

Cities and Suburbs.

The United States long has been a metropolitan nation. The majority of Americans have lived in urban places since 1920, and cities have been the sites and the catalysts of major social, political, and economic transformations over four centuries of American history. America's urban age also has been a suburban one. Suburbs have been an important feature of the American urban landscape since the middle of the nineteenth century. The concurrent growth of cities and suburbs resulted not only from economic and technological transformations, but also from cultural responses to America's ethnic and racial diversity and public policy choices that subsidized suburban development, particularly since 1945. While the last 200 years of human history have witnessed unprecedented rates of urbanization around the globe, the United States has been distinctive in its high degree of urban decentralization and in the functional and social segregation within the urban built environment.

Pre-colonial and colonial patterns of urbanization and suburbanization

Cities and other fixed settlements served as hubs of economic and political power for indigenous North American societies many centuries before European contact. One of these was Cahokia, established around 700 CE by the Indians of the Late Woodland culture in what is now East St. Louis, Illinois. At its height around 1100 CE, Cahokia was a city of between 10,000-20,000, with another 30,000 people living in fifty miles of surrounding hinterland. Cahokia's political and trade networks extended across a territory that extended from the modern Dakotas to New York, south to Florida, and southwest to Mexico. Other urban places with broad trade and political networks included the pueblo villages of the Anasazi people of the Southwest. By the time the first Europeans arrived in the early sixteenth century, these cultures had been superseded by societies that rarely built permanent settlements, instead moving across their territory in traveling bands and living in small, seasonal villages.

Forts, trading posts, missions, and towns were outposts of empire from which European societies gained control of North America between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Spanish rulers made the building of towns and cities the central part of their imperial project. Spain's Laws of the Indies (1573) dictated precise standards for urban planning and development, establishing a network of colonial cities throughout the Americas that are strikingly similar in their layout and in their architecture. This urbanization was not as pronounced in North America, but the Spanish missions and trading posts established there (particularly in what would become the State of California) were the core settlements around which large metropolitan areas later would develop.

French, Dutch, and English interests established port cities along the Eastern and Southern coasts beginning in the seventeenth century. Some were founded to establish territorial dominance and profit from lucrative trade between the

Americas and Europe, such as New Amsterdam (later New York City), which was established as a small, fortified settlement by Dutch traders in 1625. Religious freedom was another reason for the establishment of urban places. English Puritans founded Boston in 1630 under the leadership of John Winthrop, who urged his followers to build their city along Christian principles, saying “we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill.” Several decades later, William Penn, an English Quaker and proprietor of Pennsylvania, established the city of Philadelphia as another haven from religious persecution. Penn’s background as a country gentleman influenced his plan for Philadelphia, which sought to distinguish itself from the crowded and chaotic cities of Europe by featuring a uniform street grid, ample lot sizes, and parks and gardens. The blend of the urban and the rural in this “Greene Country Towne,” as Penn called it, was a seminal influence on American urban and suburban planning.

Gridded streets also became a consistent and defining characteristic of North American urban places from the eighteenth century going forward, as European colonizers sought to impose some regularity and “civilization” on an unfamiliar and dangerous landscape. Fortified port cities like New Orleans (France) and Charleston (England) and missions and pueblos like Los Angeles (Spain) laid out street grids in advance of settlement, a pattern that would be repeated many times over in the nineteenth century as American settlement advanced westward.

Urban life and commerce

Preindustrial cities in North America remained small compared to the rest of the world. By 1790 only 5% of the U.S. population lived in settlements of 2,500 or more; the largest city, Philadelphia, had a population of about 40,000. In contrast, the world’s largest city in 1800, Beijing, was home to over a million people; London, the second largest, had 860,000. Despite their size, American cities had a significant influence upon the political and economic life of the thirteen colonies and the new nation. Deep-water port cities along the Atlantic coast – Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston – became hubs of international trade and the centers of regional economies. Their orientation was chiefly commercial, as they moved raw materials from the American hinterland onto Atlantic-crossing ships. These, in turn, brought manufactured and finished goods back from England and the rest of Europe. Such mercantile cities adhered to preindustrial rhythms of work and rest, and their streets became the stages for political action and public celebration. Cities played pivotal roles in the American Revolution. Urban newspapers galvanized patriotic sentiment and built support for the revolutionary cause. Urban coffeehouses, wharves, and public squares became sites where news of politics and war was shared, and where crowds rallied in support of each side. Cities were the sites of political conventions, military mobilizations, and were theatres of war.

The cities of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were densely populated “walking” cities where people of many classes, races, and professions lived in close proximity to one another. Home and work were often in the same

place, as both artisans and merchants lived above their storefronts or next to their warehouses. Social differences were expressed through clothing and comportment rather than through opulent residences.

The density and lack of water and sewage infrastructure in early American cities led to regular outbreaks of disease. In the hot and humid summer months on the Atlantic coast, many thousands fell ill and often died from cholera, typhoid, and malaria. A yellow fever epidemic in Philadelphia in 1793 killed 5,000 of the city's 45,000 residents. Urban epidemics such as these continued in American cities throughout the nineteenth century and prompted the construction of citywide water and sewer systems.

Public health also served as a catalyst for early suburbanization, as affluent citizens chose to escape heat, crowds, and disease by building villas on the lightly populated urban outskirts beginning in the mid-1700s. Suburban spaces of this period, however, were characterized more by poverty than by wealth, and by a mix of uses rather than being exclusively residential. The urban fringes of cities like Boston, New York, and Philadelphia during this period were sites of polluting activities and marginalized populations whose presence was shunned elsewhere in the city.

Early American leaders had conflicting opinions about the role of cities in American life. The nation's founders came from an affluent landowning class; many, like Virginia plantation owner Thomas Jefferson, argued that an urban manufacturing economy was a threat to democracy and antithetical to the American character. "Mobs of great cities," Jefferson wrote, "add just so much to the support of pure government, as sores do to the strength of the human body." Jefferson's views encapsulated a persistent anti-urbanism in American culture and politics that became amplified as the United States became more diverse, more industrial, and more urban in the nineteenth century.

Early industrial cities and suburbs before the Civil War

Before the end of Jefferson's lifetime, the United States was becoming a major manufacturing economy. Cities were the hubs of industrial growth and the sources of capital. Manufacturing in turn vastly expanded the size of metropolitan areas and increased their social and economic importance. Prior to the American Civil War, this urbanization and industrialization occurred nearly entirely in Northern states, while the slaveholding South became increasingly attached to large-scale, labor-intensive agricultural production. Major public and private infrastructure projects of the early nineteenth century fueled industrial growth in the North as well as established thriving regional networks of cities.

Early industrial production between the 1790s and 1840s encouraged the growth of new urban centers as well as of towns on the metropolitan periphery of long-established cities. In New England towns like Lowell, Massachusetts, Boston-based investors and entrepreneurs established large water-powered textile mills that

drew upon an underemployed rural workforce of young women and girls to create the nation's first large-scale manufacturing enterprises. In doing so, they expanded the economic reach of cities like Boston and Providence and mapped out roadways and railways that later served as paths for suburban growth. Industrialization fueled the growth of the urban West as well, as the growth of manufacturing cities like Pittsburgh and Chicago shifted the economic activity of the nation westward from the Atlantic Coast.

The role of transportation

New transportation technologies and infrastructure fueled America's industrial revolution and vastly enlarged its cities. Steamboat technology opened up the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers to long-distance trade and led to the rapid growth of river-port towns like Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Louisville during the first decades of the nineteenth century. Steamboats shrank the distance between these inland cities and the port of New Orleans, allowing producers and merchants to move their goods to international markets much more quickly.

The greatest infrastructure triumph of this period was the construction of the Erie Canal. Opened in 1825, the canal created a navigable water route between the Atlantic and the Great Lakes, opening up a vast western hinterland to trade and settlement. Trade flowing down the Erie Canal encouraged the growth of a chain of prosperous towns along its length, and made New York City the undisputed financial and commercial capital of the United States. Within a few years of the canal's opening, New York had surpassed Philadelphia as the largest city in the country.

As cities grew, their dense and diverse streetscapes began to spread outward and become separated by type of activity as well as by class, race, and ethnicity. The introduction of horse-drawn public transportation (the omnibus, the horse car) gave urbanites the ability to travel greater distances in shorter periods of time, encouraging the development of larger, less dense urban neighborhoods.

A growing middle class of business owners, managers, and professionals moved to more spacious, well-appointed houses located at some distance from their places of work. In New York City, the development of elite residential districts pushed urbanization north from crowded tip of Lower Manhattan. The establishment of regular ferry service to Brooklyn by the 1830s encouraged its development as a middle-class residential area, making it the United States' first commuter suburb.

Social structure

The large-scale global migrations prompted by the Industrial Revolution brought new immigrant populations to American cities in the first half of the nineteenth century. Immigrants of this period came chiefly from Northern Europe, with the largest cohorts coming from Germany and Ireland. A steady stream of Irish

immigrants grew in magnitude after Ireland's potato famine of the 1830s and 1840s; in 1830, less than 3,000 Irish immigrated to the U.S.; by 1850, this number had grown to 164,000. Large cities were the destinations for the vast majority of these new arrivals. Poor, ill-educated, and subject to virulent ethnic and religious discrimination and violence, Irish immigrants had limited choices about where to live and work, and found themselves crowded into the most dangerous slums and working in particularly dangerous and dirty jobs. Black urbanites, whose numbers in many American cities remained comparatively small, faced similar discrimination in housing and in the workplace, often living in the same slum areas. Over time, the Irish increased their economic status and political power, while African Americans remained segregated and economically marginalized.

Industrialization transformed employment for urban residents of all classes. The preindustrial model of artisanal or small-shop production gave way to larger-scale manufacturing involving a waged workforce. These factories grew in and around cities, drawing on urban areas' large pools of labor and of capital investment. As Americans began to produce and sell in mass quantities goods that previously had been made by hand, clusters of specialized manufacturing emerged in different cities. New York City became the center of garment and shoe manufacturing; Pittsburgh, "the Iron City," became a hub of steel production.

Gender roles became more clearly delineated in the early industrial city. An emerging cultural ethos of middle-class respectability defined the workplace as a male domain, and home and family as a female one. Popular culture celebrated women's roles as wives, mothers, and managers of the household. More middle-class families began to employ domestic servants drawn from the burgeoning populations of immigrants and racial minorities. The early nineteenth-century upsurge in evangelical Christianity and the growing populations of immigrant poor led to widespread charitable activities in the urban slums, many of which had a strong moralistic and missionary bent.

Working class and poor city residents did not have the luxury of separate domestic and productive spheres, and both men and women lived more of their lives in public. Working people of both genders participated in the manufacturing economy, both on the factory floor and by performing "piece-work" or "out-work" at home. Unionization was limited in the pre-1860 period, and most working people earned meager wages, had few benefits, and labored long hours. Unlike the irregular working rhythms of life on the farm or in the mercantile city, the workday now became standardized and regularized. The character of urban recreation and community activities changed as a result, with the coffeehouse culture, parades, and street celebrations of an earlier era giving way to after-work amusements, from theatre to baseball games, and to a more informal street culture in neighborhoods and public areas of the city.

The industrial metropolis of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries

As the size of America's industrial economy expanded in the second half of the nineteenth century, American cities grew along with it. Revolutions in transportation and communication spurred both industrialization and urbanization of unprecedented speed and scale. Across the continent, railroads fueled urban growth by the wealth they created and the networks of new towns and cities that grew up along the lines as the railroads pushed west. Within metropolitan regions, railroads and streetcar systems vastly expanded the size of cities and suburbs. Occurring at the same time as a mass influx of new migrants and immigrants to cities and as a growing economic polarization between rich and poor, rail-driven suburbanization furthered the physical distance between people of different classes, races, and ethnicities.

The arrival of the railroad was an economic boon to existing cities and towns along the main lines, and railroad companies further boosted urbanization – particularly in the far West – by founding new towns to promote settlement and trade. As had occurred throughout American history, towns and cities were the spearheads of frontier settlement and served critical economic and cultural functions throughout the western expansion of the nineteenth century.

By connecting manufacturing cities with a vast rural hinterland abundant in timber, ore, grain, and cattle, the railroad enabled the rapid rise of Western metropolises and fueled the growth of new industries. Chicago, strategically located between the grazing lands of the Great Plains and one day away by rail from the cities of the East, became a major meatpacking center after the advent of refrigerated rail cars. Farther west, cities like Denver, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Seattle grew in size and influence through wealth created by mining, timber, and oil; rail connected these and other major cities and further encouraged the migration of people and manufacturing.

Railroad and streetcar suburbs

In and around the cities, rail networks had become vital channels for suburban expansion and spurred the private development of carefully planned elite residential areas. The first planned community in the United States was Llewellyn Park, established in 1857 in the New Jersey suburbs of New York, which featured extensive landscaping and curvilinear roadways that presented a dramatic contrast to the gridiron pattern of city streets. Inspired by the Romantic movement and playing upon deep-rooted cultural ideas about the desirability of a certain kind of country life, many planned suburbs with similar landscape and architectural features appeared in the decades following, including Bronxville, New York; Riverside, Illinois; and Brookline, Massachusetts. Despite their reputation as havens for the rich, these suburbs also had working-class populations who worked as domestic servants or in other service jobs.

By the 1880s, electric streetcars had replaced horse-driven omnibuses in most major American cities. The urban grid extended further outward along the car lines

as private developers built new residential neighborhoods for the white-collar workers of the expanding professional middle class. The streetcar suburbs of the late nineteenth century encouraged the decentralization of the urban middle class and increased the separation of the feminine world of home and the masculine world of work..

Mass immigration

The decentralization of the urban middle class occurred in a context of extraordinary population growth in American cities. Much of this growth was the result of foreign immigration, which transformed the ethnic and religious makeup of the United States and made it a majority-urban nation. Drawn by the promise of factory jobs in a rapidly expanding American industrial complex, and pushed out by economic hardship and political turmoil at home, 28 million immigrants arrived on American shores between 1860 and 1920. Unlike earlier waves of immigration, many were from Southern and Eastern Europe and were Catholic and Jewish rather than Protestant. Cities were where immigrants first arrived, and often where they stayed. By 1910, New York City was 40% foreign-born (nearly 2 million immigrants).

Because of poverty and ethnic and family ties, foreign immigrants clustered together in crowded urban neighborhoods. These ethnic enclaves were home to a rich assortment of vibrant neighborhood institutions, from churches and schools to foreign-language newspapers and community banks. Earning meager wages and forced to live in substandard housing, immigrants relied on family members and a neighborhood-based network of fellow countrymen for economic and social support in their new country. Native-born Americans – including those from “old-stock” immigrant groups like the Irish and Germans – viewed new arrivals as economic competitors and possible political subversives. Growing numbers of politically militant socialists and anarchists among the new immigrant communities worried the middle-class urban establishment. High-profile acts of violence by individuals from immigrant backgrounds, like the 1901 assassination of President William McKinley by Leon Czolgosz, validated these fears in some Americans’ minds. Yet the growing numbers of immigrants became increasingly powerful voting blocs in American cities, and they were critical to the sustained electoral success of urban political machines like New York’s Tammany Hall.

City life and architecture

The industrial city became home to a variety of new kinds of entertainment and means of communication. Professional sports like baseball became hugely popular urban pastimes, catering to cities’ huge populations of working men with affordable tickets and game times that accommodated the rhythms of the factory and the office. Live entertainment like vaudeville and musical theatre drew large crowds of both genders and most classes, and touring companies brought a shared culture to large cities as they moved the same shows from place to place. Amusement parks like

New York's Coney Island provided cheap and novel entertainment on their hours off. Department stores offered urbanites an extraordinary range of goods under one roof, and they became a favored destination for middle-class housewives as well as for working single women with their own money to spend. Newspapers and magazines proliferated in number and in size of circulation. "Muckraking" journalists used the pages of these publications to expose the excesses of corporate capitalism and the economic inequities of the industrial city.

The city was moving up as well as out. Technological advances in steel-frame construction allowed for multi-story buildings. The introduction of elevators allowed these structures to soar even higher. Chicago was home to many of these first skyscrapers, with architects like Louis Sullivan and Daniel Burnham defining a particular type of building design that became known as the Chicago School. By the end of the nineteenth century, the large American metropolis had taken on a form to which it would adhere for the next half century: a dense downtown of high-rise office buildings, transit and transportation networks radiating out from the central core, working-class and poor neighborhoods ringing downtown, and wealthier residential areas on the metropolitan periphery.

Progressive reform

The vast increase in the size and diversity of urban populations during the industrial age spurred a significant uptick in urban reform initiatives designed to make cities and their poorer residents more healthful, efficient, and orderly. As in an earlier era, reformers were chiefly native-born, middle class Protestants. However, while churches or charities were the main vehicles of reform during the antebellum period, local governments or professionalized social service institutions tended to take the lead in reform by the late nineteenth century. Women remained active participants in social reform. Female-led institutions like the settlement house movement gave some educated, middle-class women opportunities for public engagement and provided an entry point for careers in politics, government, and academia. New immigrants were major targets of reformers, who hoped to improve the material conditions of the foreign-born, but also to "Americanize" them.

In politics, reformers pushed for a permanent and nonpartisan professional class of civil servants to replace patronage-driven cronyism. The era also saw the emergence of professional city planning and civil engineering, as urban leaders embarked on ambitious infrastructure and urban planning projects to bring order and efficiency to chaotic urban spaces. City governments began to finance and provide an increasing number of services, from water and sewer systems to road and bridge systems, civic centers, and parks. The 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago had a seminal influence on these planning schemes. The fair's centerpiece was a "White City" of neoclassical buildings and grand public promenades, inspiring a City Beautiful planning movement that would create similar spaces in Washington DC, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Los Angeles, among others.

The early automobile age

By 1920, half of the United States' population lived in urbanized areas. Ambitious city planning schemes, robust infrastructure development, a proliferation of entertainment and cultural attractions, and booming new urban industries made the 1920s the apex of the American urban age. Yet the widespread adaptation of the automobile during the decade propelled a decentralization of urban people, industries, and culture that presaged the mass suburbanization to come. In 1900, there were approximately 8,000 cars on American roads. By 1920, this had grown to 6 million. By 1929, it was 29 million.

Immigration restriction and black migration

An isolationist mood after the end of World War I and continued fears about socialist and communist policies among immigrant groups contributed to severe restrictions on immigration in the early 1920s. Ethnic enclaves in cities continued to thrive, but the slowdown in the number of foreign arrivals helped set in motion a gradual weakening of older ethnic and linguistic ties and a geographic dispersal of European immigrant families. Widespread unionization created new connections and identities among and across immigrant groups, and contributed to their assimilation into a mainstream "white" American culture over time.

The demographics of American cities changed as the result of the mass migration of African Americans from the rural South during and after World War I. Known as the First Great Migration, this movement gave cities like New York, Philadelphia and Chicago significant African American populations, spurring the establishment of a robust set of urban black community institutions, religious bodies, and political groups. Increased Mexican immigration to California and the Southwest after the Mexican Revolution of 1910 and through the interwar period further changed the racial and ethnic mix of cities like Los Angeles.

Urban culture and industry

Cities remained the centers of entertainment and culture, including the newest form of mass entertainment, Hollywood movies. Movie attendance soared from 50 million a week in 1920 to 90 million in 1927. By the end of the decade, about 75% of the American population was attending movies every week. The expansion of the film industry helped propel the expansive growth of Los Angeles, a metropolis already made rich on oil and railroads. Joining Los Angeles as another hub of industrial energy and wealth was Detroit, home to the nation's major automakers.

Known as "the industry of industries" because of its size and economic impact, Detroit's auto manufacturing economy shaped a city that was a dynamic urban model of modernity and automobility. Assembly-line manufacturing required factories with a great deal of floor space, leading companies like Ford and General

Motors to set up large plants in outer areas of the city or its suburbs. With their smokestacks and working-class housing, the industrial suburbs created around Detroit were a departure from the wealthy residential suburbs of an earlier era.

Like Los Angeles and other metropolises that grew large during the streetcar age, Detroit was a horizontal city that radiated out in a low-density fashion along major trolley lines. As car ownership increased, Detroit became one of the first to adapt and expand this horizontal structure to car traffic, featuring long, straight avenues that allowed workers to easily commute between home and factory. A low-density landscape allowed cities like Los Angeles and Detroit to provide workers of nearly income with the opportunity to live in detached, single-family homes.

Automotive suburbs

The interwar period also saw the creation of a number of suburban planned communities designed to incorporate and adapt to the automobile. The Country Club District of Kansas City and Palos Verdes Estates south of Los Angeles were two notable examples of high-end suburbs designed for the car. In addition to the usual array of suburban residential amenities, these developments featured shopping plazas whose convenience and abundant parking made them precursors to the postwar shopping mall.

Other suburban developers put forth suburban models that attempted to minimize the visibility of the car. Inspired by British planner Ebenezer Howard's idea of a Garden City that blended industrial and residential development in a landscaped setting of curved roads and greenbelts, influential planners like Lewis Mumford and Clarence Stein encouraged the development of towns like Radburn, New Jersey, which placed garages in the backs of houses and shared green space in the front. The federally-sponsored Greenbelt Towns of the New Deal were similarly inspired by Garden City ideas. While early garden cities featured homes for people of different incomes and aimed for multiple land uses, over time these design principles encouraged exclusively residential and demographically homogeneous suburban settings.

The Great Depression and New Deal

The Great Depression was economically devastating for American cities. At its height, Chicago and Detroit had close to 50% unemployment; in Toledo, it hit 80%. Vast shantytowns of displaced workers – labeled “Hooverilles” – sprang up in the shadows of American downtowns. Homeownership plummeted and foreclosures rose, slowing the suburban housing boom and resulting in little new construction in or around cities between 1929 and 1945.

The mobilization of public resources in response to this economic crisis spurred a series of infrastructure projects in cities, suburbs, and adjacent rural areas that created a foundation for vast suburban expansion after World War II. New Deal

programs such as the Civil Works Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corps built roads, bridges, and parks in cities and around the urban periphery. In New York City, federal funds fueled the already expansive public works projects spearheaded by New York State official Robert Moses. The limited-access parkways Moses built on Long Island and along the Hudson River Valley became models for later freeway development and encouraged the decentralization of people and industry.

Federal infrastructure investment far beyond the cities in the 1930s provided another critical ingredient for the mass suburban growth of later decades. Hydroelectric dams like the Hoover Dam (completed 1935) provided the water and electricity that would allow Southwest cities like Las Vegas and Phoenix to grow, and fueled the growth of urban and suburban Southern California. The Rural Electrification Administration and Tennessee Valley Authority performed a similar function in the South, providing electricity and capital to rural areas that in the postwar period would morph into suburbs and exurbs.

The New Deal also generated the first interventions by the U.S. government into the housing market. Seeking to spur mortgage lending and increase homeownership, the federal Home Owners Loan Corporation and the Federal Housing Administration provided loan guarantees. Yet federal agencies also contributed to the widespread adaptation by banks of a rating system that graded neighborhoods according to their racial and ethnic composition. This contributed to a scarcity of mortgage and other investment capital in minority neighborhoods, whose designation as “red” under these classifications led to the practice being called “redlining.” The federal government also established its first public housing programs during this period. The earliest projects were low-rise, garden apartments targeted to working-class families.

The era of mass suburbanization and the rise of the Sunbelt

Visions of a suburbanized, car-dependent future began to emerge before the beginning of World War II. The 1939 New York World’s Fair featured a General Motors-sponsored exhibition called “Futurama” that presented a model metropolis of the future. The city center featured high-rise superblock buildings; ten-lane highways led to verdant suburbs. This was the modern city rebuilt and remade to accommodate the car. After the end of World War II, this landscape of highways, rebuilt urban neighborhoods, and residential subdivisions became ubiquitous throughout metropolitan America.

Wartime industry and Sunbelt migration

The regional economic and demographic shifts set in motion by World War II assisted in this transformation. White workers left the North and Midwest for war work in the factories and shipyards of the Pacific West. Both whites and blacks left the rural South to escape economic depression and racial discrimination. This

period marked the beginning of the Second Great Migration of African Americans to the urban North and West; black populations of large cities continued to grow well into the civil rights era. The balance of people and jobs in the United States moved from what became known as the “Rustbelt” of the industrial Northeast and Midwest to the “Sunbelt” of the South and West. Between 1940 and 1950 alone, the population of the 17 Western states grew by 8 million people, or 31%. Much of this growth was urban.

The new urban geography of World War II solidified during the Cold War, when hubs of war industry continued to be major sites of defense-related research, development, and manufacturing. The San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles, and Seattle were among those metropolitan areas that benefited the most from heavy defense investment. The Cold War also triggered new federal investment in university-based research, which spurred development of high-tech industry clusters near Boston (home to Harvard and MIT) and San Francisco (Stanford and Berkeley).

Mass suburbs

While American cities had long exhibited a pattern of decentralization and suburbanization, several factors present in the postwar period triggered suburbanization of an unprecedented scale and scope. One critical factor was technology. Wartime production had given American industry the capabilities to mass-produce construction materials and build homes cheaply and quickly. The widespread introduction of air conditioning made regions of the South and Southwest appealing as year-round destinations for both residents and industry.

Another important factor was demographics. America was a nation of young families. Two-thirds of Americans were married in 1950. Between 1946 and 1964, 79 million babies were born. Immigration restrictions had resulted in a nation that was more culturally homogenous; the shared experience of wartime combat and life on the homefront further propelled the development of a common American identity.

Public policy was a third, and most decisive, factor. The Serviceman’s Readjustment Act of 1944 (also known as the GI Bill) provided 8 million returning veterans with college tuition and home mortgage subsidies. The numbers of Americans with college degrees skyrocketed in this period, creating an educated class of workers with the credentials to perform the white-collar service jobs of the emerging postindustrial economy. Mortgage subsidies, combined with the mass development of inexpensive suburban housing, put the purchase of a single-family home within the reach of millions of returning veterans and their families.

The vast majority of these homes were in suburbs, developed by mass homebuilders like Arthur Levitt, whose Levittowns in New York and New Jersey epitomized the new suburbia. These developments also were almost entirely white. Levitt, like

many other developers, went to some lengths to keep minority homebuyers out of his subdivisions. Black families who attempted to buy homes in white neighborhoods in city and suburb often were met with violent reprisals. In a nation where homebuying was closely connected with economic opportunity and political identity, white homeowners fiercely fought the arrival of neighbors whose presence might lower property values.

Slum clearance, public housing, and highways

The housing market got a further federal boost with the Housing Act of 1949, which expanded loan guarantees for housing as well as provided municipalities with millions of dollars in matching funds to clear slum neighborhoods and build public housing. Cities throughout the nation used these monies to clear “blighted” and “obsolete” neighborhoods of older, mixed-use structures, replacing them with large, modernist developments. While intended to improve the availability and quality of low-income housing, these projects often demolished poorer areas without providing adequate replacement housing in a timely manner. As many of the areas targeted for urban renewal were home to racial minorities, this urban renewal program came to be labeled “Negro removal” by some of its critics.

Public housing of the postwar period proved to be a similarly inadequate response to urban poverty. While there are public housing success stories from this period, large high-rise housing projects quickly became bleak and crime-ridden symbols of failed federal policy. As early as the 1960s, these projects began to be torn down and replaced with lower-rise, mixed-income housing developments.

Interstate highways were another federal policy that had a profound effect on cities and suburbs. By the time Dwight Eisenhower signed the interstate highway act into law in 1956, many major cities had plans underway for elaborate networks of limited-access highways and arterial roadways. Federal highway policy created a 90% match to local funds for roadway construction, spurring these projects forward. While many urban freeways were built, others were blocked by strong and sustained resistance by residents of neighborhoods in their path. These “freeway revolts” continued through the 1960s and early 1970s, by which time expansive freeway networks had fallen out of favor with urban leaders and planners.

White flight and urban “crisis”

Schooling was another decisive factor in the reshuffling of people around the American metropolis. Throughout the country, school integration prompted many white parents to move their children into private academies or leave the cities for all-white suburban school districts. By the late 1960s, many districts had resorted to court-ordered busing programs to ensure racial balance in urban schools, prompting further flight of white middle-class families to suburban districts.

As people and jobs moved out of cities, new forms of community emerged in suburban areas. Shopping malls functioned not only as centers of consumption but as community gathering places, hosting celebrations and events that in an earlier era might have taken place in a town hall or public park. Churchgoing increased in this suburban age, and new suburbs seeded the growth of evangelical Protestant megachurches, particularly in the South and Sunbelt. A suburban generation of stay-at-home housewives led to a dynamic set of formal and informal women's associations in the suburbs, and women were at the forefront of grassroots political movements on both the right and the left ends of the political spectrum.

Poor minorities were left behind in this rising tide of metropolitan affluence, and continued discrimination and lack of economic opportunity led to explosions of violence in American cities over several years in the late 1960s. Beginning with several days of civil disorders in Los Angeles' Watts neighborhood in 1965, riots in subsequent summers in cities like Detroit, Newark, and Washington DC cost hundreds of lives and millions of dollars. It took decades for the neighborhoods where they occurred to be fully rebuilt, and the broadcast of these events on network television created indelible images of urban crime in the minds of white suburbanites.

The 1970s continued this period of urban crisis. Deindustrialization, high energy prices, the rise of foreign competition, and cuts in defense spending ended a quarter-century of American economic expansion. Shrinking tax rolls and rising social service costs had devastating effects on municipal governments. New York City nearly declared bankruptcy in 1975. Crime rates in major cities escalated, aided by a television news industry that gave exhaustive coverage to violent crimes, particularly those committed by minorities. Municipalities of all sizes found their incomes shrinking as the result of voter revolts against high property taxes, starting with California's Proposition 13 in 1978. However, this period also saw the emergence of fresh urban leadership, with blacks and Hispanics occupying mayor's offices and city council chambers.

The Information-Age metropolis

The last decades of the twentieth century witnessed an economic and cultural resurgence of many central cities, and an even further expansion of its suburbs. The United States continued to become more intensely metropolitan and, after 1980, its population was majority suburban. Yet these suburbs were highly diverse, and older patterns of wealth and poverty were beginning to change. As development took on even lower densities spread out further into the countryside, the distinctions between city, suburb, and rural areas became difficult to distinguish.

The decline of American manufacturing and the rise of a postindustrial economy of "knowledge work" and low-skilled service jobs prompted a new metropolitan geography of work and leisure. Suburbs became dotted with office parks and research parks; major clusters of technology and telecommunications industries

were chiefly suburban in location. In retailing, “big box” retailers joined shopping malls on the metropolitan outskirts. An imbalance between where jobs were located and where people could afford to buy or rent homes led to long commutes for many workers. Both commute distance and traffic congestion increased measurably in many American cities during the 1990s.

Comeback cities

Economic and demographic change helped central cities bounce back from the crises of the 1970s and 1980s. Historic preservation and restoration of older urban neighborhoods in cities like New York, Washington DC, and Chicago turned them into desirable residential and commercial districts, but it also drove up real estate prices and displaced poor and minority residents. Urban revival and gentrification made central cities into tourist destinations and entertainment hubs for suburban residents, and popular culture again began to portray cities like New York as exciting playgrounds for the young and affluent. Yet some of the great cities of the industrial age continued to struggle with chronic poverty and unemployment. Detroit became the most extreme example of a city in decline, and by the early twenty-first century some of its abandoned urban spaces were being converted into parks and farmland.

Immigration once again changed the character of the American metropolis. The lifting of restrictive quotas in 1965 allowed for giant new flows of immigrants, particularly from Asia and Latin America. These groups built dynamic ethnic enclaves in older urban neighborhoods, driving economic revitalization and population growth. Yet as many if not more of these immigrants chose to settle in suburbs, profoundly changing suburban demographics and culture from Seattle and Los Angeles to Detroit and Atlanta.

Immigration, technology, culture, and trade now link American cities and suburbs to one another and to cities around the world. While the American metropolis has been a product of global flows and systems throughout its history, its fortunes and its futures are connected to those of the rest of the world like never before.

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Margaret O'Mara