Cityscapes

By Kathy Warnes

My Website:

[http://discoverfunhistory.webs](http://discoverfunhistory.webs.com)

[.com](http://discoverfunhistory.webs.com)

Cityscapes

Chapter One

Cityscapes I

European Colonists Create the Colonial City

Urban historians like Howard Chudacoff and Charles Glaab argue that European colonists created New World cities like the Old World cities they had left.

In his book *The Evolution of American Urban Society*, historian Howard Chudacoff states unequivocally that the people who colonized North America were urban-minded.

Colonists Considered Cities Necessary and Desirable

Colonists came to America with the idea of establishing settlements that resembled the urban places that they had known in the Old World. Immigrants saw cities and towns as centers of defense, organization, population control and a place to buy and sell goods and as a center of communications. The settlers came from an Old World culture that considered cities necessary and desirable and they wanted to transfer their "civilization" into the alien new world that they were determined to conquer.

Historians Argue that America Has Always Been Urban

Historians Charles N. Glaab and A. Theodore Brown explore and broaden the definition of *urban* in the opening chapters of their book, *A History of Urban America*, *Second Edition,* when they expand the definition of urban to include the idea that a rational, organized community has existed in America from Colonial days.

They also narrow the definition of urban by saying that urban includes just cities or towns with metropolitan characteristics. All three historians argue in their books that America has been urban from its beginnings.

Richard C. Wade makes this point in *The Urban Frontier: The Rise of Western Cities, 1780-1830.* His thesis about the urban frontier vividly contradicts the traditional rural approach to the frontier question and deals another blow to Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis. Frederick Jackson Turner argues that the constantly moving line of the frontier allowed Americans to develop their peculiar national characteristics.

Wade argues that the immigrants to the New World brought the Old World and age-old qualifications of success, wealth and status with them and incorporated them intact into their new world when they created cities.

Puritan Colonists Have Their Own Urban Visions

John Winthrop articulated the Old World religious idea of a New World working, ideologue city when he used the phrase "City upon a Hill" to describe the new settlement in Massachusetts. The Puritan city that he and his colleagues envisioned had a religious foundation, and Winthrop and the other Puritans saw their new city as an example to the Puritans and the Anglican Church in England that they desperately wanted to reform. As they built their new city and forged their destiny in the new world the Puritans felt "the eies of all people" upon them.

The Puritan ideas of social and religious harmony were important foundation stones for New England cities such like Boston and Concord, but these ideas also included secular doses of commerce and cultural developments that the Puritans could not have foreseen.

The Pilgrims Also Have Ideas About Cities

Pilgrim William Bradford visualized cities as transforming the landscape and its people. He wrote from the Mayflower that the New World was "A hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men." When the Pilgrims landed in Plymouth, Massachusetts, they immediately began to

transform what they saw as a hostile environment into structured towns and cities.

The Spanish, French, and Native Americans Already Have Cities in the New World

What the European world view of John Winthrop and William Bradford and even John Smith of Jamestown in 1607, did not comprehend much less acknowledge was that urbanization already existed in North America. For centuries before the English landed in North America, Native Americans had built and maintained cities like Cahokia and Chillicothe.

. In 1583, the Spanish developed a formal system of town planning called the Law of the Indies that specified standard requirements for the location of towns, street layouts and land usage. The Law of the Indies shaped urban development in Florida and the American Southwest.

French settlers in North America came as traders, and in their trading, especially of furs, they needed centers to exchange goods, so they founded commercial ports on waterways of American's northern and western boundaries. These ports were the urban beginnings of cities like Quebec, Montreal, Detroit and St. Louis.

Settlements Rural and Urban Merge, Mingle, and Emerge Into Diverse Cities

The Dutch in New York and the Swedish settlements in Delaware as well as diverse ethnic and cultural immigrants in Providence and the southern colonies helped to dilute and combine Puritan ideas of social and religious harmony. They transformed cities with both urban and rural orientation into a new American, cutting-edge, corporate, communal city.

Although life in colonial America for many of the new settlers turned out to be rural- most farmed for a living - Colonial American cities like Boston, Newport, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston, played important roles in shaping the Colonial world. The Colonial cities were commercial and administrative centers, and economic magnets for tradesmen and others who

wanted to make a living outside of agriculture. Yet, Old World concepts and motivations shaped these New World Cities and formed them into something the Old World ancestors had not intended.

Colonial ports like Boston and Charleston were links in the English mercantilist system and as such, they collected and dispatched raw materials for England and received the wares of British merchants for American consumption. Communication systems in colonial cities extended from each city to England instead of between individual colonies. Yet, when the colonies decided they must unite to fight a Revolutionary War against England, they built upon established communication networks to create the Committees of Correspondence and ultimately the Continental Congresses.

References

Chudacoff, Howard and Smith, Judith, *The Evolution of American Urban Society, 4th Edition*, Prentice Hall, 1994

Glaab, Charles N. and Brown, Theodore, *A History of Urban America, Second Edition,* New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1976

Legetes, Richard T., *The City Reader, 2nd Edition*, Routledge, 1999

Wade, Richard C., *The Urban Frontier: The Rise of Western Cities, 1790-1830,* University of Illinois Press, 1996

Zukin, Sharon, *The Culture of Cities,* Wiley-Blackwell, 1996

For the next chapter in the evolution of American cities read: Colonial Cities Incubate the American Revolution

Chapter Two

Cityscapes II

Colonial Cities Incubate the American Revolution

People in colonial cities developed their own version of the European city, developed self government, and created conditions for the American Revolution.

Historians Charles N. Glaab and Theodore Brown explore colonial cities and their influence on the American Revolution in their book, *A History of Urban America*, *Second Edition.*

Philadelphia and New York create and expand self-government

Although they all had urban roots, colonial cities developed differently according to geographical and political factors. The size and commercial activity of Colonial cities like Philadelphia and New York when it became British, along with the non-involvement of England in colonial city affairs, encouraged colonial cities to create and expand self-government.

Philadelphia and [New York](#) because they were capitals of proprietary colonies, paralleled English towns in the respect that they were municipal boroughs, and royal charters incorporated them and a mayor and a council administered them. The governor of the colony appointed their officials so the political elite tended to be aristocratic and self interested. Eventually, under new charters ordinary citizens of New York and Philadelphia were empowered to vote for their own councilmen, but change came slowly.

Boston and Newport Town Meetings

In Boston and Newport, town meetings resembling New England assemblies and growing out of Puritan congregationalism governed civic and political matters. Town meetings tended to produce order, dissolve local differences, and create a climate for government to establish public facilities that the citizenry was willing to finance. Boston and Newport proved to be more successful in developing public facilities than Philadelphia and New York.

Colonists Develop Their Own Versions of the European City

The positive side of living in a colonial city included people linked by a sense of community and a combination of private interests to public welfare, despite growth and diversity. The cities offered more possibilities for education and entertainment. They produced endless human resources for change and technological, economic, and political advancement.

Although the European colonists created a rigidly hierarchical city modeled after their European experience, they gradually accepted social distinctions in America and urban society that enabled people to be more upwardly mobile than in rural areas.

The city offered most of the cultural and educational opportunities in colonial America. Following Boston's example, by the 1720s every city committed itself to supporting some type of public schools and already had several established private schools for the wealthy and religious and charity schools for the poor. Boston and Philadelphia supported public libraries and print shops.

Colonial Cities are Cogs in the English Mercantilist Wheel

Although colonial cities developed particularly American social and cultural structures and their own identities separate from England, they still hung on the coattails of the British Empire and the British governed them as segments of a mercantilist administrative and economic network.

For over a century, colonial urban dwellers lived as British subjects, yet harboring and nurturing within themselves the capabilities for revolution and self government. Local problems forced colonial towns and cities to develop their own institutions and methods of government apart from England. This situation especially applied to Boston, where the town meeting had shaped many local matters. By 1750, Boston and many other towns jealously protected their right of self-government.

Urban colonial merchants had also learned to profitably operate outside of the mercantilist system and many colonial townsmen translated their self-government and commercial independence into the right to be independent entities and to consider interference with this right as illegal and tyrannical.

Boston is an Urban Rehearsal for the Revolutionary War

Boston was the focus of friction between Colonial and British authority that dated back to the 1689 battle with Governor Edmund Andros. By 1765, Boston had a reputation for radical action against the British. Protests against the Townshend Acts in 1768, the actions of the Sons of Liberty, and the "lighting rod" Boston Massacre in 1770 made Boston an urban rehearsal for the Revolutionary War.

The Boston Tea Party in 1773, pushed the American colonists to rebel against the British. The closing of the Port of Boston further drove home the point to the other colonies that the British were determined to eradicate two of the most cherished aspects of colonial urban life-self-government and commerce.

The growth and clash of the values of colonial urban America with the British mercantilist system did not alone precipitate the final break with England, but colonial cities were essential to the timing and organization of the Revolution. They bore the brunt of British policy and they also produced and nurtured the physical and human resources to foster resistance and rebellion against the British.

The "Colonial Matrix" is the Foundation for the Revolutionary War

The "colonial matrix", as Glaab and Brown title the first chapter of their urban history, enabled the American colonists to engineer their separation from England for a century before it physically happened. Each town and city resident developed a sense of community and societal identification and allegiance to a particular place.

By the 1770s, common interests and grievances, increased intercolonial communication, and the spread of these and Enlightenment ideals beyond individual cities to entire colonies created a new American citizen, separate from the European urban matrix. The collectivism, opportunity and diversity of Colonial American cities forged the winning of American Independence from mercantilist England.

The colonial city also created and nurtured the uniquely American City and American character. The American City has survived centuries of growth and change from its original colonial matrix, yet has remained the same in an important regard- it is a crucible for the American character in all of its facets.

References

Chudacoff, Howard and Smith, Judith, *The Evolution of American Urban Society, 4th Edition*, Prentice Hall, 1994

Glaab, Charles N. and Brown, Theodore, *A History of Urban America, Second Edition,* New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1976

Legetes, Richard T., *The City Reader, 2nd Edition*, Routledge, 1999

Wade, Richard C., *The Urban Frontier: The Rise of Western Cities, 1790-1830,* University of Illinois Press, 1996

Zukin, Sharon, *The Culture of Cities,* Wiley-Blackwell, 1996

For the First Part of the story of the American Colonial City read: European Colonists Create the Colonial City

For the next chapter of the story of American cities read Turner and Wade on the Origins of American Cities

Chapter Three

Cityscapes III

Turner and Wade on the Origins of American Cities

Frederick Jackson Turner imagined an expanding rural frontier and then cities. Richard Wade argued that the urban frontier came first.

The common historical perception of the settlement process in North America is that urban development slowly evolves from individual pioneers, farmers in larger numbers, the eventual emergence of a village or a town, and later, often much later, a city.

The *Frontier Thesis* in Chicago

Two historians, [Frederick Jackson Turner](#) and Richard C. Wade, illustrate the polar opposites of this idea. One of the ironies of the Frederick Jackson Turner *Frontier Thesis* is that he presented it as part of his paper "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" to a gathering of historians at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, a city that as Carl Sandburg put it, was already the city "of big shoulders."

An enormous fair, the Columbian Exposition celebrated the 400th anniversary of the voyage of Columbus and some of its most popular exhibits featured 1890s conceptions of the city of the future. In his *Frontier Thesis, Frederick* Jackson Turner argues that "the existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward explain American development."

Turner Casts the Frontier as the Juncture of Savagery and Civilization

Turner went on to describe the frontier as the meeting place between sava-gery and civilization and he argued that the frontier meant that every Ameri-can generation returned to "primitive conditions on a continually advancing frontier line." Along this frontier, Americans continuously recapitulated the developmental stages of the emerging industrial order of the 1890s. Turner traced the development of American civilization from the emergence of the trader and the disintegration of savagery, farming, ranch life, and finally the manufacturing organization within the city and the factory system.

Although virtually ignored at the time, these words and the *Frontier Thesis* of Frederick Jackson Turner gained widespread distribution and influence to the degree that it shaped Western American historical scholarship for gener-ations. Even 21st century scholars are influenced by the Turner Thesis, if on-ly to argue vehemently against it.

Wade Argues that Cities Are the Spearhead of the Frontier

Roughly 69 years later in 1959, Richard C. Wade in his book, *The Urban Frontier: Pioneer Life in Early Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Lexington, Louisville and St. Louis* argued that these cities were the "spearheads of the frontier" with a substantial impact on the rest of the settlement process by providing organizational and support facilities, much like the Colonial American city did for the surrounding countryside.

The Urban Frontier is a Study of Early City Builders

The Urban Frontier is a study of the ways that early city builders imagined and promoted their communities as economic engines and civic bodies. In this groundbreaking study, Wade suggested that the developmental order of America did not happen the way the Turner thesis suggested, but rather the reverse happened.

Wade argues that towns and cities preceded general settlement. In other words, an "urban frontier" rather than a "primitive frontier" is responsible for American development. Using the cities of Cincinnati, Lexington, Louis-

ville, and St. Louis as case studies, Wade traces the efforts of these city founders to establish a stable economic base and illustrates how they expanded fro that base. As a secondary argument, he explores ethnic differences, class divisions, and free and enslaved African Americans. He discusses how these factors impacted the city, but he doesn't mention the role of women on the "urban frontier."

American Cities After the Civil War

For the most part, the Colonial City and cities before the Civil War had commercial and administrative foundations. Colonists came to America with the European idea of the necessity For the most part, Colonists came to America with the European idea of the necessity and importance of the city, and of urban life, and they translated and adapted this European idea to fit their New World surroundings. Part of their urban ethos was the quest for an ordered society and structure that a city provided and some of the urban ethos was based on the ideological city –the "City on the Hill" of John Winthrop and later that of Navoo and Salt. Lake City of the Mormons.

Geography played an important part in the development of American cities, and Frederick Jackson Turner touched upon this concept when he based his thesis on the importance of a continuously receding frontier. What he didn't take into account was that in the minds of many Americans, the frontier was something crude and uncivilized, something to be conquered and a city, no matter how "primitive" was the mark of civilization. America began its conquest of the North American continent by building cities such as Philadelphia, Boston, New York, Providence, and Charleston, not to mention the countless smaller cities and towns that sprang up in colonial America.

European Style Cities Evolved into American Cities after the American Revolution

Colonists transplanted the cultural milieu and social organization of the European cities to America and the new cities became just as class structured as those in Europe. By the end of the American Revolution, American cities had evolved into uniquely American cities of American character and civilization.

Wade addressed this development when he explored the evolution of Cincinnati as one of the oldest and largest cities west of the Alleghenies in the early 19th century. He pointed out that like other then western American cities, Cincinnati was laid out as a grid and modeled after Philadelphia. Located on the Ohio River between Ohio and Kentucky, Cincinnati was geographically blessed and an important commercial river link with the Mississippi River and Southern ports like Memphis and New Orleans as well as the cities of Pittsburgh and Wheeling.

References

Clarke, Graham, *The American City: Literary and Cultural Perspectives*, Palgrave Macmillan, 1988

Monkkonen, Eric, *America Becomes Urban: The Development of U.S. Cities & Towns, 1780-1980*, University of California Press, 1988

Turner, Frederick Jackson, *The Frontier in American History*, Dover Publications, 1996

Wade, Richard C. *The Urban Frontier: The Rise of Western Cities, 1790-1830*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1959

For the next chapter read: City Intellectual History and the Civil War

Chapter Four

Cityscapes IV

City Intellectual History and the Civil War

American beliefs about cities radically changed after the civil War and so did their attitudes about nature and its role in their lives.

The Civil War separated the two major fields of interpretation about the American City into the paradox of the city as a symbol of good and the city as a symbol of evil.

Also tied into the intellectual history of the city is a change in the perception of Nature. Before 1850, Americans and American writers tended to picture nature as a force to be conquered or at least subdued. After 1850, Americans began to regard nature as a beautifying force in their lives and as something to be enjoyed and appreciated, even emulated. These theories appeared in American literature and in American culture and were expressed differently in the practicalities of the immigrant's attitude toward the new city.

Lewis Mumford and Other Urban Historians Re-interpret the City

In the early twentieth century, academics from the University of Chicago and intellectuals like Lewis Mumford channeled the conception of form and function of the city into new directions. The city in American thought has developed in as many facets as the American city itself. Writers and historians portrayed the city in polar opposite terms without much middle ground.

A 1998 book about urban history called *The City in African-American Literature* by Yoshinobu Hakutani and Robert Butler featured sixteen essays and an introduction that stated that the intention of the book was to fill a gap in the critical study of African American literature. The editors contended that African American writers more often than mainstream historians viewed the

city as a fluid space that nurtured both self and community. They also implied that African American literature presented a more diverse view of the American urban experience than did mainstream and academic literature.

The topics of the sixteen essays in the book cover a wide range from Frederick Douglass to the Harlem Renaissance to contemporary writers and include discussions of Richard Wright, James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, Toni Morrison and Charles Johnson, ending with an essay on the black playwrights of the 1960s.

Donald B. Gibson Writes About Harlem

In his essay, "The Harlem Renaissance City: Its Multi-Illusionary Dimension," Donald B. Gibson argues that academics and others have reduced the city in literature and life to "a mythological dichotomy of good versus evil." He contends that the Heavenly City-Demonic City paradigm oversimplifies human experience in the city and he argues further that "the conception of the northern city as the City of God never caused a single individual to raise a single foot to take one step northward." The dream of the northern City of God did not lure people eastward or in any other direction since black people migrated to urban centers all across the United States.

Gibson's point about the intellectual history of the city as polarized between good and evil with no middle ground is reinforced by examining the city in American Thought from 1790 to mid twentieth century. It seems that Americans have always had ambiguous feelings about their cities. The Puritans, Pilgrims and other North American Colonists came from an urban European background that accentuated the civilizing influence of cities and stressed the necessary role of cities in creating order in the chaos of a New World.

The idea of John Winthrop and his Puritan colleagues of "the city on hill," a deliberately planned city to serve as an example to the unreformed Puritans back in England resonates through Colonial Literature as does the perception of Pilgrim William Bradford who viewed the new world as a savage wilderness that needed to be conquered by building towns and cities.

Cultural Historian Morton White Analyzes the City

The agrarian ideal found in Christian thought underscored the virtues of farming and herding and often portrayed the city as an evil, carnal place. The image of the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah against the image of shepherds tending their flocks in the hills of Judah while the star of Bethlehem shines brightly is a lastingly vivid one. Another contrast to the positive city is Thomas Jefferson's articulation of the idea of an agrarian nation composed of virtuous farmers and his aversion to manufacturing and industry.

Cultural historian [Morton White](link) characterizes the casting of the attitudes of writers and other intellectuals about the American city in an essay that he titled *Two Stages in the Critique of the American City.* In this essay, White said that writers like Jefferson, Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorn, Poe and Melville viewed the post-Colonial American city with attitudes of distrust and dismay.

After the Civil War, literary realists and naturalists like William Dean Howells, Frank Norris, and Theodore Dreiser expressed the same reservations about the American urban frontier. Ironically enough, Jane Addams who established Hull House in the center of Chicago can be added to the list of those who distrusted the city as can be John Dewey, Josiah Royce, Santayana and Lewis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright.

White finds this distrust of the American City puzzling for three reasons. His first reason is that he saw the city as a place where intellectuals congregate; his second reason is that for the past 175 years urbanization has been a constant factor in American life, and his third reason is that other western countries have not stressed persistent anti-urban feeling and ideology.

He concludes that American writers did not necessarily oppose urbanization out of Romanticism. Writers like Theodore Dreiser who wrote about the influence and impact of cities in novels like *Sister Carrie* eventually came to regard the American metropolis as a threatening place. Dreiser was not an agrarian or a romantic and neither was Henry Adams who hated New York

because he thought that the city empowered immigrant Jews more than it did him.

Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*

In his *Age of Reform*, [Richard Hofstadter](#) points out that the distrust of the city that Henry Adams displayed was common among his class of respectable gentlemen, including his brother Brooks, Henry Cabot Lodge, Theodore Roosevelt, John Hay, and Albert J. Beveridge. Hofstadter said that these men were the antithesis of the populists.

White concluded that the ideological differences between Romantics and Realists in American literature could not simplistically explain the intellectual and literary differences in attitudes toward the city.

References

Gibson, Donald B., "The Harlem Renaissance City: Its Multi-Illusionary Dimension," in *The City in African American Literature,* Yoshinobu Hakutani and Robert Butler, Associated University Press,1995

Hofstadter, Richard. *The Age of Reform*, Vintage, 1960

Lynch, Kevin, *The Image of the City*, The MIT Press, 1960

Mumford, Lewis*, The Culture of Cities*, Mariner Books, 1970

White, Morton, "Two Stages in the Critique of the American City," from *The Historian and the City,* edited by Oscar Handlin and John Burchard. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1963.

For the next part of the story read: Growing Pains, American City Style

Chapter Five

Cityscapes V

Growing Pains, American City Style

Industrialization, culture and immigration shaped American cities and by the 1920s, more Americans lived in cities than rural areas.

Internal geography distinctively shaped individual 19th century cities. Until the middle of the 19th century, palatial townhouses were located within walking distance of the docks, warehouses, offices, and courts. Poor people lived in the back alleys and courtyards of the central city. The middle classes lived in the center and other poor people lived in the suburbs, a trend that the middle class would reverse in the 20th century.

Historian David Hamer Writes About Frontier Town Building

In the 19th century, living in the suburbs meant living a great distance from urban amenities like town watches, clean water, and trash collection. Cities were densely populated because people had to live within walking distance of their shops and factories. As 19th century people developed their urban frontier, they built their cities to reflect these needs.

Historian David Hamer develops the thesis of the city as a frontier on an international level in *New Towns in the New World: Images and Perceptions of the Nineteenth Century Urban Frontier.* Hamer's book is a study of frontier town-building in Australia, New Zealand, the United States and briefly, Canada. He argues that an urban frontier was more of a contemporary perception of 19th century people involved in developing that frontier instead of a recent invention of historians.

Education and Cultural Development are Important in Establishing Cities

Some of the common features these 19th century citizen developers had in common included boosterism and speculation. Land speculation was an important factor in encouraging people to continually move west. Along with many other states, the state of Connecticut awarded wild frontier lands to Revolutionary War veterans or in the case of the Firelands -Wyandot County and Sandusky, Ohio - to people that the British burned out of house and home. These land awards motivated people to move to the frontier for economic gain, and not necessarily because they wanted to farm.

Many of these people created towns and cities that supplied the surrounding farms and served as a locus for educational and cultural development. Cities like Cleveland, Chicago, Milwaukee, and countless others on the shores of the Great Lakes grew from the geographical benefits of natural harbors and natural resources like gas, coal, and iron that could be exploited for growth and profit. Duluth, Minnesota and Milwaukee, Wisconsin are just two of such cities.

Industrialization and Immigration Reshape the Nature of Cities

Around the time of the Civil War, the nature of the American urban base changed. The old commercial and administrative cities like Philadelphia and New York continued to thrive, but industrialization and immigration increasingly shaped and reshaped the nature of cities.

In his book, *Immigrants and the American City*, historian Thomas Muller, interpreted the Northern victory over the South as a triumph of immigration. During the nineteenth century, immigrants tended to avoid the agrarian South and poured into the urban North. They spurred massive economic development and by the time the Civil War began, immigrants accounted for about one-half of all factory workers in the North. Muller argued that "without so many people and so much industrial power rising out of New York, Boston, and elsewhere at a minimum…the conflict would surely have been more protracted."

After the Civil War, industrialization and immigration began to more heavily impact the urban frontier. Increased technological innovations in transportation and housing construction reshaped cities. The development of railroads, streetcars, and trolleys in the 19th century expanded the urban frontier. People no longer had to live within walking distance of their jobs and enjoyed more choices about where they would live. They tended to seek out neighbors of similar social, economic, or ethnic status. Immigrants often clustered or huddled together in city neighborhoods.

The Wealthy and Middle Classes Begin to Leave the Cities

The wealthy no longer had to live in the center of the city, so they built their homes far away from warehouses, factories and docks. Office buildings, and retail and manufacturing concerns began to characterize the central business districts of cities. Heavier industries used rivers and rail lines to bring in raw materials and ship out finished goods from downtown commercial districts. By the end of the 19th century, specialized spaces such as retail districts, office blocks, and manufacturing areas characterized urban life.

When the middle classes left the bustle and smoke of cities, poorer people and immigrants moved into the old housing. Landlords filled the demand for housing by erecting and renting buildings that were often poorly maintained and unsanitary. Cheap housing and the promise of work near the center of the city lured the poor to the cities and impelled the rich to flee to the suburbs.

American Cities Grow by Millions between 1870 and 1920

In the 50 years between 1870 and 1920, the urban population of America grew by the millions and by 1920 more people lived in cities than did in rural areas. Chicago grew from about 300,000 people to more than a million in 1890.

Immigrants continued to pour into the cities and some found work and a comfortable life, but many found poverty and hardship. Poverty in cities like Chicago and New York sparked the Settlement House Movement that reformers like Jane Addams of Hull House in Chicago and Lillian Wald of the

New York settlements represented. People living in poverty were invisible to the rich people living on the outskirts of town.

References

Hamer, David, *New Towns in the New World: Images and Perceptions of the Nineteenth Century Urban Frontier,* Better World Books, 1990

Muller, Thomas, *Immigrants and the American City*, New York University Press, 1944

Wade, Richard C. *The Urban Frontier: The Rise of Western Cities, 1790-1830*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1959

For the next chapter in the story of cities read: The Cities Reinvent America and America Re-invents the Cities

Chapter Six

Cityscapes VI

The Cities Reinvent America and America Reinvents the Cities

American cities reshaped the political and economic face of 19th century America, and they periodically reinvent themselves in the 21st century.

From the 1880s until about the 1920s, African Americans from the south fled dead-end sharecropping and racial discrimination in the South to flock to northern cities for the well- paying factory jobs that they found there. By the 1950s, when population growth in American cities stagnated, blacks made up over half of the population in cities like Detroit, Chicago, and Washington D.C.

Cities Restructure the Political and Economic Face of America

The black "great " migration inspired cultural movements like the Harlem Renaissance and the resurgence of Blues and Jazz associated with cities like Chicago and Memphis, but it also exacerbated racial turmoil when blacks discovered that they had traded the sharecropping of the South for the urban ghettos of the North. These conditions in the cities restructured the political and economic face of America.

Cities were the sources of employment, and the centers of social, cultural and political life. Reforms, religions, and even revolutions originated in cities. Cities grew at such a fast pace that reform and morality had to race to keep up with economics and politics. The Progressive movement of the late19th and early 20th centuries successfully established housing codes, public health measures, city government reform, and social and regulatory programs.

Reformers Documented Social Evils in the American City

For reformers like muckraker [Lincoln Steffens](#), business and the business-man represented the evil of cities. In his book *The Shame of the Cities,* Steffens charges that "the commercial spirit is the spirit of profit, not patriotism, of credit, not honor, of individual gain, not national prosperity; of trade and dickering, not principle." Cities were founded upon and imbued with the spirit of commerce, so Steffens felt that they needed reforming even from businessmen.

Reformers like Lincoln Steffens and activists like [Jacob Riis](#) decried the detrimental influences of the cities on the American moral character and physical health. Despite cultural disapproval and developmental drawbacks, the urban frontier continued to expand. The urban frontier offered a mosaic of advantages and disadvantages from Colonial to modern times.

Cities Afford Americans Upward Mobility and Opportunity

The city and its economic advantages allowed millions of Americans to participate in upward mobility, home ownership, educational opportunities, and cultural events like beautification programs. Urban life in the 19th century featured construction of libraries, parks, playgrounds, and swimming pools.

Disadvantages of urban life included low wages, sub-standard housing, unemployment, underemployment, and inadequate skills. But the urban frontier continued to be just that - a frontier, where changes in demographics and economics continued to challenge Americans to practice American ideals of equality and progress.

The Frontier Creates Mixed Experiences and Perspectives

Contrasting the urban frontier to the more rural frontier of Frederick Jackson Turner reveals another *Frontier Thesis* irony. In 1893 as Turner introduced his *Frontier Thesis* in Chicago, the era of free land or the American frontier was coming to a close, although historians like Henry Nash Smith dispute the very idea of a frontier of "free land." Turner's Thesis ignored the civilizations of the myriad Indian nations that were subjugated by America's

westward march and enhanced the myth that the bulk of newly acquired lands were democratically distributed to yeomen pioneers.

American settlers from towns, villages and even cities like Cincinnati, Louisville and Lexington came to the frontier to fight Indian wars. Other historians find the concept of a frontier dubious because it is ambiguous and can be applied to too many disparate places and times to be a useful analytical tool. Many of these critics want to replace Turner's idea of a moving frontier with the idea of the West as a distinctive region, like the South.

Did the Frontier or City Create Democracy?

Turner's idea that the frontier promoted democracy walks hand in hand with the myth that people came to America obsessed with starting a new social order, when most of them simply wanted to recreate the kind of life they had in the old country and prosper economically. Isolated individuals forged by the frontier did not make the absorption of the West into the United States possible. Instead, cooperation and communities of various sorts made that possible.

These communities were formed around towns and cities and as the 19th century progressed, the federal government and large corporations began to have increasingly large and important roles in knitting America together.

Even the symbolic American cowboy is bound up in Turner's idea of rugged individualism on the frontier, when in actuality cowboys were often low-paid employees of corporate cattle ranches, some of them not even American.

It seems more likely that the Turner thesis of evolving democracy originates more in the Colonial cities and towns moving slowly and painfully toward self- realization and independence from the British mercantile system. And unlike Turner's frontier, the urban frontier is still evolving as American cities invent and reinvent themselves every decade or so.

References

Clarke, Graham, *The American City: Literary and Cultural Perspectives*, Palgrave Macmillan, 1988

Monkkonen, Eric, *America Becomes Urban: The Development of U.S. Cities & Towns, 1780-1980*, University of California Press, 1988

Turner, Frederick Jackson, *The Frontier in American History*, Dover Publications, 1996

Wade, Richard C. *The Urban Frontier: The Rise of Western Cities, 1790-1830*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1959

For the next part of the story read: Cityscapes - City Bosses and Machine Politics Create American Cities

Chapter Seven

Cityscapes VII

City Bosses and Machine Politics Create American Cities

Some Americans regard the boss machine system of 19th and 20th century America as corrupt, but the bosses inspired reform despite their corrupt practices.

The roots of bossism began as early as colonial times, but it took until 1850 for conditions to bring about the practice of [boss politics](#) in cities. The conditions that made the urban climate for bossism favorable included a huge increase in urban populations heightened industrialization, commercial expansion, technological change, immigration and the rise of tenement neighborhoods.

Modern urbanization and industrialization increased the need for more utility services like water gas and sewer systems. Urbanization and industrialization created the need for more policemen, firemen, and teachers and more streets, schools, and government buildings. Modernization split urban communities into competing factions. The time for bosses and their controlling machines had arrived.

After 1829, most new city charters were modeled after the federal form of government calling for two legislative councils elected from districts or wards, and an executive, usually a mayor, elected at large. Bicameral governments usually proved to be inefficient and many cities reeled under obsolete governmental systems and political chaos that fragmented political leadership. By the middle of the nineteenth century local merchants and manufacturers vied for political control to steer public policy into the path of their own interests.

Immigrants Help Shape American City Politics

From 1820 onward, increasing numbers of men with the right to vote created an electorate with its own political goals and leadership. Immigrants from diverse ethnic groups continued to pour into the United States. Every immigrant settling in an American city automatically became a ward resident and acquired a spokesman at city hall in the person of the local alderman.

Immigrants learned very quickly that if they needed anything from city hall, their ward boss was the man to see. The ward boss could arrange for streets to be paved, extend water mains, or grant variances. Machine control of politics became rooted in towns and small cities, but especially blossomed in the big cities. The machine acted as social work-

er, providing jobs for the jobless, comfort for the bereaved and human feeling against an unfeeling city bureaucracy.

The business community benefited in the same way. Contractors wanted city business and gas companies and streetcar lines wanted licenses and privileges. Manufacturers needed services and lax inspectors, and the liquor trade and numbers racket needed a tolerant police force. All of them depended on the machine boss and his cronies to give them what they needed.

Machine Politics Created Social Mobility and Democracy

The price that people and businesses paid for favors from the ward boss and his machine varied. The tenement resident gave his vote. The businessman wrote a check and expected some of his money to line the pockets of the machine boss. For new immigrants and their ambitious children, the machine system offered more advantages than disadvantages. Boss politics grew along with big cities like New York and Chicago.

Blacks did not manage to get on Chicago's board of aldermen until after 1900, but Baltimore's Eleventh Ward elected an African American in 1890, and Philadelphia had three black aldermen by 1899. As a means of social mobility, machine politics was a purely democratic American institution.

Oscar Handlin and Daniel Boorstin Write About City Government and Politics

Oscar Handlin, in his classic study, *The Uprooted*, asserted that in the Old World, government was very distant from the everyday lives of the peasants and that in fact, the state seemed to exist for the benefit of the rich and powerful. In America, immigrants found a different conception of government and politicians advised them to share in the selection of rulers by becoming a citizen and voting.

Historian Daniel Boorstin in *The Americans: the Democratic Experience*, noted that the Irish organized "not against but within the government." They brought well-known attitudes and customs with them including a predisposition for hierarchical organization, and a readiness to resort to illegal acts or violence to achieve their desired ends and an intense loyalty to the organizations they joined. The Irish discovered that votes gained them power in a democratic system and they created their own political organizations to achieve their goals.

Critics Decry Big City Graft and Corruption

Critics have characterized political machines as mobs and bosses as demagogues who ruled those mobs by graft and corruption. This may be a distorted picture because ma-

chines were coalitions in the tradition of other political organizations. Ward and precinct bosses obtained their power directly from the neighborhoods and they were the ones who converted votes to a marketable commodity.

Boss politics flowed in two directions. In return for votes, machine politics made government personal for immigrants and other people and in return for material considerations, machines granted privileges to segments of the business community. Both directions reinforced the traditional American notions of privatism.

Bosses Created Dictatorship and Democracy

Immigrants depended upon politics for individual and group benefits, and understanding this, bosses trained themselves to become specialists in personal relations. Bosses themselves were often immigrants or the sons of immigrants and they knew the ward neighborhoods first hand.

Each boss and each organization had unique features and personalities. All bosses pursued power and advantage, but some showed genuine concern for the people in their wards while others concentrated more on graft and self-serving. Most bosses used politics as a means of power and gave political favors on a cash and carry basis.

References

Boorstin, Daniel, *The Americans: The Democratic Experience*, Vintage Books, 1974

Handlin, Oscar, *The Uprooted, The Epic Story of the Great Migrations That Made the American People,* University of Pennsylvania Press, Second Edition, 2006

Ryan, Mary, *Civic Wars, Democracy and Public Life in the American City During the Nineteenth Century*, University of California Press, 1998

Teaford, Jon C., *The Unheralded Triumph: City Government in America, 1870-1900*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984

Teaford, Jon C. *City and Suburb: The Political Fragmentation of Metropolitan America, 1850-1970,* The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979

Chapter Eight

Cityscapes VIII

Tammany Hall, Chicago and Kansas City Bosses

Modern urban bossism originated in New York's Tammany hall and spread to other cities. City bosses and machine politics were a blessing and curse to cities.

New York's [Tammany Hall](#) evolved from a 1790s anti-Federalist social club into a political entity of the 1830s.

The Tammany Club Focused on Helping Irish Immigrants

During the aftermath of the Panic of 1837 the Tammany Club gave food and clothing to the poor people of New York and continued its relief work into the 1840s, focusing particularly on the increasing number of Irish immigrants. Eventually, the Tammany Club expanded its control over local patronage and politicians began to consult Tammany candidate selection and rewarded loyal Tammany members who worked for the party.

"Boss Tweed" Seizes the Democratic Party

The first man to centralize control of the Democratic Party under Tammany Hall was William Marcy Tweed, or "Boss Tweed." This centralization enabled "Boss Tweed" and his organization to run the entire city of New York and to appropriate about $200 dollars in seven years. In July 1871, the *New York Times* printed evidence that the Tammany Machine had perpetrated many gigantic frauds. Top New York officials like Judge Barnard and Mayor Hall were implicated and several Tammany lieutenants fled to Paris.

Tweed was arrested and eventually was convicted on 104 counts of fraud and bribery and sentenced to twelve years in prison. After a jailbreak and es-

cape to Spain, Tweed went back to jail and died there of pneumonia in 1878. Some of the positive things that Tweed's Tammany Hall accomplished were granting franchises for transit and utility companies, developing Central Park, and overseeing the physical expansion of the City.

Numbers, Jobs, and Favors

The demise of William Marcy Tweed did not bring about the demise of Tammany Hall. "Honest" Jack Kelly succeeded him as leader and Tammany people moved back into positions of power. In some ways, after 1880, Tammany Hall and similar machines in other cities changed. Their graft and corruption became less blatant and they used expanding municipal bureaucracy and the constant need for services to cement their influence. But they still drew upon a foundation of numbers, jobs, and favors.

Richard Croker Becomes Tammany's Boss

In the late 1880s, Richard Croker became the Tammany Hall and New York City boss. Croker was an able politician and often won the respect of his enemies. Reformer Lincoln Steffens wrote "Richard Croker never said anything to me that was not true, unless it was a statement for publication.

In 1894 Croker's enemies managed to dent Tammany's power for the first time since the demise of Boss Tweed. United States Senator and Chairman of the Republican State Committee Thomas Platt began an investigation into police corruption in New York City. By the time the investigation was over and the mayoral election of 1894 had taken place, Richard Croker found it necessary to sail to England for a three-year vacation.

New York Police Commissioner Theodore Roosevelt Works to Reform Tammany

Mayor Strong and his new police commissioner Theodore Roosevelt managed a few reforms, but their strict law enforcement made many people want a return of the Tammany days and in September 1897, Richard Croker returned to New York and Tammany. After four years of additional rule,

Corker lost his grip on the Tammany machine and again sailed for England in 1901.

New York City provided a colorful area for machine politics but bosses flourished in other cities and machines did not exist merely in the Democratic Party. Philadelphia had "King" James McManes, a Republican who controlled the city's fiscal policies and electoral politics from the late 186os until 1881. Outraged Democrats and Republicans united to oust McManes, but bossism returned to Philadelphia later in the decade.

The Chicago Brand of Machine Politics

Chicago, too, developed its own style of machine politics with every ward boss functioning as an independent entrepreneur with his own constituency. Michael "Hinky Dink" Kenna of the First Ward served free lunches in his saloon and his partner "Bathhouse John" Coughlin earned his nickname from his business. Despite its colorful bosses, Chicago Ward politics had drearily familiar features. Bosses drew their political power from numbers and favors. City employees kicked back some of their salaries to the bosses who gave them their jobs. Charles Tyson Yerkes, one of the most powerful bosses of early twentieth century Chicago, specialized in making deals with banks and gas companies.

Nebraska, Kansas City, and Pittsburgh Have Political Machines

Bossism also existed in small cities. After the turn of the century, Tom Dennison built a Democratic machine in Omaha, Nebraska, that endured for thirty years, from about 1900 until the 1920s. In Pittsburgh Christopher Magee ran a Republican machine that lasted for fifty years. In San Francisco, Abe Ruef, one of the few Jewish college graduates in the field, acquired control of the city in the early twentieth century.

Martin Behrman of New Orleans ran the city between 1900 and 1920 from his "cat bird" seats as mayor and head of the Democratic Choctaw Club. In Kansas City, Jim and Tom Pendergast rose from the river wards to dominate the city from the late 1880s to the 1930s. Senator and later president Harry S. Truman rose from these Democratic origins. Edward H. Cramp ruled

Memphis from about 1910 until the 1940s and Frank Hague was kingpin of Jersey City from 1917 to 1947 using his slogan "I am the law."

References

Boorstin, Daniel, *The Americans: The Democratic Experience*, Vintage Books, 1974

Handlin, Oscar, *The Uprooted, The Epic Story of the Great Migrations That Made the American People,* University of Pennsylvania Press, Second Edition, 2006

Ryan, Mary, *Civic Wars, Democracy and Public Life in the American City During the Nineteenth Century*, University of California Press, 1998

Steffens, Lincoln*, The Shame of the Cities*, Amereon Limited, 1957

Teaford, Jon C., *The Unheralded Triumph: City Government in America, 1870-1900*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984

Teaford, Jon C. *City and Suburb: The Political Fragmentation of Metropolitan America, 1850-1970,* The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979

For the next article in the series read: The City Political Machine and Presidential Politics

Chapter Nine

Cityscapes IX

The City Political Machine and Presidential Politics

City bosses and political machines influenced presidential politics and the influence of city bosses ultimately created the urban reformer.

The political machines were partially responsible for the careers of presidents as well as bosses. Shortly after Thomas Woodrow Wilson resigned as president of Princeton in 1910, a coalition of political machines that controlled the New Jersey Democratic Party approached him and asked him to run for Governor.

The New Jersey Political Machine Tried to Control Woodrow Wilson

The bosses thought that Wilson would be a pliable conservative who would bring them prestige and rhetoric and maintain a "hands-off" policy about the daily political workings of the machine.

At this point in Wilson's career, the machine politicians read him correctly. Wilson even went so far as to promise party leaders that he would not smash their organizations. But during the campaign he became totally convinced of the morality of the twentieth century reform program and once he became New Jersey governor, in his zeal for reform he forgot his promises to the party politicians who put him into office.

Woodrow Wilson denied Jim Smith, his most powerful machine supporter, a seat in the Senate and spent the next two years successfully fighting for workmen's compensation legislation, utility regulation, and electoral reform in New Jersey. Wilson's reform program gained him attention from nationally known Democrats and eventually he successfully ran for president of the United States.

Other Presidents and Political Machines

Warren G. Harding, and before him William McKinley traced some of their political success to Ohio machine politics and even the durable and sacrosanct Franklin Delano Roosevelt operated the "machine." A book called *Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Tammany Hall of New York* by Charles La-Cerra details the relationship of Franklin Delano Roosevelt with Tammany Hall. Historians have treated FDR's dealings with the New York machine in monographs and as part of histories of his life, but have not focused on this particular aspect of his political career.

There seems to be a scholarly bias against linking presidents to machine politics and this linkage, especially in the case of Harry Truman, has been considered a liability. As Professor LaCerra said in his book, "Good government advocates, such as Roosevelt are supposed to be above contact with local machines which are known to be corrupt. In truth, Roosevelt had a very intricate and profound connection with Tammany Hall that lasted over thirty years, whether he was in or out of office."

The Pros and Cons of Political Machines

In the years after 1860, political machines garnered many benefits for American cities at great social and economic costs. Balancing the benefits and costs, especially the ethical costs against each other, will furnish historians and moral guardians of the nation material for many future debates. On one side looms the achievement of the bosses in procuring enormous expansion of urban facilities.

On the other side speak the cheating, frauds, and corrupt laws. Machines gave millions of ordinary city dwellers a belief that someone in power did care about them. Some historians even argue that bosses acted as mediators between different economic interests and social groups and eased the pressures that could have resulted in class conflict, socialism or other revolutionary change.

Machines were not across the board tolerant. They often were exclusive and favored some groups over others. Irish machines in New York, Chicago,

New Orleans, New Haven and Detroit ignored Polish people and Italians for many years and bosses seldom curried the favor of black people in this period. Only Mayor William Hale Thompson of Chicago built a solid following from the black ghettos between 1915 and 1931.

Political Bosses Also Had Their Pros and Cons

Bosses can't be judged by their corrupt activities along. They came to power in an age when industrialists and merchants ran roughshod over opponents and manipulated the public in their quest for money and power, but bosses should also not be venerated for preserving order in the cities.

America's political institutions survived despite the influence and control of bosses. Bosses and their machines can be viewed as catalysts. Their attempts to control and aid their constituents dramatized the problems of modern urban society and provoked debate about solving these problems and managing them in the future. It can be argued that bosses preceded and even created the urban reformer.

References

Boorstin, Daniel, *The Americans: The Democratic Experience*, Vintage Books, 1974

Handlin, Oscar, *The Uprooted, The Epic Story of the Great Migrations That Made the American People,* University of Pennsylvania Press, Second Edition, 2006

LaCerra, Charles, *Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Tammany Hall of New York*, Rowman & Littlefield, 1997

Ryan, Mary, *Civic Wars, Democracy and Public Life in the American City During the Nineteenth Century*, University of California Press, 1998

Steffens, Lincoln*, The Shame of the Cities*, Amereon Limited, 1957

Teaford, Jon C., *The Unheralded Triumph: City Government in America, 1870-1900*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984

Teaford, Jon C. *City and Suburb: The Political Fragmentation of Metropolitan America, 1850-1970,* The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979

For the next part of the story read: Americans Rethink the Nature of Their 20th Century Cities

Chapter Ten

Cityscapes X

Americans Rethink the Nature of Their 20th Century Cities

Romantic writers like John Ruskin popularized the idea that parks and trees in the midst of the cities could counteract their negative influences.

As discussed in Inventing and Re-inventing the American City After the Civil War, the physical characteristics of the city from the dirt and refuse in the streets of Colonial Philadelphia to the tenement houses in Chicago were early called into question. By the 1840s and 1850s, a well-organized movement advocated introducing trees and parks into cities. This movement was part of a formal change in attitude toward nature from one of aversion and conquest to one of appreciation and admiration. Romantic writers like John Ruskin, William Cullen Bryant presented the view that the unhealthy influence of the city could be tempered with parks and trees to bring it closer to the healthier, more desirable country.

After the Civil War, leading intellectuals attacked the city with anti-Romantic arguments. Henry Adams, Henry James, William Dean Howells, and John Dewey did not advocate abandoning the American City for the forest. In sharp contrast to ante-bellum criticism of cities as being too over civilized, the generation of post-Civil War intellectuals-realists and pragmatists and naturalists criticized American City life as undercivilized. Even Louis Mumford, stalwart admirer of Emerson, complained that Megalopolis was too primitive and too barbaric.

The City as a Jungle

The period of industrial and technological growth after the Civil War added to the intellectual and literary perception of the city as a jungle. Tangled streets and tenements teeming with immigrants, rows of buildings punc-

tuated by primitive skyscrapers in Chicago and New York, streets filled filth and garbage were just a few of the characteristics of the late 19th century city.

Muck Raking writers like Lincoln Steffens in *The Shame of the Cities* exposed the shoddy and immoral side of urban life. Upton Sinclair in *The Jungle*, Ida Tarbell's *History of the Standard Oil Company* and many others exposed the nefarious business practices that industrial capitalism produced in the crucibles of the cities. Sinclair Lewis in *Babbitt* satirized the stultifying and inhibiting affect that the city and its businessmen could have on cultural and intellectual life.

The City as a Cradle of Industry

On the positive side of the street, industrial capitalists like Andrew Carnegie and J.P. Morgan used cities like New York and Pittsburgh as bases to establish empires in steel and banking that irrevocably altered American life. Not many urban dwellers will argue that steel skyscrapers and ships or banks and capital are detrimental to an industrial society.

It seemed that the American city needed a new soul. Around the turn of the twentieth century intellectuals and urban historians began to re-imagine the city, propelled by the spirit of Progressive reform and the forces of continuing industrialization, immigration, migration, and urbanization.

The Migration of Southern Blacks into Northern Cities

One of the significant events of the 1880s into the 1920s was the migration of Southern blacks into the Northern cities in search of better lives than a racially biased South offered them. The great migration did not produce significant numbers- only about 2 percent of the populations of New York, Cleveland, and Washington D.C.- but the resettling of Southern blacks from Southern hill farms into northern ghettos and continued racial discrimination underscored the perceptional dichotomy of the city.

On one hand, the city lured people looking for economic opportunity and anonymity enough to lead private lives. On the other hand poor people

tended to be isolated in neighborhoods or ghettos that were not upwardly mobile. Wholesale movement to the suburbs did not begin for another thirty years but the seeds for white flight and continued urban unrest including riots came North with the black exodus.

The Chicago School of Sociology

Government officials failed to heed the changing demographics of the cities as the twentieth century progressed. A group that did re-conceptualize the urban environment was the Chicago School of Sociology, which spear-headed the first major attempt to study the urban environment by combined efforts of theory and ethnographic fieldwork in Chicago.

The major researchers in the Chicago School included Robert Park, Louis Wirth, Ernest Burgess and Robert McKenzie and from the 1920s to the 1930s urban sociology meant primarily the Chicago School. Park and Burgess developed a theory of urban ecology that proposed that cities were environments like those found in nature and the same forces of Darwinian evolution that affected natural ecosystems also shaped city environments.

Competition was the most important of these forces and Park and Burgess suggested that the struggle for scarce urban resources, especially land, led to competition between groups and eventually to the division of urban space.

People who shared similar social characteristics were subjects to the same ecological pressures. Competition for land and resources brought about dividing urban space into zones, with the more desirable areas garnering higher rents. People and businesses moved outward from the city, as they became more prosperous. Park and Burgess called this phenomenon succession, a term they borrowed from plant ecology.

Robert Park and Ernest Burgess Introduce Concentric Zone Theory

Park and Burgess called their model concentric zone theory and published it in *The City,* in 1925. In their paper they predicted that cities would take the form of five concentric rings with the areas of social and physical deterioration concentrated near the city of the city and the more prosperous areas lo-

cated near the city's edge. As sociologists, Park and Burgess and their students used concentric zone theory extensively to explain the existence of social problems such as unemployment and crime in certain districts of Chicago.

They also employed the extensive use of mapping in their social program to expose the spatial distribution of social problems and to provide a basis of comparison between areas. Burgess especially employed maps, requiring the students in all of his seminars to acquire proficiency in basic map making techniques. He and his students combed the city of Chicago for data that could be used for maps, gleaning information from city agencies and making more extensive use of census data than any other social scientists of the time.

Post World War II Critics Attack Concentric Zone Theory

After World War II, critics attacked the ecological models of Park and Burgess, charging that the models were overly simplistic and that their search for "natural" or "organic" process was superficial. Their process didn't address the social or cultural dimensions of urban life and the political-economic impact of industrialization on urban geography. The urban ecology studies of the 1920s for the most part did not address the issues of class, race, gender, and ethnicity but the concentric rings model is still used in urban sociology and in studies of urban processes.

Mike Davis, in his 1992 study called *The Ecology of Fear*, used the concentric rings model to describe the turmoil of Los Angeles. He argued that Los Angeles had an inner core of urban decay that spread into the heart of suburbia. One of the most important legacies of the urban ecology studies at the University of Chicago in the 1920s was adding mapmaking to the methodology of the emerging disciplines of sociology, criminology, and public policy.

References

Bulmer, Martin. *The Chicago School of Sociology*, University of Chicago Press, 1986

Davis, Mike, *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster*. New York: Henry Holt, 1998

Lewis, Sinclair, *Babbitt*, Bantam Classics, First THUS Edition, 1998

Sinclair, Upton, *The Jungle*, Bantam Classics, 1981

Steffens, Lincoln, *The Shame of the Cities*, Amereon Limited, 1957

Tarbell, Ida. *History of the Standard Oil Company*, Dover Publications, 2003

For the next part of the story of the American City read: American Cities and Suburbs Have An Interconnected Relationship

Chapter Eleven

Cityscapes XI

American Cities and Suburbs Have an Interconnected Relationship

America began as a rural nation and grew into an urban and then a suburban nation. In the 21st century, Americans strive to balance these diverse origins.

As foreshadowed in Americans Rethink the Nature of Their Twentieth Century Cities, after World War II, the white flight to the American suburbs began in earnest when the American GIs came home seeking places to live and raise their families.

The suburbs offered them cheap housing and escape from the dangerous minorites in the cities. The white populations fled the cities in such great numbers that by the 1970s, America had become a suburban rather than an urban nation. President Richard Nixon saw suburbanization as the wave of the future in America and put his stamp of approval on suburban America by engineering building and tax break programs. Historian Richard Hofstadter commented that the United States "was born in the country and has moved to the city."

American Suburbanization is Rooted in the 18th Century

America became officially urban in the early Twentieth Century, and in the early twenty-first century when more than 59 percent of Americans, or over 140 million people live in suburban areas-more than live in rural areas or central cities.

The truth about the suburbanization of America is that it is rooted in the 18th century when wealthy Americans built homes in the country to escape the crowded, hot cities during the summer. Although Monticello was his prin-

cipal and most famous residence, Thomas Jefferson also had a country home in Poplar Forest. By the time of the Civil War, influential architects like Andrew Jackson Downing and Alexander Jackson Davis were deifying the cottage as the solution to social ills. Significant authors like Henry David Thoreau and Catharine Beecher reinforced the virtues of yards and meadows in the minds and lives of Americans doubtful about raising their families in large, noisy cities that already teemed with foreign immigrants.

As the eighteenth century progressed into the nineteenth, more people who could afford them built summerhouses and a few began to save time by commuting by carriage into town. Commuting into the city to work became cheaper in the nineteenth century when commuter railroad lines were built in the central city and by 1900 suburbs were beginning to cluster around every city. Already thousands of commuters passed daily through the Grand Central Terminal in New York City and Chicago was building a vast rail network that opened new suburbs to the north, south and west.

American Cities Became Industrial Instead of Residential

Part of the reason for this spurt of suburban growth was that a new kind of metropolis was developing in America that sharply contrasted with the walking city of a century earlier. By 1900 the center of every American City had become an area for industrial and commercial use, with very little residential space. Grimy factories stood nearby, and beyond them, the first tenement districts where the poor and recent immigrants and other people who couldn't afford better housing lived. This living pattern was a reversal of that in the early cities when the wealthy people lived in the center city and the poor were pushed out to the suburbs.

Beyond the boundaries of the walking city grew the streetcar suburbs. People could easily commute to their jobs in the central city from their modest, yet affordable homes. Still farther out, the railroad commuters lived in large houses with wrap-around yards thick with trees and shrubbery and large iron or wooden fences protecting them. Railroad suburbs were more expensive to live in than streetcar suburbs because railroad fares were relatively high until after World War I. These streetcar and railroad suburbs and later, the creation and spread of the automobile making transportation even

easier and cheaper, established a suburban rather than an urban standard for ambitious Americans.

Working Class Suburbs Sprang Up After World War I

After World War I, working class suburbs sprang up around large manufacturing complexes and when the economic blight of the Great Depression settled on 1930s America, American city planners and government officials revived the idea of a planned community. Planned communities did not originate in America; rather one of the earliest planned communities was built in the 4th century B.C. in Miletus, Greece. Several eighteenth-century cities including Washington D.C., New York City and St. Petersburg, Russia, were built with comprehensive planning guides.

The Garden City and the Greenbelt City

Ebenezer Howard founded [The Garden City Movement](#) in 19th century England as a counterpoint to the pollution and crowding of the Industrial Revolution. In 1898, he published his book, *To-Morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*, that expounded his ideas about creating towns limited in size and density and surrounded with a belt of undeveloped land.

American architects Clarence Stein and Henry Wright brought the idea of the "Garden City" to America in the early 1920s and created Radburn, New Jersey, featuring several cutting-edge urban planning ideas that would set the standard for urban and suburban planners for the next century.

After the stock market crash in 1929 and the economic depression, people needed affordable housing and jobs. Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his New Deal responded to this human need by creating the Resettlement Administration in 1935. The Resettlement Administration developed three greenbelt towns; Greenbelt, Maryland; Greenhills, Ohio; and Greendale, Wisconsin. These towns featured many of the Garden City Movement developments, including the use of super blocks and a "greenbelt" of undeveloped land surrounding the community. They were the concrete results of visionary dreams and suburban models.

The Mushrooming of the American Suburbs

After World War II, a housing shortage sparked a largely middle class mushrooming of the American suburbs. With their GI Bill loans for housing, farms, and businesses in hand, American GI's married and began to raise families and several developers seized the opportunity and applied the principles of mass production to build identical houses on modest lots. They sold some of these homes to professionals in middle management, some in the lower middle class and a few to working class people.

The Levittown suburban communities in New York and Pennsylvania are probably the most recognizable of planned communities created by developers to meet the post World War II housing shortage. Abraham Levitt, a real estate lawyer, actually started purchasing land and selling it off to developers in the late 1920s.

When the Great Depression of the 1930s caused the developer of a property that Levitt had invested in to default in his payments, Levitt felt compelled to complete the development himself to protect his investment. He recruited his two sons to help and under the name of Levitt & Sons, they learned construction techniques and completed the project. Strathmore, as their development was called, turned out to be such a success that Levitt & Sons continued to buy land and built new homes throughout the Depression, continuously perfecting their craft.

During World War II, Levitt & Sons built homes for shipyard workers in Norfolk, Virginia, under a Navy contract, further perfecting the mass production techniques they later used in constructing Levittown, New York.

References

Greer, Scott. *The Emerging City: Myth and Reality*. New York: The Free Press, 1962

Hofstadter, Richard, *The Age of Reform*. Vintage, 1960

Howard, Ebenezer, *Tomorrow, A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*, 1898

Jackson, Kenneth T. *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*. Oxford University Press, 1987

Orum, Anthony M., *The Centrality of Place: The Urban Imagination*. Sociologists, Great Cities Institute, College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs, University of Michigan, 2004.

For the conclusion of the story of the American city read: Americans Move to the Suburbs and Transform Them Into Ex-Urbs

Chapter Twelve

Cityscapes XII

Americans Move to the Suburbs and Transform Them into Ex-Urbs

Industry and commerce followed Americans to the suburbs, and eventually Americans discovered that in order to survive the suburbs had to become more urban.

As discussed in American Cities and Suburbs Have an Interconnected Relationship, in 1947, in Levittown, New York, the Levitt sons, Alfred and William, built a planned community with houses approximately 60 feet apart and eventually the community grew to more than 17,000 homes. For their next planned community, the Levitt brothers bought land in Bucks County, Pennsylvania and in a short time builders were completing about 200 houses per week. Levitttown featured affordable housing in an area with plentiful job opportunities and people flocked to the Levittowns.

Black Families and Middle Class Families Move to the Suburbs

In an interesting commentary about the social reasons for suburbs, the Levitts had refused to sell homes to blacks, but in 1957 a black family bought a home in the Dogwood Hollow section that quickly became a controversy magnet. Mobs gathered outside the house, throwing rocks and bottles and breaking windows. A neighbor who helped the black family had a cross burned on his lawn. The black family stayed in Levittown for a time, but eventually moved away. The Levitttowns (there was also one in New Jersey) made suburban living accessible to hundreds of thousands of people and helped create the suburban social, political, and cultural milieu that transformed diverse people into middle class suburban residents.

As the suburbs grew, so did the migration of the middle class to live in the suburbs. Kenneth T. Jackson in *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States,* argues that affordable housing and racial prejudice (flight

from the blacks in the inner cities) are the two major reasons that middle class people live in suburbs.

Life in the suburbs did offer glittering contrast to the dingy central cities. The suburbs offered cleaner, newer housing, they were homogeneous, and they provided a sense of security. Problems of crime and poverty were not glaringly apparent and because the suburbs were not part of the core city, suburban government was presumably more honest and not corrupted with layers of graft and bureaucracy.

The Suburbs Spawn Shopping Malls, Suburban Housing, and Suburban Industry

As millions of people moved to the suburbs, stores followed them so that suburbanites did not have to go to the city to shop. By the mid 1950s, shopping malls were springing up and by the 1980s and 1990s, had evolved into centers for consumption and entertainment. Suburban housing also changed in the 1980s and 1990s. Town house complexes began to symbolize suburban living as well as houses on lots.

Employers eventually followed the population exodus to the suburbs. Office complexes and corporate campuses moved closer to the suburban areas where many workers lived. And warehouses and light manufacturing and other businesses increasingly located in the suburbs. Since public transportation did not extend to these new locations, workers had to commute by car, cementing its position as a necessity and a focal point of American middle class life.

By the late 1990s, traffic congestion had become an increasing problem in cities and suburbs and Americans spent more of their time commuting to work, school, shopping, and around town. Rush hour traffic patterns congested the city in the morning and evening. Suburban communities were compelled to build huge parking lots because employees had to drive to work. There were still very few efficient mass transit systems out to the suburbs and long commutes and traffic jams were an inevitable part of urban and suburban existence.

Suburbanization Changes American Life and American Life Becomes More Urban

Some aspects of American life have remained untouched by suburbanization. Central city functions, including government bureaus, courts, universities, professional sports teams, theaters, and arts groups still remain viable and essential. Trendy shopping, trendy apartment living, and vibrant nightlife, offshoots of the booming economy at the end of the 20th century, revitalized a few urban neighborhoods.

Urban historian Jon C.. Teaford condensed a political trend into one sentence when he said in a speech at a Hofstra conference on the Nassau County centennial that "in order to survive, suburbs have to become more urban." He cites as his example the towns of Oyster, Bay, Hempstead and North Hempstead. About a century ago, these towns chose to band together to form the new County of Nassau instead of being gobbled up by the expanding New York City. Their action created a model of suburban development for the rest of the nation, according to Teaford, of Purdue University.

The Transformation of Suburban America

The demographics of suburban America underscore another mass migration when they reveal that 41 percent of people live in the city, and 59 percent live in the surrounding suburban or rural areas. Hoping for more privacy, more space and better housing, people are moving from the older suburbs on the fringes of urban areas into newer suburbs even further outside the city.

In the 1990s, the older suburban population moved to newer suburbs and to the exurbs, rural areas that could be developed to offer suburban advantages. With these new suburbs springing up on the fringes of major urban centers, older suburbs are experiencing many of the hardships of the cities. As the young and the more affluent seek newer developments, tax bases in the cities and older suburbs erode. Housing prices stagnate or fall and decline. The elderly – many on limited incomes and in poor health – are located in older suburbs – a trend that diminishes tax revenues and services. Schools, no longer supported by the same strong property tax base, decline, causing even move people to move out. Poorer people then move into the older suburbs.

As poverty increases in the older areas, so does crime. The urban-suburban-exurb-cycle seems to be a circular phenomenon of American history.

The peace and security that people moving to the suburbs sought became more elusive at the end of the 20th century and gated and walled housing developments, resembling the walled cities of the Middle Ages, began to become increasingly important in suburban life. The next major trend may be a move from the cities and suburbs into the small towns and the countryside as Americans enjoy more leisure time and seek a stronger sense of community, although this trend will undoubtedly be influenced by the availability and cost of automobiles and gasoline for the commuter.

Urban Historians Robert Fishman and Kenneth Jackson Argue that the American Suburban Experience is Unique

Compared to that of the remainder of the western world, the suburban experience in the United States is unique in many important ways. According to urban historians Kenneth T. Jackson and Robert Fishman, the major marker of the American suburban experience is that middle class Americans live in suburbs in homes that they own and in the center of yards that the rest of the world considers enormous. These suburbs are located far from the workplaces of middle class Americans, thus making commuting time and distance important factors in American life.

They also argue that the American tax system favors middle class suburbia and places subsidized government housing and programs in the cities where the poor must remain to take advantage of them.

Fishman and Jackson contend that racial prejudice is another factor that makes the American suburban experience unique. Even before the "white flight" from the black central cities in the 1960s, richer Americans fled the cities to avoid living cheek to jowl with poor, foreign immigrants often speaking different languages and from alien cultures.

Jackson and Fishman conclude that: *economic factors, combined with racial prejudice and a pervasive fondness for grass and solitude have made private detached houses affordable and desirable to the middle class. They have*

produced a suburban pattern of work, residence, and consumption that has thus far been more pronounced in the United States than elsewhere.

References

Fishman, Robert. *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia*, Basic Books, 1989

Greer, Scott. *The Emerging City: Myth and Reality*. New York: The Free Press, 1962

Hofstadter, Richard, *The Age of Reform*. Vintage, 1960

Howard, Ebenezer, *Tomorrow, A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*, 1898

Jackson, Kenneth T. *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*. Oxford University Press, 1987

Orum, Anthony M., *The Centrality of Place: The Urban Imagination*. Sociologists, Great Cities Institute, College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs, University of Michigan, 2004.

Teaford, Jon C., *The Metropolitan Revolution: The Rise of Post Urban America*. New York: Columbia University, Press, 2006

.