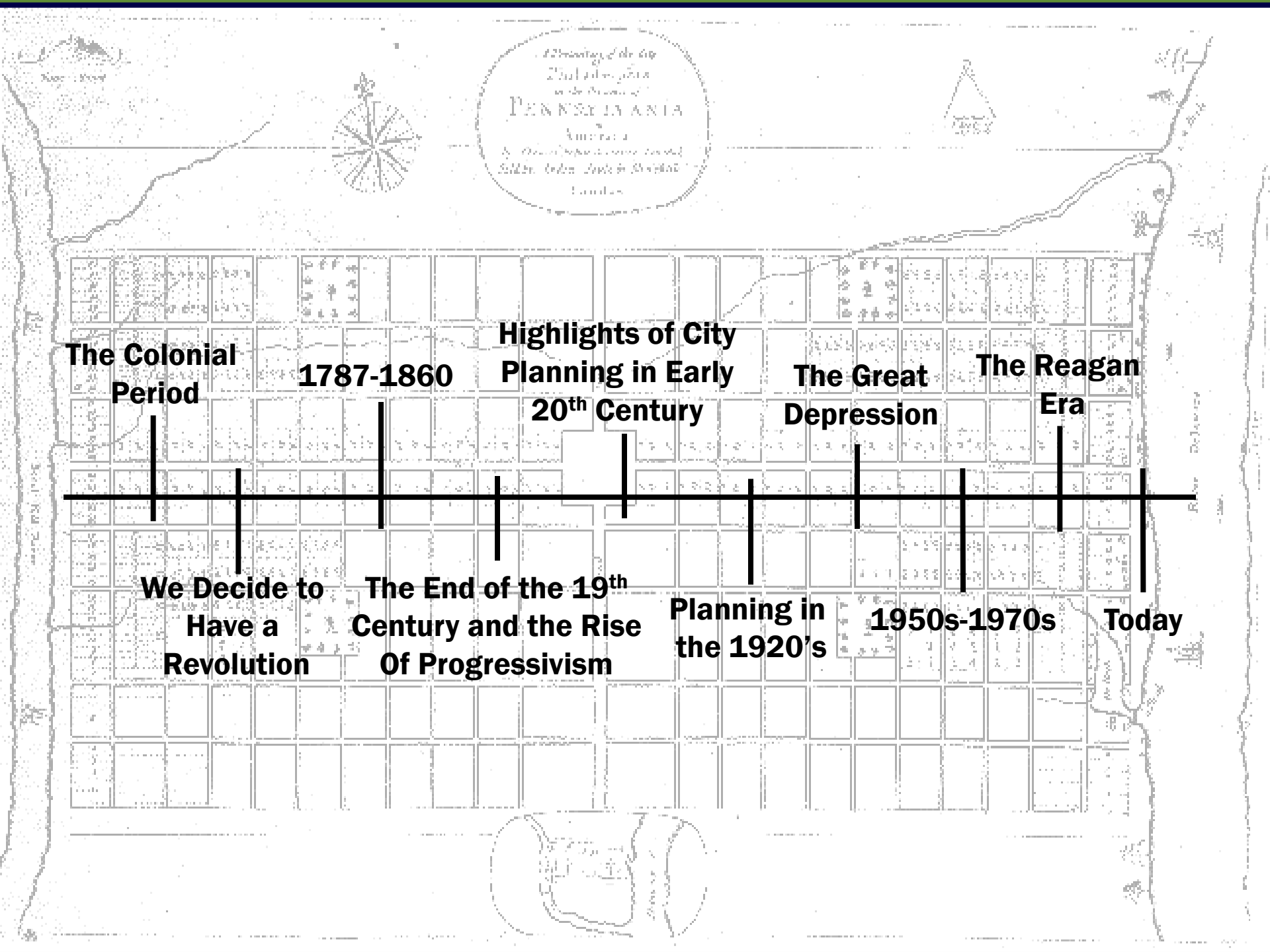
The Planning Commission – A Historical Perspective

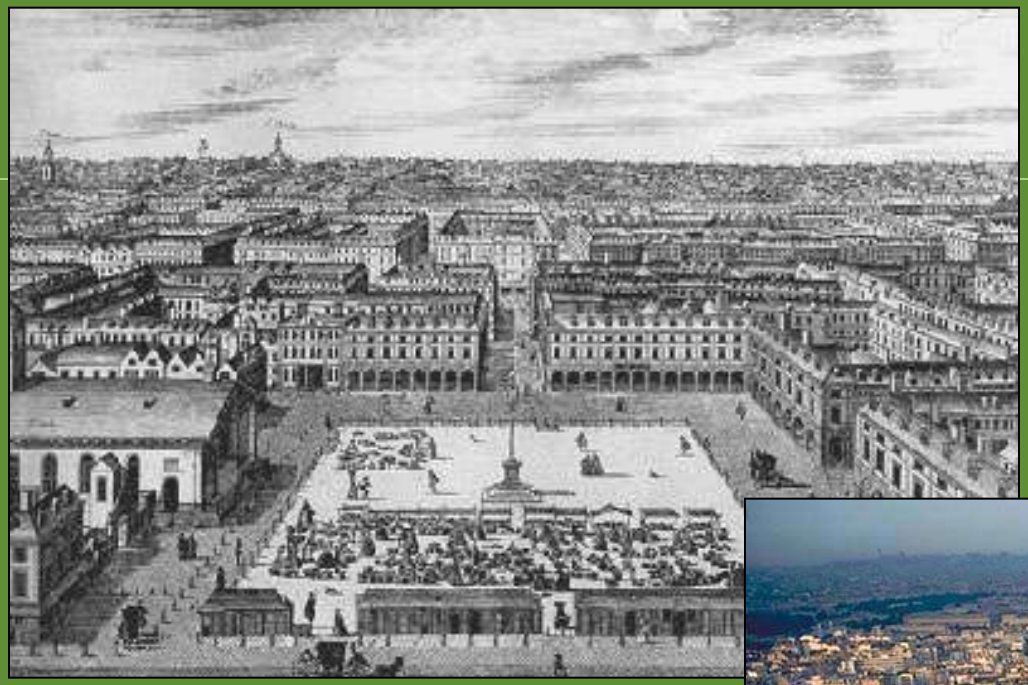
Baton Rouge CPEX Conference

Nixon Adams


The Colonial Period
1787-1860
Highlights of City Planning in Early 20th Century
The Great Depression
The Reagan Era
We Decide to Have a Revolution
The End of the 19th Century and the Rise Of Progressivism
Planning in the 1920's
1950s-1970s
Today

The Colonial Period

- We got our early traditions for city planning from colonial Europe…
- Many cities controlled land use
- Grids laid out by military engineers
- Controlled future expansion
- Laid out central town squares
- Exercised strong control

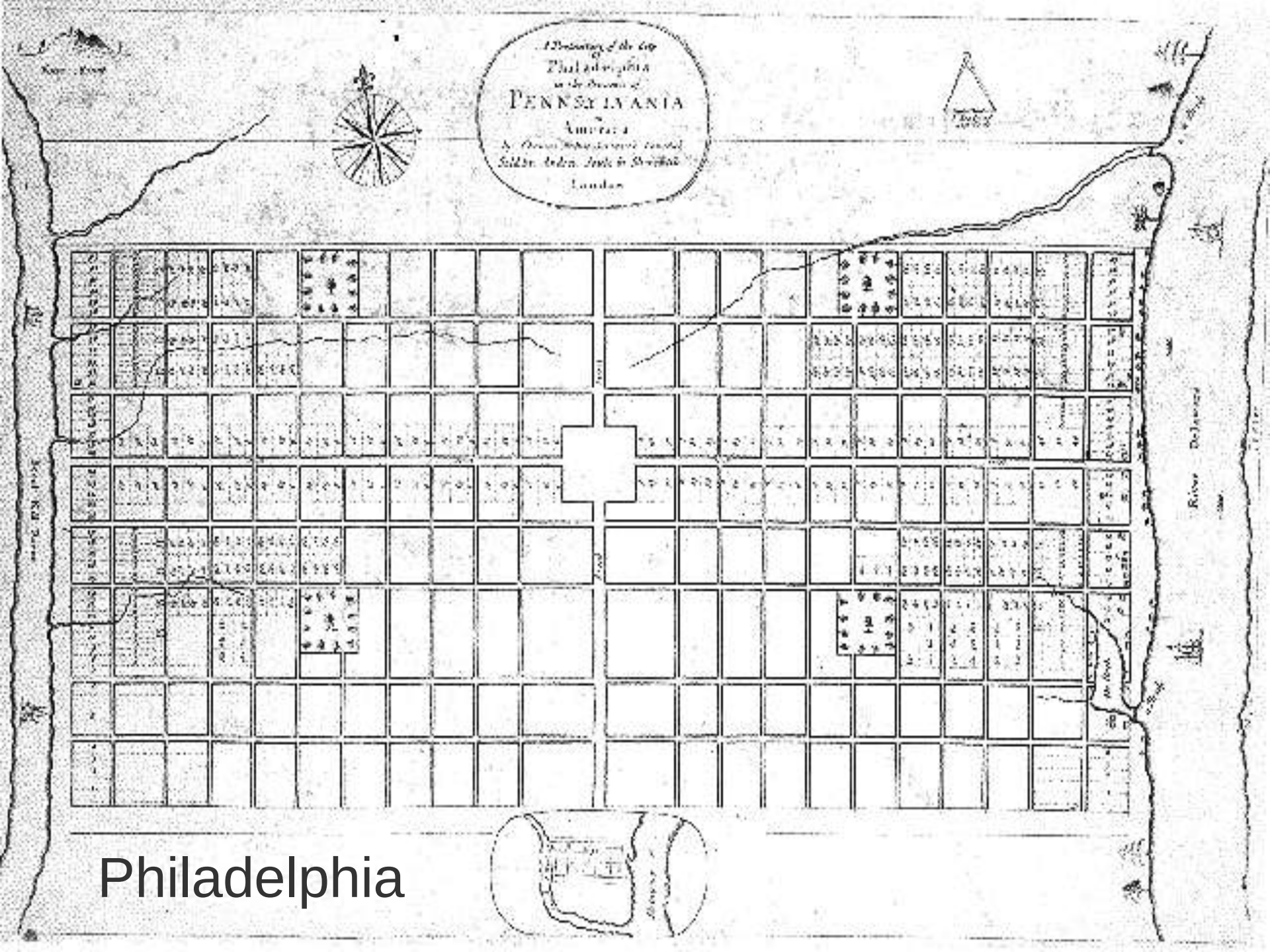


London

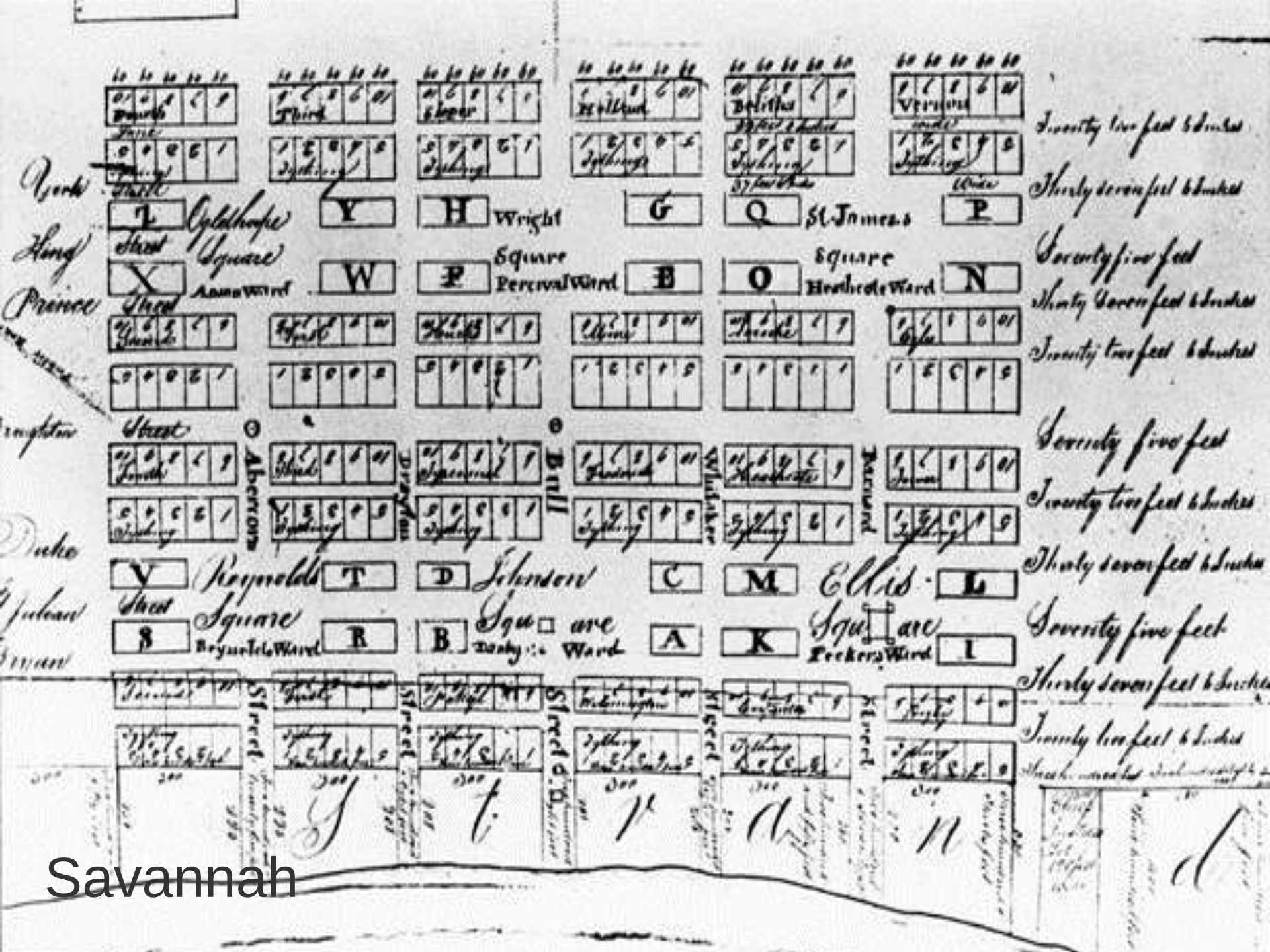
Paris

Colonial Period

- …We brought those traditions with us

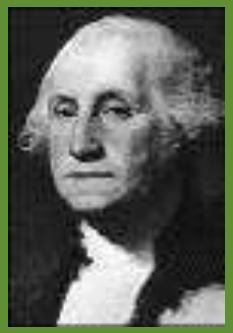


Philadelphia


Third
Wright
Square
St James
Square
Square
Reynolds
Square
Square
Square
Ellis
Square
Square
Street
Street
Street
Street
Street
Street
Seventy five feet
Seventy five feet
Seventy five feet
Seventy five feet

Savannah

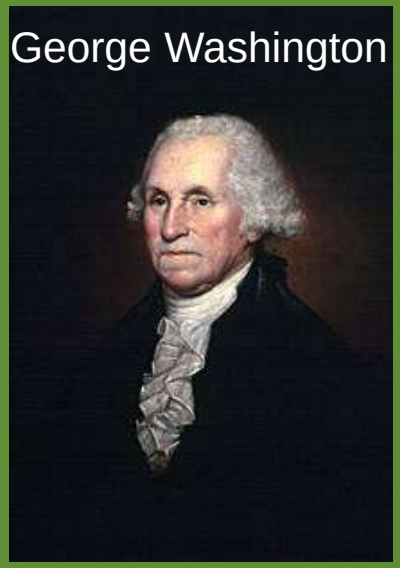
The Revolution



Yorktown

The Revolution

- Struggle over allocation of power
- Agrarian ethic vs. strong central government



Pre-Revolution	Post-Revolution
Strong City Power	Weak City
Weak State Power	Strong State Powers
No Federal Power	Moderate Federal Power

1787-1860

- First great act of planning: the siting of the new capital

1787-1860

- Control the development of cities through the use of public spaces, utilities and locating public buildings

- Not controlling private property. Yet.

The End of the 19th Century and the Rise of Progressivism

- Great wave of immigrants form Central, southern and eastern Europe

- Blacks moving North from the South

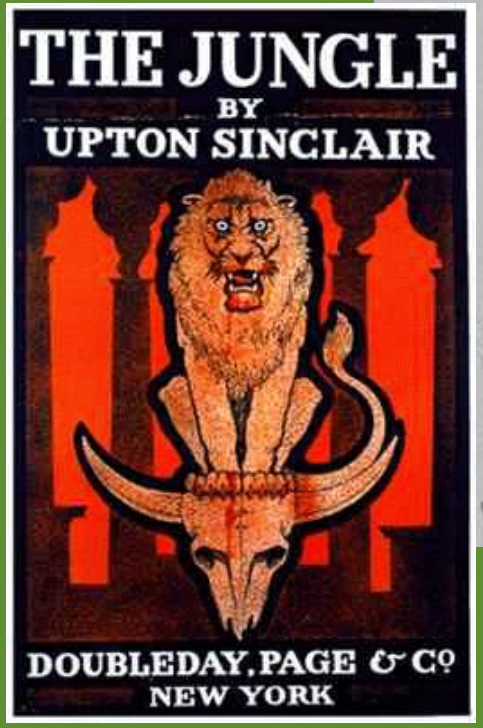
The End of the 19th Century and the Rise of Progressivism

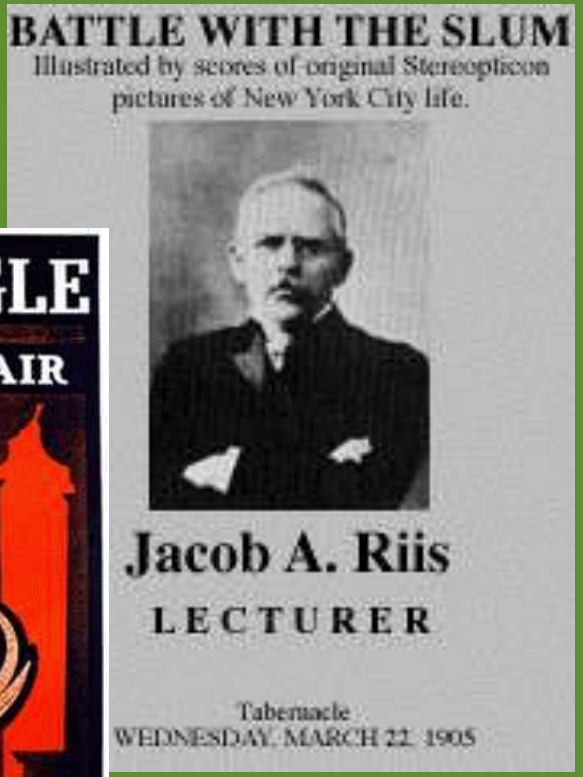
- Leads to massive overcrowding in cities
- Highlights the lack of sanitary and public health codes
- No minimum standards for housing

The End of the 19th Century and the Rise of Progressivism

- Lack of Open Space
- No Traffic Planning

The End of the 19th Century and the Rise of Progressivism





- Muck-raking authors bring the conditions to the attention of Americans – the US is still a rural nation
- Beginning to get the feeling that you could intervene in the regulation of private property?
- In 1867 New York passed the fist Tenement Housing Law

The End of the 19th Century and the Rise of Progressivism

- The Chicago World's Fair and Columbian Exposition (1893)
  - Daniel Burnham, August St. Gaudens, Fredrick Law Olmstead brought together
  - Estimated that 1 in every 6 Americans attended

The End of the 19th Century and the Rise of Progressivism

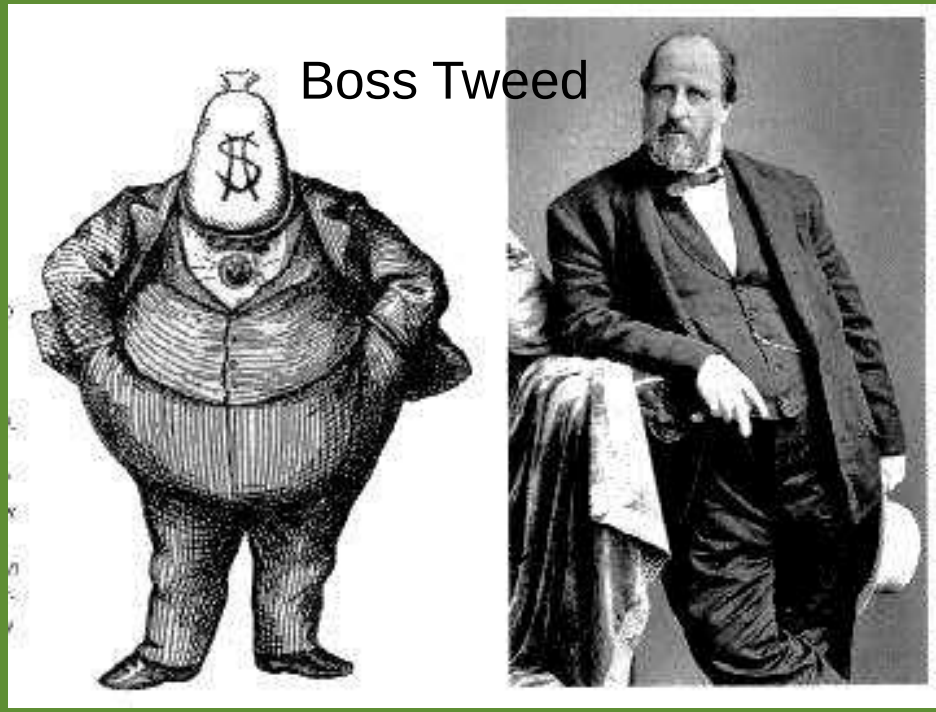
- The Chicago World's Fair and Columbian Exposition (1893)
  - Everything worked!
    - Streetlights
    - Sculpture
    - Gardens
    - Street Furniture
    - Beautiful Buildings
  - Changed Americans attitudes about cities

The End of the 19th Century and the Rise of Progressivism

- Political Corruption –

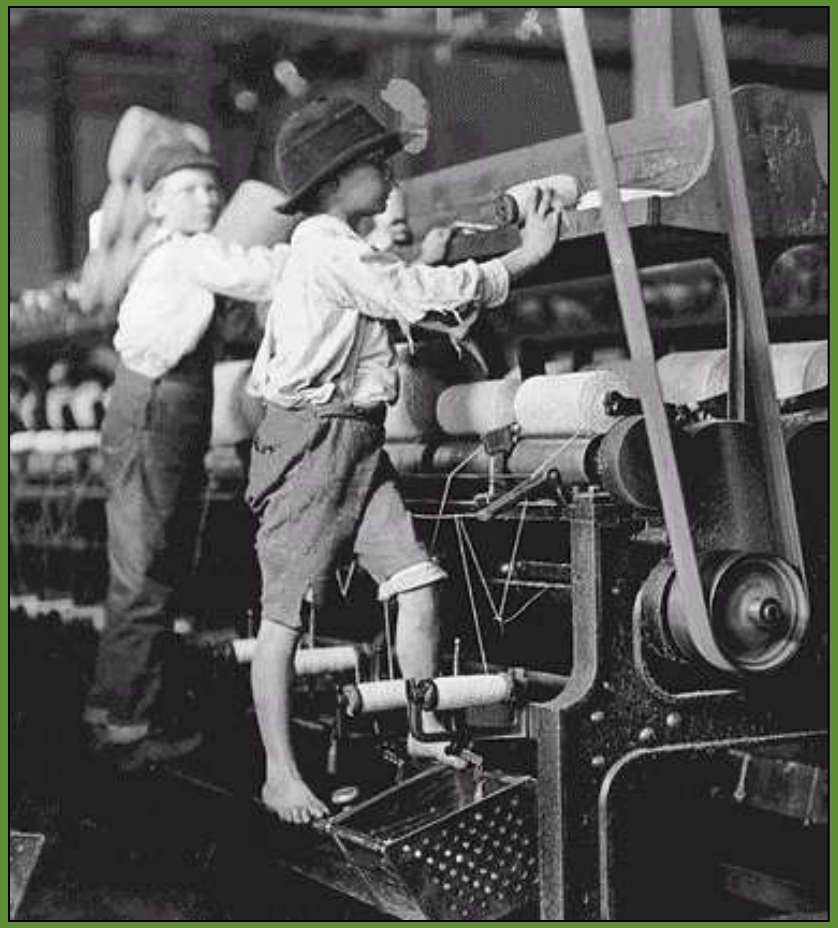
bosses taking advantage of immigrants

- Graft in exchange for votes and patronage



The End of the 19th Century and the Rise of Progressivism

- Child Labor
- Women's Rights
- Workers Safety
- Robber Barons



- White City
- Corruption
- Conditions of Cities

Progressive Movement

Civil Service

City Manager Form of Government

Planning Commissions

City Beautiful Movement

City Efficiency Movement

The Early 20th Century

- 1907: First Planning Board -Hartford, Ct

- "1909 A Watershed Year for City Planning"

  - First National Conference on City Planning
  - First city planning course offered at Harvard
  - Publication of Daniel Burnham's Plan of Chicago

- 1925: First Long Range Comprehensive Plan – Cincinnati, OH
- 1926: Euclid vs. Ambler Realty (***more in "Law" session***)
- 1926: Standard Zoning Enabling Act

Commission Duties & Powers (La RS 33.101, et seq)

- Provides for creation of local planning commissions
- Members may be removed for inefficiency, neglect of duty and malfeasance
- Planning commission shall also serve as zoning commission
- Commission may hire employees and consultants
- Legislative body shall provide necessary funds

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Commission Duties & Powers (cont.)

- A commission shall elect a chairman from its membership…
- A commission shall hold at least one regular meeting in each month…
- It shall adopt rules for transactions of business and shall keep a record of its resolutions, transactions, findings and determinations, which record shall be a public record

Commission Duties & Powers (cont.)

- A commission shall create master plan
- It will make decisions and recommendations on land use and development and on city planning issues ***based on the plans***
- Local projects shall be consistent with master plan
- Overriding commission requires two-thirds vote
- Subdivision is a legislative function

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An Important Role

- As envisioned historically, and under Louisiana law, planning commissions have a lot of responsibility <u>and</u> power
- Critical to community's character and reputation
- Important that a community have confidence in the planning process and all involved in it
- A commission's actions are also important because they may be the first step in a long, complex legal process

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Commission & Commissioner Qualities

- Consistency
- Objectivity, impartiality and good judgment
- Independence from political pressure
- Thorough discussion and fact-finding before decisions
- Effectiveness (meeting conduct, clear findings & records keeping)
- Transparency (open meetings law and ex parte rules)

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