/placemakers/jjacobs>
12. "Jane Jacobs" – Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jane_Jacobs
13. "Influential author Jane Jacobs dies at age 89". CTV.ca April 25, 2006