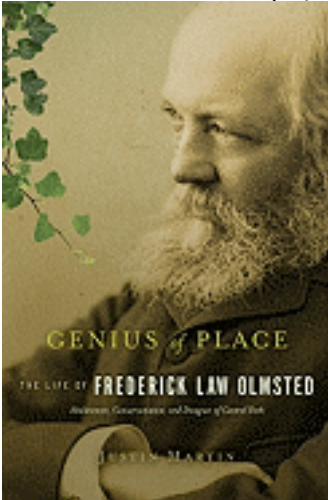




May 16, 2011

Genius of Place: The Life of Frederick Law Olmsted (Abolitionist, Conservationist, and Designer of Central Park)

Justin Martin. De Capo, \$30 (496p) ISBN 978-0-306-81881-3



Martin (Nader: Crusader, Spoiler, Icon) begins his ardent biography by positing that Olmsted "may well be the most important American historical figure that the average person knows least about. "FLO" was a man for whom landing the lucrative post of designing Central Park was perhaps the least extraordinary episode in a quite remarkable life. Restless from a young age, Olmsted's sense of adventure compelled him to embark upon a turbulent stretch as a sailor, which Martin renders as thrillingly as any maritime tale. Science lectures at Yale and an affinity for Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* inspired a pursuit of horticulture. Opportunistic and resilient, "Olmsted dove into farm life with aplomb." Incessantly plagued by ill health and family tragedy, Olmsted nevertheless made numerous trips to Europe. He was a mercurial man, an author, journalist, and prospective businessman before he became a pioneering landscape architect. Olmsted (1822-1903), who took part in the Civil War battlefield relief effort, was an activist, environmentalist (helping to save Yosemite and Niagara Falls), and humanitarian, as well as an incredibly gifted visionary. Martin presents Olmsted's era in all its glory, with the intimate affairs and staggering accomplishments of the great man unfolding against the vivid backdrop of 19th-century America. Photos. (May)

