
I. Lyndon LaRouche's 'Manhattan Project'

Beautiful City

Όμορφη πόλη

by Dean Andromidas

FIRST OF THREE PARTS

June 24—In February 2017, I was struck by the discussion in a meeting of Lyndon and Helga Zepp-LaRouche with some of their associates, where the question of a beautiful city came up during a discussion of voice placement. The issue was raised in the context of building new cities in the United States, which should have an important element of beauty imbued in them. The discussion provoked me to give some thought, and some work to it, and to present some rough ideas.

To explore the idea of the Beautiful City, let us look at two examples: Athens and Manhattan.

I say Athens and not just “ancient” Athens, because

the city has had an uninterrupted life of over three thousand years. It is, not was, the city of immortal Plato and the poets, and has continued to produce philosophers and poets through the centuries, to this very day. It has never ceased in its role as light-bearer of universal civilization and the struggle for true freedom, whether against the Persian or British empires or the chains of a false ideology.

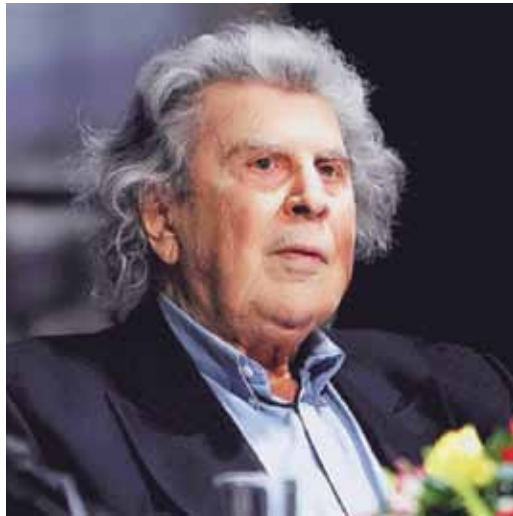
It was in the dark days of 1941, when the eternal city was under the brutal occupation of the Nazis, that a 16-year-old youth, upon hearing that the brave people of beautiful Crete were still fiercely resisting the Nazi invasion of their island, knew at once that he could not stand idle. In the dark of night, he and a comrade



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The Acropolis in Athens, Greece.

launched a flanking operation. They secretly climbed the Acropolis and removed the Nazi flag, replacing it with the blue and white Greek flag. This act is credited as the first act of resistance in Nazi-occupied Europe. In 2001, that same youth, Manolis Glezos, now over 90 years of age—with another resistance fighter, the great modern composer Mikis Theodorakis—launched another resistance movement against the financial oligarchy which has been looting and destroying their country and their city.



Courtesy of Mikis Theodorakis

Mikis Theodorakis

The Greeks of today speak in principle the same language as Plato and they love their city just as deeply as the great philosophers and poets. In this time of terrible crisis for Greeks of today, looking upon the Acropolis, crowned by the most famous of edifices, the Parthenon, gives them the strength to resist, knowing that their city has made some of the most important contributions to universal culture. It is this Athens that bears the crucial attributes of a “beautiful city.”

Athens embodies the Hellenic conception of “polis,” which, rather than being exclusive, is inclusive not just of its “native” citizens but foreigners as well, according to the Greek concept that sees the stranger as a guest who might indeed have something to offer the city, especially in the way of ideas. One sees this in perhaps less poetic terms, but in the spirit of its times, in New York City.

At the center of this Athens is the Acropolis, for many centuries the religious and civic center of the city, and now still, as it has always been, its spiritual center. Surrounding it was the Agora or marketplace, from which a road and long walls linked the city to the port of Piraeus and the *demes* or city districts. This is much like every city, ancient, renaissance or modern. There are many professional city planners capable of designing the functionality of a city in which most people would be satisfied

living and working. So these attributes I leave to the professional.

But let’s look at the Acropolis and its crown jewel, the Parthenon, which lies at the very heart of the city, if not the very heart of Greece and Western Civilization. Everyone knows the history: Initiated by Pericles following the victory over the Persians, and designed by the architects Iktinos and Kallikrates and the sculptor Pheidias, this was the most amazing of buildings in the history of civilized man. No other building shares all the attributes of this temple.

Although there is one that endeavors to, which I will discuss later.

I will not attempt a detailed analysis of the Parthenon, I leave that to the experts. Nonetheless a comment on its most celebrated feature, its curvature, is important for my purpose. As is known, there is not one straight line in the entire edifice. No two parts are identical. It has been suggested for centuries now, that the purpose of this curvature is to correct the distortion imparted onto straight lines by the eye of the viewer. Panos Valavanis, one of the archeologists involved in the restoration project of the Parthenon, now in its third decade, wrote:



The Agora or market place surrounding the Acropolis.



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The Parthenon in Athens.

“It is improbable that this entire nexus of features, invisible on first glance, was of the nature of visual adjustments or a way of neutralizing optical illusion, as had been assumed from late Antiquity. It is actually a recondite mesh enclosing the entire building, even its least accessible parts, and was created deliberately in order to serve purely aesthetic aims. It was intended to insufflate the pulse of life and movement into the monument, to unfetter it from static rigidity, imparting a covert harmony, which, according to Heraclitus, was more important than the overt... Because we cannot accept that they were applied only to satisfy the needs of the monument’s creators. Everything must also have served the aesthetic demands of an entire society, to which, in the last analysis, the monument was addressed.”

There is no mystery here. Up until the liberation of Athens in 1833, western Europeans could not easily examine the Greek monuments. Architecture was dominated by Roman classicism, as very misleadingly interpreted by the Roman engineer Vitruvius and his ten easy lessons on architecture. Once Athens was liberated, German and French architects, artists and poets began visiting the city. King Otto, the first modern king of Greece, moved to preserve the Acropolis as an archaeological site, bringing professional architects and archaeologists to prepare the site and begin a close examination. It was observed that the curvature was not derived from arcs of circles, but derived from conic sec-

tions, including parabolic curves. This conical curvature contrasts with the circular curvature of Roman architecture.

This curvature in conic sections applied to all the elements of the building, including the columns, stylobate, the entablature, the pediment, and so on. There were no straight lines and no plumb surfaces.

By contrast to the circular, the conical and parabolic cast soft shadows, and in combination with the highly polished marble positively affect the *chiaroscuro* of the building. This generation of light and shadow not only generated the sense of depth, but contributes to an overall sense of metaphorical ambiguity central to any form of art, whether liter-

ary, plastic or musical. This point is very important in relation to the painted parts of the Parthenon, which are poorly understood.

Charles Blanc, one of the first to closely analyze the Parthenon in his *Grammaire des Arts du Dessin*, wrote that the Parthenon had the character of the Sublime, and observing it “is like the sudden encounter with infinity,” for “unlike beauty, which is man’s domain,” the sublime places the observer “above and beyond us.”

King Otto’s chief architect, Joseph Hoffer, wrote: “The system of curved lines” which exhibited a “perfect logic,” had enabled Greek architects “to infuse the lifeless forms of art with a breath of living Nature, for Nature avoids the rectilinear and develops its most attractive forms in swelling curves.”

Hoffer’s contemporary, Charles Schnaase, wrote in his *Geschichte der bildenden Künste* “a feeling of life,” conveyed by this curvature, “inspired the whole building, dispelling its mathematical rigidity.”

The English astronomer J. Norman Lockyer observed that the Parthenon is an Egyptian Temple made beautiful. Lockyer wrote: What would the Greeks do, who were the first Europeans to be exposed to Egyptian ideas, and after observing Egypt’s “massive and glorious” temples, and “fired with Greek ideals of the beautiful, determined that their new land should not remain altarless?”

What would they do? They would naturally

adapt the Egyptian temple to the new surroundings, climatic among others. The open courts and flat roofs of Egyptian temples would give way to covered courts and sloping roofs to deal with a more copious rainfall: and it is curious to note that the chief architectural differences have this simple origin. The small financial resources of a colony would be reason good enough for a *cella* not far from the entrance, with courts surrounding it under the now necessary roof. The intuitive love of beauty would do the rest, and make it a *sine qua non* that the rosy-fingered dawn would be observable, and that the colored light of the rising sun in the more boreal clime should render glorious a state statue of the divinity.



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Nikos Kazantzakis

Oriented to the Pleiades

In the case of the Parthenon, and following the Egyptian model, the temple was orientated to the Pleiades constellation in such a way that the priests could observe it, so as to foretell the rising of the sun at various feast days, thereby giving the priests the time to prepare for the ceremony. (For a full discussion of the Parthenon's orientation see: *The Dawn of Astronomy; A Study of the Temple-Worship and Mythology of the Ancient Egyptians*, by J. Norman Lockyer, pp. 413-424.)

Greece's most accomplished and beloved literary figure of the 20th century, Nikos Kazantzakis, wrote late in his life, "This temple is a mystery to me. I can never see it the same way twice; it seems to change constantly, come to life, undulate while remaining motionless, play games with light and the human eye."

Nonetheless as a young rebellious youth he at first rejected it, writing:

"I felt that the Parthenon was an even number such as two or four. Even numbers run contrary to my heart; I want nothing to do with them, their lives are too comfortably arranged, they stand on their feet much too solidly and have not the slightest desire to change position. They are satisfied, conservative, without anxieties; they have solved every problem, translated every desire into

reality, and grown calm. It was the odd number which conforms to the rhythm of my heart. The life of the odd number is not at all comfortably arranged. The odd number does not like this world the way it finds it, but seeks to change it, add to it, push it further. It stands on one foot, holds the other ready in the air, and wants to depart. Where to? To the following even number, in order to halt for an instant, catch its breath, and work up fresh momentum."

Nonetheless with each successive visit he soon discovered that the Parthenon was an odd number:

But after each new return from Attica's olive groves and the Saronic Gulf, the hidden harmony, casting aside its veils one by one, slowly, gradually revealed itself to my mind. Each time I climbed the Acropolis again, the Parthenon seemed to be swaying slightly, as in a motionless dance—swaying and breathing...

This initiation lasted for months, perhaps years. I do not remember the exact day when I stood completely initiated before the Parthenon and my heart bounded like a young calf. This temple that towered before me, what a trophy it was, what a collaboration between mind and heart, what a supreme fruit of human effort! Space had been conquered; distinctions between small and large had vanished. Infinity entered this narrow, magical parallelogram carved out by man, entered leisurely and took its repose there. Time had been conquered as well; the lofty moment had been transformed into eternity.

I allowed my gaze to creep over the warm, sun-nourished marble. It touched the stones and rummaged through them like a hand, uncovering the hidden mysteries; it clung to them and refused to depart. I saw the seemingly parallel columns imperceptibly incline their capitals one toward the other so that concertedly, with tenderness and strength, they might sustain the sacred pediments entrusted to them.

Never have undulations created lines so irreproachably straight. Never have numbers and music coupled with such understanding, such love.

Kazantsakis often wrote that the true mission of mankind is to “turn matter into spirit,” and indeed the Parthenon is a celebrated example of that principle. (*Report to Greco*, Nikos Kazantzakis, pp. 136—138.)

The American Hudson River School painter, Frederic Edwin Church, spent several weeks in Athens in 1869, studying the Greek ruins, and wrote to his friend Nicholas Biddle Kittell:

The Parthenon is certainly the culmination of the genius of man in architecture. Every column, every ornament, every molding asserts the superiority which is claimed for even the shattered remains of the once proud temple over all other buildings by man.

I have made architectural drawings of the Parthenon and fancied before I came to Athens that I had a good idea of its merits. But in reality I knew it not. Daily I study its stones and feel its inexpressible charm of beauty growing upon my senses. I am glad I came here—and shall try and secure as much material as possible. I think a great picture could be made of the ruins. They are very picturesque as well as imposing and the color is superb.

Again in a letter to William H. Osborn, he wrote, “I recently visited Greece—Athens—I was delighted. The Parthenon is a wonderful work of the human intellect. No photograph can convey even a faint impression of its majesty and beauty. . . . fragments of sculpture are strewn all about—and let me say that I think Athens is the place for sculpture—to be sure in Rome they have famous things—mostly brought from Greece, but on the classic ground itself everything is in its place. The Greeks had noble conceptions. They gave a large god-



Artist Frederic Edwin Church

The Parthenon

like air to all they did and the fragments and bits are full of merit. I spent over two weeks there with immense pleasure and profit. . . . and when I returned—Rome with its gross architecture looked cheap and vulgar. ”

Church made his painting of the Parthenon: it can be seen hanging in the Metropolitan Museum of art.

Let’s have a look at the “sacred pediments” entrusted to this temple of temples. These are formed by sculptures arranged in three categories. There are the pediments, the second are the metopes, which are set on the entablature above the columns, and the third is the frieze on the wall.

Those on the pediments celebrate the deity of the city, Athena—first her birth, on the east pediment, and her conflict with Poseidon on the west. While all the principal gods are there, the Parthenon is a celebration of Athena, the patron god of Athens and, most importantly, the god of knowledge, marking her as the goddess for all humanity. Indeed, she has been transformed from a patron god of the city to a principle upon which the city, if not all of Greece, rests.

The metopes depict, in snapshot form, the mythological battles—first the Gigantomachy, the battle between the Gods and their challengers, the Titans. Next is the Amazonomachy, the battle between the Amazons and the Greeks, in which the Athenian hero Theseus plays a crucial part. This is followed by the scenes of the sack of Troy with emphasis on Demophon and Akamas, the sons of Theseus who took part in it. Lastly



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Parthenon Metope: Centaur and Lapith in combat.

there is the Centauromachy, the battle between the Thessalian tribe of the Lapiths and the Centaurs, half man-half horse. The defeat of the latter was secured through the decisive intervention of Theseus.

The third category of sculpture is the frieze relief displayed behind the outer colonnade. This is perhaps the most masterful of all. It is the procession of the Panathenaia, a celebration held every four years in honor of the Goddess, where the entire city as well as delegations from all of Greece participate. Archaeological evidence is said to suggest that this was not in the original plan but was the result of a political decision. No other Greek temple displayed a relief at this location. Like the temple itself, it is a relief in motion.

So here on this one temple can be seen Gods of the Hellenistic world, its mythologies and its citizens. There has been much commentary on the symbolism and relationships of these three sets of sculpture, some saying they depict the conflict between Man and the Gods, Civilized man, the Greeks and the Barbarians, etc. But who are we to make such commentaries? The most truthful commentaries on these relationships were by the Greek tragic poets themselves, who performed

their works in the Dionysos theater on the slope at the base of the Acropolis' south wall below the Parthenon, serving as the counterpoint between the "Frozen Music of Architecture," as Goethe once described Architecture, and the music of the poet.

Then on the other side of the Acropolis is the Agora, or market place. It is here where one found Socrates holding his immortal dialogues, transforming art into what we call "philosophy."

While volumes can be written on the beautiful city of Athens, it is the Acropolis and its Parthenon that captures its essence and embody all the principles we need to know.

In fear of belaboring the reader with yet another long quote from our modern Greek poet, I must nonetheless quote below another passage from Kazantzakis' *Report to Greco*, describing the conclusion of a tour through Greece he made after graduating from university—which would be about 1905, although he wrote this shortly before his death in 1956. So it was as an older man reflecting on his own development.

When a Greek travels through Greece, his journey becomes converted in this fatal way into a laborious search to find his duty. How is he to become worthy of our ancestors? How can he continue his national tradition without disgracing it? A severe unsilenceable responsibility weighs heavily on his shoulders, on the shoulders of every living Greek. The name itself possesses an invincible, magical force. Every person born in Greece has the duty to continue the eternal Greek legend.

In the modern Greek, no region of his homeland calls forth a disinterested quiver of aesthetic appreciation. The region has a name; it is Marathon, Salamis, Olympia, Thermopylae, Mistra, and it is bound up with a memory: here we were disgraced, there we won glory. All at once the region is transformed into much-wept, wide-roving history, and the Greek pilgrim's entire soul is thrown into turmoil. Each Greek region is so soaked with successes and failures possessing world-wide echoes, so filled with human struggle, that it is elevated into an austere lesson

which we cannot escape. It becomes a cry, and our duty is to hear this cry.

Greece's position is truly tragic; on the shoulders of every modern Greek it places a duty at once dangerous and extremely difficult to carry out. We bear an extremely heavy responsibility. New forces are rising from the East, new forces are rising from the West, and Greece, caught as always between the two colliding impulses once more becomes a whirlpool. Following the tradition of reason and empirical inquiry, the West bounds forward to conquer the world; the East, prodded by frightening subconscious forces, likewise darts forward to conquer the world. Greece is placed in the middle; it is the world's geographical and spiritual crossroads. Once again its duty is to reconcile these two monstrous impulses by finding a synthesis. Will it succeed?

It is a sacred and most bitter fate. At the end of my trip through Greece I was filled with tragic, unexpected questions. Starting with beauty, we had arrived at the agonies of our times and the present-day duty imposed on every Greek. Today, a man who is alive—who thinks, loves, and struggles—is no longer able to amble in a carefree way, to appreciate beauty. The struggle today is spreading like a conflagration, and no fire brigade can insure our safety. Every man is struggling and burning along with all humanity. And the Greek nation is struggling more than all the rest. This is its fate.

The circle closed. My eyes filled with Greece. It seems to me that my mind ripened in those three months. What were the most precious spoils of this intellectual campaign? I believe they were these: I saw more clearly the historic mission of Greece, placed as it is between East and West; I realized that her supreme achievement is not beauty but the struggle for liberty. I felt Greece's tragic destiny more deeply, and also what a heavy duty is imposed on every Greek.

I believe that immediately following my pilgrimage through Greece, I was ripe enough to begin the years of maturity. It was not beauty which led the way and ushered me to manhood, it was responsibility.

If I had summarized this passage in two sen-

tences, would I have so beautifully expressed an idea that holds true today as it did a half century ago when these words were written?

The question immediately arises—can walking the streets of Manhattan evoke similar feelings, similar commitments, similar responsibilities?

Manhattan as the Beautiful City

Can we learn something of the beautiful city, Manhattan, from Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*? Does that play, separated from us by one or two generations, bear comparison to immortal works of the Greek poets? Could someone so profane as to marry Marilyn Monroe bear comparison to the tragic poets? Yet with a closer look at the play, one will soon discover that nothing could be more at the very heart of New York society than this play.

The image of the "salesman," forever in my mind, whom I saw every day in the 1970s on Seventh Avenue; the well dressed, sassy-looking men rolling their wheeled sample cases, hailing cabs in their thick New York accents. Selling the wares of the famous, or infamous, in the "fashion" center of the world, a world with its own internal hierarchy, at the bottom of which were the seamstresses and delivery boys, up to the aristocratic layers that began with the "cutter" and ended



Library of Congress

Men pulling racks of clothing on a sidewalk in the New York Garment District in 1955.

with the boss, who in this most New York of industries could in one season become a millionaire, and in the next a bankrupt. The salesman found himself somewhere in between the skilled cutter, protected by his union, and the boss whose fortunes were inseparable from his own success or failure.

It was also the heart of the Jewish community of New York, the world's largest outside of Israel. But these Jews did not come from Palestine, they came from Central and Eastern Europe and the Russian Empire, having arrived in New York in the first decades of the 20th century, fleeing pogroms, persecution and poverty. They brought with them the progressive and socialist ideas of their time, as well as a high degree of culture and the arts, enriching every aspect of the city.

Arthur Miller came out of this environment. His parents were Austrian Jews. Miller was born on the upper West Side of Manhattan when his father, the proprietor of a garment factory with 400 employees, was rich—only to lose everything when the “crash” came. Miller soon found himself moving to Brooklyn: He had to work to pay his way through school. As he said in an interview, salesmen were very much part of his family experience. He too was a man of the left, a “progressive.”

In fact, this play, clearly the best play Miller wrote, and arguably the only good play he wrote, was not written by him. It was written and inspired by the muses of Manhattan. Indeed, in an interview given a few years before his death, he insisted that he had not written it. “I was the stenographer. I could hear the characters. I could hear them literally,” as he took down the words of the characters speaking in the silence of his mind in clear and powerful words.

In an interview many years after he wrote the play, Miller recounted that Willy Loman, as is often the case, was modeled on a real person he had known, whose life represented “failure in the face of surrounding success. He was the ultimate climber up the ladder who was,



Eileen Darby/Keystone Features/Fair use
Lee J. Cobb, seated, with Arthur Kennedy, left, and Cameron Mitchell in the 1949 production of Death of a Salesman.

constantly, being stepped on. His fingers were being stepped on by those climbing past him. My empathy for him was immense. And I mean, how could he possibly have succeeded? There was no way... He committed suicide... The play was basically looking from the edge of the grave at life.”

In an interview in 1949, on the eve of the play's opening, Miller told the *New York Times* that Loman, as does every man, “has an image of himself which fails in one way or another to correspond with reality. It's the discrepancy between illusion and reality that matters. The closer a man gets to knowing himself, the less likely he is to trip up on his

own illusions.” The play poignantly reveals how Loman's self-delusion is transmitted to his sons, who are seen as unable to deal with reality.

He said that he knew the play was good when he finished it, but did not understand its impact until his publicist came to read the manuscript and was brought to uncontrolled tears. In fact, at the play's debut, when the final curtain came down, there was nothing but silence in the theater, for the entire audience had been reduced to tears.

Bernard Gimbel, the owner of the famous Gimbel's department stores was in that tear-filled audience, and is said to have given orders the next day that no employee should ever be dismissed for being over-aged.

As a prologue to this story: Three of the most important creators of that first performance, Lee J. Cobb (born Leo Jacobi), who played Willy Loman, the director, Elia Kazan, and Arthur Miller himself were all forced to appear before the House Un-American Activities Committee because of their alleged communist sympathies. The first two named names. Miller did not.

Beautiful city? one protests, that drives a hapless man to suicide? Yet I am reminded of the lines of Alcinous, in Homer's *Odyssey*, who upon seeing Odysseus weeping while the minstrel sings the *Iliad*, says,

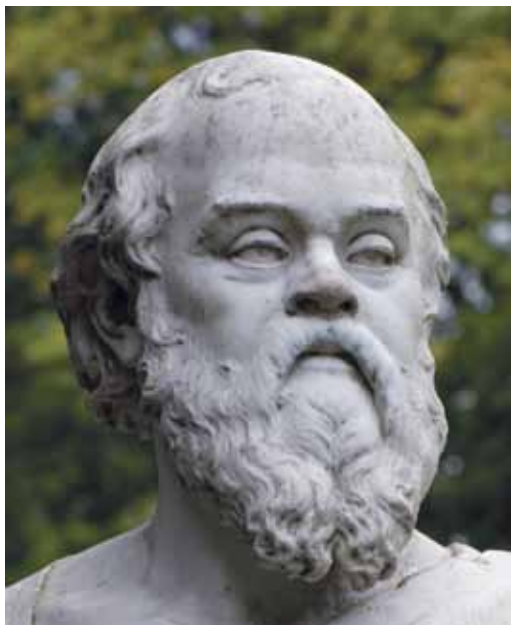
...Why to heare
The Fate of Greece and Ilion
mourne you so?
The Gods have done it; as to all
they do
Destine to destruction, that
from thence may rise
A Poeme to instruct posterities.

Sacred Soil

Miller's play expressed a universal truth that could move audiences throughout the United States as well as the world. It was translated into Greek and performed in Athens in 1949 with incidental music written by the equally beloved 20th Century Greek composer Manos Hadjidakis. But this play could not have been written in any other city than New York. Willy Loman's imaginary home is in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn, where Miller grew up. Loman was employed by a company in Manhattan's West Side garment district. One of his sons is obviously a buyer for Macy's or Gimbel's department store. Loman held a 25-year mortgage with which he bought his house when it was almost a suburb of Manhattan, but it is now suffocated by the surrounding apartment houses which push up against the windows, blocking out the light and air. This is New York, a city that undergoes dramatic change over the course from one generation to another.

When the first subway was built in the three thousand year-old Athens, the ancient city was exposed like the deep roots of an old oak tree, exposing what seemed another strange world, yet it was every bit Athens just as much as its 19th Century Parliament and the Athens Hilton.

While Athens is over thirty centuries old, New York is a mere four, and has not yet passed two and a half centuries as the greatest city of the independent Republic of the United States. Yet like Athens, the millions of tons of asphalt, concrete, brick and mortar cover, as the poets would say, a "sacred blood-soaked soil" where trod the men and women who struggled, fought and died for the same principle as did the Athenians—that is freedom and necessity.



creative commons/Ben Crowe

Socrates

Living under the shadow of the Parthenon, the modern Athenian is confronted every day with this struggle for that ancient principle, freedom and necessity. Set high on the Acropolis, the Parthenon can be seen from every part of the city, even from neighboring islands. If one is blind, one can always touch it with the conceit that Pericles, Socrates or Plato also touched it at that very spot.

While much of Athens is a post-World War II city, walking through it one is not only confronted with the great Acropolis and Agora which lie at its very center, but as one walks through it, one comes upon open archaeological sites where the ancient

city, including the Greek, Hellenistic and Roman periods, reminds the viewer that below the tons of concrete and asphalt, he is walking on sacred soil. One is often confronted with an ancient church and chapel, confronting the viewer with the Early Christian Byzantine. Walking through the Plaka, or the old city below the Acropolis, one can see buildings from the period of Ottoman occupation and early independence. Further into the city can be seen the grand neoclassical buildings of early independence, the Parliament, the Law University and others.

The ability to see, and even touch one's history across its entirety cannot help but have a powerful impact on each successive generation, and is one of the crucial elements of the beautiful city.

While New York is famous for its towering skyscrapers, it has no acropolis capped by a Parthenon. But if one looks for it, one can find sacred, blood-soaked soil, uncovered and exposed where the eyes can see, the feet can tread and the fingers can touch.

Athens has its Marathon and Salamis where the defeat of an Empire assured the posterity of Hellenism for eternity. The first battle for an independent United States was the battle for New York, which began within hours of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. While not our Marathon or Salamis, it exposed the weakness of an Empire. Perhaps it was our Thermopylae. Though ending in defeat, that battle, against

overwhelming odds, lasted more than four months, and the British failure to capture or destroy Washington's army served the strategic goal of demonstrating to the King and his army that they would have to fight for every inch of territory.

A review of that battle will serve the purpose of this report, which is to link culture and history with the topography of the living beautiful city, as it is a battle that was fought throughout almost the entire area of today's New York City. While most of the battlefield is covered with concrete, asphalt and bricks, small patches of the original battlefield still push up through the modern megalopolis. They are marked by monuments that have almost been forgotten in the everyday hustle and bustle of the city.

Washington's strategy rested on the principles upon which we sought to create a nation. These principles are well expressed by one of Washington's generals, Nathanael Greene, a native of Rhode Island. He died soon after the revolution and his story is not well known. He held fast to those principles and fought across the territory of what would become the great nation for which he was fighting, not to defend it, for it did not yet exist, but to create it.

In January of 1776, it was still being debated whether the colonies would remain a party of discontented demanding relief from the injustices of the "mother country," or declare independence with the purpose of creating a new nation that would give territory to their principles, that would stand on the surface of this planet, and that could be called a "nation." Greene, writing—on the eve of the departure to New York of Washington's army from Boston, which it had recently occupied—to his friend and mentor, Governor Ward, who represented Rhode Island at the Continental Congress, encouraged him to support the proclamation of independence:

Heaven has decreed that tottering empire to ir-



painting by C.W. Peale

Nathanael Greene

retrievable ruin; and, thanks to God, since Providence has so determined it, America must raise an empire of permanent duration, supported upon the grand pillars of truth, freedom, and religion, based upon justice, and defended by her own patriotic sons. Permit me then to recommend from the sincerity of my heart, ready at all times to bleed in my country's cause, a declaration of independence; and call upon the world and the great God who governs it, to witness the necessity, propriety, and rectitude thereof. My worthy friend, the interests of mankind hang upon that truly worthy body of which you are a member.

You stand the representative not of America only, but of the whole world, the friends of liberty, and the supporters of the rights of human nature. How will posterity, millions yet unborn, bless the memory of those brave patriots who are now hastening the consummation of freedom, truth and religion." (*General Greene*, by Francis Vinton Greene, pages 31-32. Kennikat Press, Port Washington, NY./London.)

Thus Washington's strategic conception was first to demonstrate to the British that they were fighting not against a nation or a country, but a principle, and a principle has no topography that can be seen and tread upon. It cannot be crushed by cannon-shot or invaded and conquered by a well-armed and trained army. It is weightless and has no surface. It is an idea held in the breast and soul of a man and woman. You may kill that man or woman, but you will never destroy that principle.

Nonetheless Washington had to submit this strategic principle to the demands of the topography of the battlefield.

Washington knew his adversary well. The British commander, General William Howe, was well-known

to Washington from the French and Indian War. While he was well-trained in the art of warfare, that art was of the set-piece warfare characteristic of the warring monarchs of Europe, where victory and the end of the war could be won through destroying the adversary's army in one great battle. With a poorly-trained army supplied on a shoestring budget, Washington would not fight that type of war. His army would be everywhere, yet nowhere at the same time. He might lose a battle, but his army would withdraw from the field intact to fight yet another day. But at the end of a long seven years, it would be the British, at Yorktown, who would lose an entire army.

This was a strategy that would drive the British commanders mad. They were also fighting under severe limitations. While Britain had a huge fleet that commanded the seas, their army, while well-trained, was severely limited in numbers, and had to be supplemented with expensive Hessian mercenaries. With their long supply lines stretching all the way to Europe, they had to carefully husband both their manpower and supplies. For example, the Americans would deny the British horses, forcing them to ship horses all the way from Europe, thus the continentals had a greater cavalry than the British.

The Battlefield of New York City

New York City of 1776 was like a miniature England. In fact it was considered the most English of the English colonies. Being the capital of the colony of New York, its governor was the embodiment of the British Sovereign. Like the king whom he represented, he had a twelve-man executive council through which he made all important decisions on running the colony and city. There was also a colonial assembly, and as in Westminster it had its loyalists and opposition, all in order to have heated debates—but like those of the debating societies of Oxford or Cambridge, their debates were of little consequence, because all important decisions were made by the sovereign's representative. Then there was the City Council, modeled after those



Oil on canvas by William Walcutt.
Pulling down the statue of King George III in New York City in 1776.

of England, that is to say impotent by design.

This little London also had its own aristocracy, with their town-houses in the city, which then only covered the lower tip of Manhattan, but also landed estates, in upper Manhattan and what are now Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx and Westchester. Visitors from the “mother country” always felt at home in what for Englishmen was a congenial environment.

Yet in this most English of Colonial cities, filled with loyalists, the fire for freedom and nationhood also burned among a faction of the citizenry. History has well recorded them, such as Hamilton and Livingston, and there is no need here to reference them further. But I will mention one, not so well known, but whose breast burned with the same fervor as the others, often referred to as the “Patriot Rabbi.” He is Rev. Gershom Mendes Seixas (Say'-shus) Hassan at the Portuguese and Spanish Synagogue on Mill Street, Manhattan. Although not the first synagogue, it was in fact the first building to have been built as a synagogue in North America. His father Isaac had arrived in New York from his native Lisbon three decades earlier, and Gershom was one of his six children. In 1770 Isaac was among the signers of the “Non-Importation Agreement,” which was one of the first acts of resistance by the merchants of the Colonies against the oppression of Great Britain.

Gershom took the cloth at an early age. Although never an Ordained Rabbi, he became the beloved

Hassan of his Synagogue where he presided over the services each week. A partisan of the revolutionaries, he fled the city when the British occupied it, and took with him the holy scrolls of the congregation, first to Stamford, Connecticut, and latter to Philadelphia. His brothers were also ardent patriots and served as officers in the Continental Army and state militias.

Returning to New York at the end of the war, he became the leading representative of the Jewish community in the new nation, and was among the religious leaders who were invited to attend the inauguration of President Washington.

His faith in the new republic can be seen in a reply to a question by Hannah Adams, who had been preparing her two-volume work, *The History of the Jews, From the Destruction of the Temple to the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century*; she asked him to comment on any sufferings from discrimination and civil disabilities toward Jews in America. Expressing indignation at what he saw as an unfair attack on the Republic, Seixas replied that the question, “surprises me very much. . . as the Constitution of the United States as well as the Constitution of New York does not disqualify any person from holding an office either of honor or trust on account of his religious principles or tenets. . . All are entitled to equal rights and privileges. . . My dear Madam, there is one thing which I would wish you to notice. . . that the Justice and righteousness of Providence is manifested in the dispersion of his People. . . for they have never been driven from any one country without finding an Asylum in another. . . and this Country. . . the United States of America, is perhaps the only place where Jews have not suffered persecution but rather the reverse—for through the mercies of a Benign Judge, we are encouraged and indulged with every right of citizenship.” (Berman, Howard A, “The First American Jew: A Tribute to Gershom Mendes Seixas ‘Patriot Rabbi of the Revolution,’” *Issues*, Spring 2007.



Signing of the Declaration of Independence.

painting by John Trumball

The Battle Begins

Shortly after the arrival of Washington in New York, the Declaration of Independence was signed. It was celebrated in New York by a group of patriots who took the opportunity to bring down the equestrian statue of King George. Being made of gilded lead, it would be given back to the British in the form of musket shot.

While much of the city’s population, merchants and aristocrats with strong ties to England, were loyalists—the decision not to hold the city, was for purely topographical reasons. The reality was that it was surrounded by water, and therefore accessible on all sides by the unchallengeable British fleet. New York would not be held, but it was not to be given as a gift to the British, A battle would be fought.

Washington arrived in New York on April 13, 1776, and began gathering what would become an army of nearly 20,000 men, who were neither well-trained nor well-supplied. He set about building his defenses, which rested on three principal locations: the city itself at lower Manhattan, which was fortified; on Long Island, which is now Brooklyn, where a system of defenses were established that centered on the fortification of Brooklyn Heights and what are now the nearby Red Hook and Fort Greene sections of Brooklyn south of Brooklyn Heights, where a fort of that name was erected; and in upper Manhattan in what is now Washington and Harlem Heights. Fort Washington was es-

tablished at what is now the location of the Manhattan side of the George Washington Bridge, and another fort, Fort Lee, on the New Jersey side. It was hoped that these could prevent the British navy from entering the upper reaches of the Hudson River.

Thus there were three lines of defense: the fortified positions in Brooklyn, the fortified positions in New York City on Lower Manhattan, and the “highlands” of Manhattan beginning at 125 Street, through Harlem Heights, and Washington Heights.

General Howe arrived on June 29 with an initial fleet of 45 warships, which soon increased to 130 including transports and supply ships. He landed on Staten Island with a well-trained army of no less than 32,000 men, including 8,000 Hessian mercenaries, and a fleet grown to 400 warships and transports. They quickly occupied Staten Island.

Five days later they were welcomed with the announcement of the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4th, which was duly celebrated under the guns of the British Fleet.

Hoping for a negotiated surrender, Howe sent a letter offering negotiations addressed to “George Washington Esquire” and not “General George Washington”—a display of contempt for our declaration of nationhood. The letter was rejected with the comment that no such man, “George Washington Esquire,” was known. This bid for a negotiated surrender failed.

Washington was prepared for battle. He had divided his forces, half behind the Manhattan fortifications and the other half behind those in Brooklyn. To Washington’s consternation—for he had been expecting Howe to make his main attack on Manhattan—the British chose to attack Brooklyn first. It should be noted that this British flanking operation was not so much a demonstration of military brilliance by Howe, as in fact the outcome of his fundamental weakness—that being his truly limited resources. Although his army was far superior to that of Washington, and could easily have sustained a vigorous direct assault on Manhattan, he dared not do so. He knew his losses could not easily be replaced. Hessian mercenaries were hugely expensive, and it was not at all clear when he could expect reinforcements.

As luck would have it for Howe, Loyalists in Brooklyn revealed a weak point that lay at the very center of the American line. Making his main attack at that very point, Howe forced the Americans to with-

draw behind the fortifications on Brooklyn Heights.

Fearing once again lest he suffer irreplaceable losses, Howe chose to lay siege rather than launch a direct assault. Seeing the opportunity, Washington launched one of those brilliant maneuvers he would become famous for. That very first night, Washington mobilized every available boat and skiff and withdrew all 9,000 men, bringing them across the East River to Manhattan, literally under the guns of the British fleet. With the first light of dawn, the British found to their consternation that the Americans had escaped.

Lamenting the scene of retreat, Howe’s deputy Adjutant General, Stephan Kemble, wrote in his diary, “Friday, August 30th. In the morning, to our great astonishment, found [the rebels] had evacuated all their works on Brookland and Red Hook, without a shot being fired at them.”

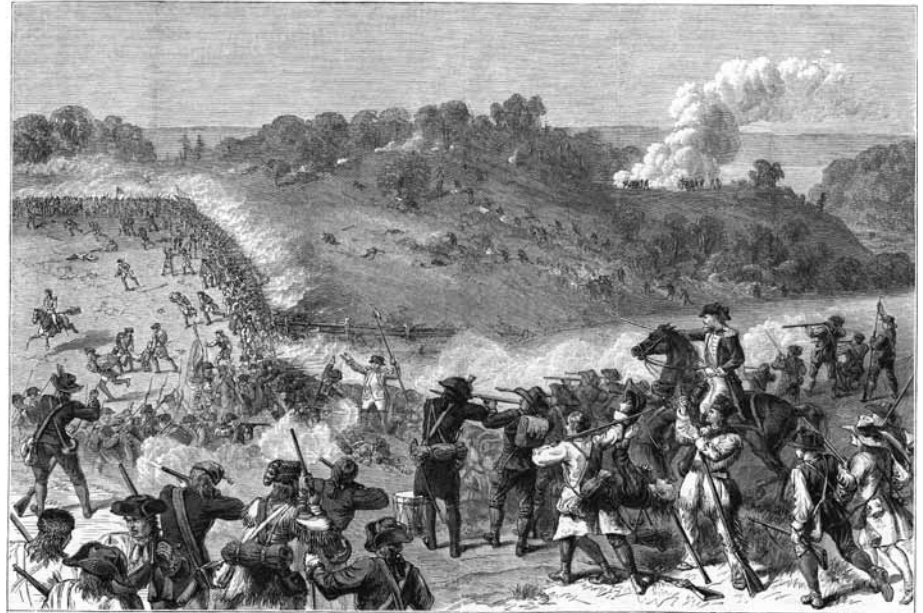
Looking across a sea of concrete, brick and asphalt more than two centuries later, it is hard to imagine the battle of Long Island. Yet small patches of the battlefield can now be tread upon in Greenwood Cemetery, Prospect Park and Fort Greene Park. The resting place of the remains of 11,000 Continental prisoners of war who died in brutal captivity, Fort Greene Park has been truly sanctified as “sacred blood-soaked land.”

While Washington had no intention of holding the city, he would not beat too hasty a retreat, for he now realized that Howe was playing an over-cautious game which Washington could use to his advantage in his intention to drag out the battle longer and longer. So Washington would play as if he intended to hold the city while preparing yet another escape.

While a more ambitious general would immediately have prepared for landings on Manhattan, Howe continued his policy of caution. He did not want to destroy the city, because he wanted it as his winter headquarters—so he hoped to maneuver Washington out of New York. Rather than cross over to Manhattan from Brooklyn, Howe moved his forces from Brooklyn to the northwest tip of Long Island in what is now the Greek neighborhood of Astoria in Queens, a move aimed at demonstrating a threat to encircle Washington’s forces, and thus forcing the latter to withdraw from the city. In reality, Washington was systematically transferring supplies and men to his next line of defense, Washington Heights, as well as further north to White Plains, in Westchester. Yet to Howe, Washington appeared to be holding fast behind his fortifications on lower Manhattan.

After waiting more than two weeks after his victory

in Brooklyn, and with the approach of winter in mind, Howe finally acted, and following bombardment from his fleet, forced a landing of 9,000 troops at Kips Bay in Manhattan, at what is now the east end of 34th Street, on September 15th. While the American troops at that location made a very feeble, if not disgraceful attempt at defending the beaches, Washington was in fact in the last phase of transferring his army to his northern defenses. Howe found a city empty of all Continental forces. Washington had escaped a certain trap a second time.



drawn by A.R. Waud

The Battle of Harlem Heights, September 16, 1776.

While Washington and his commanders discussed whether to burn down the city after withdrawing, the Continental Congress advised against it for fear that the British would follow the same practice. Although parts of the city were set afire in what is believed to have been a totally unauthorized move by over-zealous patriots, no city was burned during the revolution.

Setting up his headquarters at the Roger Morris House, a mansion on the landed estate of Colonel Roger Morris, a loyalist who had fled to England, Washington prepared for what would become the Battle of Washington Heights. The Roger Morris House still stands, and thanks to the Daughters of the American Revolution and the city of New York, is preserved as a museum of Washington’s headquarters. Built in 1765, the beautiful Georgian-style mansion is the oldest existing house on all of Manhattan.

The house stands at the highest point on Manhattan. In the sense of a topographical feature, Washington Heights is the acropolis of Manhattan. Try to create the scene in your mind’s eye, and you will see a spectacular view surrounded by rolling fields and forest and blue water. To the west is the Hudson River and the high Palisades on the New Jersey side; to the north the confluence of the Hudson and Harlem rivers, to the East the expanding Long Island Sound, and to the south New York Harbor. Paying a military compliment to the scene, an unknown British army officer said, “This is a damned strong piece of ground—ten

thousand of our men would defend it against the world.”

Following the landing, Howe moved more quickly and began the pursuit of Washington’s forces. So arrogant were the British they had their light-infantry buglers sound “Gone Away,” a popular fox-hunting call signaling that the fox was in full flight. This proved yet another tactical mistake. It was not only the rage it created among the Continentals, but it betrayed an arrogance that once again Washington would use to steal a small but significant victory in what is known as the Battle of Harlem Heights. That venture, Washington wrote to Patrick Henry at the time, had as its purpose “to recover that military ardour, which is of utmost moment to an army.”

The new battle line was 110th Street and 125th Street. To the extreme west of this line on 125th Street is what is known as Manhattan Valley. On the south of the valley is Morningside Heights, and to its north the ground rises to highlands formed by Harlem Heights and Washington Heights, further north. The base of this valley formed what was known as the “Hollow Way.”

On September 16, Washington learned that the British were advancing north, including Morningside Heights. Locating himself at the advanced outpost of the American line of defense on the north side of Manhattan Valley, that same day, he ordered a contingent of 150 men under the command of Lt. Col. Thomas Know-



engraved by J.C. Armytage

Washington's Retreat on Long Island.

land to make a probe against the enemy to the north of the valley. As was expected, the force soon encountered a superior force of British light infantry, and a lively skirmish ensued. Seeing an attempt to outflank his greatly inferior forces, Knowland ordered a retreat that was carried out swiftly and in orderly fashion without loss. In their arrogance, the British Buglers again sounded "Gone Away." The British position was then quickly reinforced.

Making a quick estimate of the situation, Washington saw his chance to bloody the nose of the British troops in the very face of their arrogance, in a maneuver Patton once described as "grabbing the enemy by the nose and kicking him in the pants." Regrouping his forces, he deployed 150 men to sally forth in a frontal attack towards the British line. But this was only a feint, to draw out the British forces, who Washington rightly estimated would counter-attack in a flight forward that would ignore the security of their flanks. With the enemy drawn into the Hollow Way, another force was to deploy to strike the advancing force in their rear, in a move Washington hoped would lead to the capture of a large number of British troops.

Although the encircling force struck too soon, hitting the enemy on its flank and not its rear, the operations succeed in forcing the British force into an unorganized and bloody retreat. Seeing the coattails of the fleeing British sent an electrifying remoralization throughout Washington's army.

Despite this victory, Washington had no illusions concerning the weakness of his forces, and his strategy was not to give Howe a decisive defeat—for he knew that was impossible—but to draw out the battle which the British had hoped to win within a number of weeks to end the "rebellion" once and for all. Instead, it would last for months, creating a situation which would be seen across the Atlantic as stiff resistance to King George's best troops by the rebels fighting for a republic.

After the battle of Harlem Heights, while stiffening his defense line on the heights, Washington was also withdrawing forces to White Plains, where

Howe had deployed a powerful force in a bid to encircle Washington's position on Manhattan. Nonetheless the affair dragged on for another month of little activity by the British, who did not become active again until Washington had redeployed much of his army out of Manhattan.

But here he learned a bitter lesson. While it was his judgment that Manhattan should be totally evacuated, much like Brooklyn Heights had been, he was prevailed upon by his officers to allow for a protracted stand against the British at Fort Mifflin. This ended in disaster. The British were able to quickly surround the fort, and its commander, Colonel Robert Magaw, soon surrendered his command of over two thousand men, many of whom would not survive their captivity.

Nonetheless Washington gave battle to Howe in White Plains, retreated in good order, crossed the Hudson into New Jersey, and headed in the direction of Pennsylvania along a line of withdrawal prepared beforehand. It was now November. A battle that should have ended in a matter of days, was instead drawn out into a campaign of four months. For the British, the first year of the revolution was not a happy one. Their evacuation of Boston in the spring of 1776 in the face of the siege mounted by Washington, was followed by a four-month campaign to capture New York, a city that Washington had no intention of keeping—only to see Washington and his Continental Army escape to fight another day.

Part II will appear in next week's issue.