

Reviving the Urban Park

The master plan for Central Park, with which varying Parks Administrations in the past five years have played lost and found, if not fast and loose, has disappeared completely with the city's fiscal crisis. Its primary purpose was rehabilitation; and some of its key projects surface occasionally as the present administration seeks state and Federal funds for urgent spot repairs.

Now a group of the private organizations that serve as watchdogs of Central Park have initiated a "Second Century Fund" which hopes to raise \$2 million for park use. The aim is a coordinated preservation effort, with emphasis on basic landscaping and erosion control.

A walk anywhere in Central Park reveals how desperately this work is needed. But what is equally necessary is a change in public attitude; the use and purpose of urban parks is increasingly misunderstood. They are no longer perceived as they were designed—as sensitive and skillful works of landscape art intended as places of repose and relief from congested cities. Parks face a double dilemma today: They are either the victim of promotions and encroachments, as in Central Park, or they have been taken over by drug users, society's dropouts and disruptive forces, with the result that many small local parks are almost unusable by the community.

The destruction involved in both kinds of abuse is eroding more than grass; it is also eroding one of the city's most valuable resources. Refreshment of the spirit through the pleasures of the senses that planners like Frederick Law Olmsted had in mind—the idea of the park as a great democratic work of art and place of quietude—is lost with the landscaping.

The public park is a significant social and environmental amenity. It is endangered now on every level, and needs help from every source.