



American Playgrounds: Revitalizing Community Space

Susan G. Solomon

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For years, designers, educators, and community administrators have clamored for a book that will highlight the problems with contemporary playgrounds, tender sorely needed strategies with which to redress them, and stimulate national debate about today's crisis of undervalued public space. Susan Solomon's groundbreaking and marvelously illustrated *American Playgrounds* is that book. Since the 1970s, Solomon maintains, American playgrounds have degenerated into irrelevance as cultural artifacts and educational tools. Imbedded in Solomon's text is a frank indictment of American attitudes that are stunted by a heavy-handed emphasis on safety that limits the nature of play and the vitality of places for public assembly.

During the past decade an elite few American architects, landscape architects, and sculptors, including Stanley Saitowitz, Walter Hood, and Mary Miss, have pioneered the restoration of aesthetic and developmental values to play areas for young people. Solomon appraises these success stories and proposes fresh and urgent remedies that blend excellent design principles, innovative planning, and affordability—a vision for the future of the playground in America. Supplementing her impeccable command of primary and secondary sources with hundreds of hours of interviews with designers and clients, the author confronts a seriously under-developed topic with powerful and complex arguments rich in social history, law, theories of play and childhood, and urbanism. Readers will be inspired—and equipped—to take up the gauntlet of advocacy for superior American playgrounds.

Accessibly written, *American Playgrounds* will fascinate diverse constituencies, including parents, educators, policymakers, and art, architectural, and cultural historians. For those commissioning, funding, designing, and overseeing playgrounds, it will be indispensable. The book includes a foreword by Martha Thorne, Associate Curator of the Department of Architecture, Art Institute of Chicago.

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