

RON ROBIN, *Enclaves of America: The Rhetoric of American Political Architecture Abroad, 1900–1965*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, xiii + 208 pp., 43 illus. \$24.95. ISBN 0-691-04805-3.

Enclaves of America: The Rhetoric of American Political Architecture Abroad, 1900–1965 explores the symbolism of American battle monuments and embassies. These two American building programs tell fascinating and important stories, and it is good that Ron Robin has called them to our attention in the first book devoted to this subject. In alternating chapters, Robin sketches the history of the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC), established in 1923 to oversee the design and construction of European monuments commemorating the wartime efforts of American soldiers; and the Foreign Service Buildings Commission (FSBC) and its successor, the Office of Foreign Buildings Operations (FBO) at the Department of State. The FSBC, created by an act of Congress in 1926, launched the first major American diplomatic building program. Secretary of the Treasury Andrew Mellon, a member of the first commission, directed the Office of the Supervising Architect to provide overall design services to the FSBC, but its enacting legislation, like that of the ABMC, permitted the hiring of private architects. Architects who completed projects for the ABMC include such notable practitioners as Paul P. Cret (Chateau-Thierry), Egerton Swartwout (St. Mihiel), and John Russell Pope (Montfaucon). Those who worked with the FSBC included Delano & Aldrich (Paris), Cass Gilbert (Ottawa), and Harrie T. Lindeberg (Helsinki), while FBO later employed, among others, Harrison & Abramovitz (Rio de Janeiro and Havana), Edward Durell Stone (New Delhi), Walter Gropius (Athens), Harry Weese (Accra), and Marcel Breuer (The Hague).

In his review of the early embassies, Robin states that the "Office of Foreign Buildings Operations (FBO) built about thirty buildings in the 1920s and the early 1930s" (4). Many buildings were indeed built during that period, but by the FSBC, not FBO, which did not exist at that time. In 1939, President Roosevelt's reorganization plan transferred the FSBC and its functions to the State Department, where it continued to exist in an advisory capacity. The Department created FBO in 1944.

While the commission existed on paper until 1962, it rarely met and played no discernible role after it lost its independent status. The distinction between FSBC and FBO is noteworthy, for the operations of the new office changed significantly as its chief, Frederick Larkin, and his assistant, Leland King, acquired decision-making autonomy in the 1940s. Here, as elsewhere, Robin's account obscures the history and misleads his readers.

This book might, in fact, be compared to a novel in which the author clearly defines his theme, but barely outlines his plot and offers mere glimpses of his characters. For example, Robin is not interested in precisely how Larkin provided a financial foundation for the building program, nor in how King provided it with its design direction. His writing is marked by an historical approach that minimizes the impact of individuals and focuses instead on the views and actions of groups or entities, sometimes only vaguely identified. What he is looking for is evidence of a structural deficiency, a general pattern to support his premise "that these architectural artifacts [embassies and monuments] failed to accomplish their objectives" (8). The book is about failure and what the author believes to be the disillusioning, if not disastrous, effort of the United States to represent itself abroad. For him the landscape is littered with nothing but disappointment—"jumbled messages" and imperialistic gestures.

The most obvious problem with this approach is that it is impossible to assess failure when we are given no idea of what success might be. The next most obvious problem is that architecture is not even the focus of this study, though the subject is unavoidably linked both to architectural history and theory. Robin teaches American history at the University of Haifa and he makes no pretense of having architectural expertise, yet what he has written is a broad-stroked interpretation of style. Historians such as Simon Schama use art as a window on historical change, and do so with brilliant insight into culture, but the situation differs here. Dismissing the import of function and context, Robin turns to "form and style as evidence of ulterior motives and intentions." "In fact," he writes, "given the laconic nature of my sources, I have had little alternative but to work as an archeologist seeking meaning and motivation in style" (10). Style is not irrelevant to this sort of investigation, but examined apart from its functional context, it is surely an inadequate indicator of intent.

Robin sets up a dichotomy between early embassies that resembled palaces, often the vestiges of prior political or economic domination, and those that looked like southern colonial plantation houses, symbols of inequality and oppression to him. His failure to distinguish between residential and office space in this context is an oversight. Strictly speaking, embassies are homes, and until the two uses were eventually separated into functionally separate buildings, embassies served principally as ambassadorial residences with sizable staffs and an array of representational needs. It is no surprise that some of these buildings in the 1920s and 1930s resembled country houses or city mansions more than factories or office buildings. Those who recognize the complexity of the design process and who are aware of the multiple meanings conveyed by any given motif, such as an arched doorway or a classical column, know that the rhetorical power of architecture is based on more than stylistic similarity. One might interpret the landmarks of America's colonial era as statements about European precedent and our architectural dependence on it, but one could also interpret the same buildings as reflections of America's struggle to find its own voice and gain

architectural independence. The White House is revered today as an *American* landmark, after all, not as a plantation house symbolizing failed southern aspirations, as Robin suggests, and not for its symbolic associations with ancient Greece. His argument is weakest in the area of style when he claims a resemblance between the White House and Lindeberg's Helsinki Embassy, which was modeled after an eighteenth-century Georgian mansion—a red-brick building with no porch, no pediment, and no columns (101).

Supporting the theme of omnipresent failure, Robin's language clearly expresses suspicion and mistrust. He calls Pietro Belluschi an "ideologue," as if his design philosophy constituted a form of sinister propaganda, and unfairly describes Belluschi's observations on building techniques abroad as "condescending" (149, 194). (Oddly, Belluschi's name does not even appear in the index.) He says, "Both the FBO and the ABMC relied primarily on the services of the private sector rather than the talents of government-employed artists and architects," intimating, for no apparent reason, that private architects were somehow inferior. Offering scant evidence, he states that the private architects involved in these projects had "lucrative ties to government" (198). And he dismisses American innovations in architecture as "products of a cadre of refugees who had infiltrated the country's major architecture schools" (177). There is a vast difference between saying that people attended or taught at schools and saying that they infiltrated them, and it is that difference that gives this book its disquieting tone.

If I am disappointed in the book, it is largely because it lays out such a slim and problematic historical record for others to build upon. Welcome for its rarely seen photographs, but hindered, as the author himself admits, by inadequate research material (8, 197), the book is unfortunately too unreliable and too subjective to be of real scholarly value. It is regrettable that Princeton University Press has allowed so many factual errors to find their way into print. Even a small sampling of the text raises doubts about the book's overall editorial accuracy. Robin identifies Edward Durell Stone, for instance, as "the designer of the American Embassy in New Delhi and one of the most influential members of the AAP [Architectural Advisory Panel] in the 1960s" (152). Stone did design the embassy, probably the most widely recognized of all the State Department projects, but he never served on the advisory panel. Harold Van Buren Magonigle did design the impressive Tokyo embassy in 1931, but he did not do so by himself. His partner was the redoubtable Czech-American modernist Antonin Raymond, who had gone to Tokyo to work with Frank Lloyd Wright on the Imperial Hotel and stayed there to build a major design practice. It is impossible to understand that embassy without considering Raymond's contribution. Robert E. Alexander collaborated with Richard Neutra on the Karachi embassy. He and Neutra were partners at the time and both contributed to the design, but his name, like Raymond's, is missing from the text. John Russell Pope did design the Montfaucon Monument, but he was certainly not its "sculptor" (51). Frederick Law Olmsted did not create the rural cemetery, though he was surely influenced by those who did (42).

Robin is correct in stating that records pertaining to the many foreign building projects are incomplete and often misleading. Others who share his interest in this subject can appreciate the formidable task he faced trying to ascertain basic questions of chronology, attribution, and ownership. Neither the FSBC nor

FBO maintained a master list of embassy projects, for example, nor any complete list of architects. Furthermore, congressional hearings, especially those on authorizations and appropriations, often mixed facts with hopes, and trade magazines similarly anticipated finished projects that never reached completion. The dilemmas posed by the research, however, do not excuse the way in which evidence is presented here. FBO did not receive a "\$200-million allocation" in 1954 (Congress passed PL 399 authorizing \$90-million for FBO in 1952 before Eisenhower's election, and there were no further authorizations until 1963), nor did the United States build an Embassy in London's Grosvenor Square in 1937 (the space was leased), (140, 101). According to State Department officials, including Loy Henderson, former Minister to Iraq, the Baghdad legation pictured on Robin's cover and described as built by the FSBC, was also a rental property, leased by the State Department from an Iraqi businessman who built it to suit American needs. When Robin says "the FSBC constructed White House embassies and legations in disparate corners of the globe, from Baghdad (1938) to the Nationalist China capital of Chungking (1944)," he leads readers to imagine a string of look-alike buildings stretching across Asia, even beyond (96). Actually, aside from those two, one of which was leased, and one more, the consulate in Yokohama, it is difficult to find any others modeled specifically after the White House.

In his passing reference to Wayne Hays, the powerful congressman who acquired almost total control of FBO purse-strings by the late-1950s, Robin places Hays in charge of a nonexistent congressional committee (165). Between 1958 and 1976, Hays was chairman of the Subcommittee on State Department Organization and Foreign Operations of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. As chairman, he was able to suspend embassy construction funds, as, for example, when he objected to John Johansen's design of the American embassy in Dublin.

The book's polemical perspective is certain to make it popular with the widening audience of scholars exploring issues of dominance, but others will study this history and arrive at different conclusions. Where Robin sees confusion, others will see the healthy, if not always efficient, workings of democratic politics; where he sees failure, they will see varieties of accomplishment. No difference in outlook, however, would prevent others from finding his stance useful and intriguing if it were well supported. What is disturbing here is not the provocative nature of his argument, but rather its fundamental weakness. The embassy building program, for one, was never as tightly organized or deterministic as Robin suggests. Individuals did play key roles, and the program was always responding to events at home and abroad. Neither those who designed battle monuments, nor those who designed embassies were universally malevolent or confused, nor was the government hierarchy any more than normally inefficient or indecisive.

As we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the invasion of Normandy, American cemeteries and chapels in Europe continue to inspire awe in visitors and stand as visible reminders of what it means to fight tyranny. By almost any standards, certainly in comparison to most other federal building programs, and also in comparison to the building programs of other nations, the State Department building program is remarkable for what it has achieved and continues to achieve in a world that is ever more troubled. Paradoxically, Robin concludes that the diversity and

architectural independence. The White House is revered today as an *American* landmark, after all, not as a plantation house symbolizing failed southern aspirations, as Robin suggests, and not for its symbolic associations with ancient Greece. His argument is weakest in the area of style when he claims a resemblance between the White House and Lindeberg's Helsinki Embassy, which was modeled after an eighteenth-century Georgian mansion—a red-brick building with no porch, no pediment, and no columns (101).

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change inherent in American democracy might explain its inability to produce an enduring architectural message, but he goes on to lament that this is further evidence of why its political architecture "was doomed to failure" (175). There is no way to please such a critic.

This effort does constitute a beginning. As more historians examine the subject from the viewpoint of diplomatic history and from the viewpoint of architectural history, the historical record will gradually expand. As it does, and as it is more precisely defined and documented, they will be better able to assess and interpret the cultural dimension, its patterns, and themes.

JANE C. LOEFFLER
The George Washington University