



Charles M. Haar

Harvard Law School's Charles Haar, a pioneering land use scholar, passed away last Tuesday at the age of 91. [Dan Filler notes that](#)

He was an expert in land use, urban development and property law. Among his various achievements, Haar was one of the key draftsmen responsible for developing four of President Johnson's important urban policy initiatives: the Demonstration and Model Cities Act of 1966; the Safe Streets and Crime Control Act of 1968; Title IV of the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1968 (New Communities); and the Section 236 Affordable Housing Guarantee Program.

This description comes out something like a backhanded compliment (although I am sure Filler didn't mean it that way), because the regnant conventional wisdom has declared the War on Poverty a failure. The problem with this view is that the War on Poverty was never really fought. The largest annual budget of the Office of Economic Opportunity never reached \$2 billion, and the Nixon Administration moved to strangle it in its crib: the White House ordered OEO appointee Donald Rumsfeld – yes, *that* Donald Rumsfeld – essentially to end the effort soon after taking office. (In 1973, Nixon tried to impound appropriated OEO funds, a move that the courts ruled unconstitutional).

Instead, Haar is better seen as an important scholar of land use and urban planning. His book on the Mount Laurel saga – [Suburbs Under Siege](#) – is a classic work on the subject. Long after many law professors became convinced that nothing useful could be done in the area, Haar maintained the faith, backed by research, that creative land use planning could actually improve cities. Later, Haar served as a special master for the cleanup of Boston Harbor, an environmental task [made infamous in the 1988 Presidential campaign](#). His book on the subject, [Mastering Boston Harbor](#), is very useful reading in considering not only the complexities of environmental regulation and cleanup, but the often-overlooked issue of judicial management of environmental problems.

Harvard Law School's press release on Haar's death is [here](#). He will be missed.