

Cities

by Roger Barr



LUCENT

Overview Series

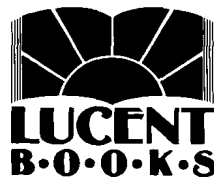
Cities

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Introduction

IN HER BOOK *Cities and the Wealth of Nations*, author and economist Jane Jacobs declared that cities were “the root of all economic expansion.” Economic growth, Jacobs determined, came from cities replacing products that were imported from other cities with products manufactured within the city. For this single reason Jacobs believed that cities were the engines of the economy.

But cities are more than the economic engines that churn out products from factories. They are the homes of millions of people. Social philosopher Lewis Mumford observed in *The Culture of Cities* that “the city is the form and symbol of an integrated social relationship: it is the seat of the temple, the market, the hall of justice, the academy of learning. Here in the city the goods of civilization are multiplied and manifolded; here is where human experience is transformed into viable signs, symbols, patterns of conduct, systems of existence.” Along “with language itself,” Mumford declared, the city “remains man’s greatest work of art.”

Since the first Europeans established settlements in what was then called the New World, cities have helped shape and build America. Today, however, America’s cities are suffering,

(Opposite page) Beneath the glistening New York City skyline lies the promise and failure that mark so many of America’s cities.

the victims of long-range economic and social trends. Since World War II the majority of America's middle-class families and a majority of the nation's new jobs have left cities in favor of life in the suburbs. Stripped of their wealth, America's cities have become what one writer referred to as "warehouses for the poor."

From New York to Los Angeles, cities are falling apart physically and psychologically. For years large and small businesses have been moving out of the old downtowns, leaving behind vacant office buildings and empty stores. City governments are running out of money to fix streets, maintain parks, or provide fire, police, and other services.

The residential areas of America's cities struggle with housing shortages, higher taxes, poverty, rising crime rates, and cutbacks in city services. Many American cities have residential neighborhoods that have fallen into disorder. In these neighborhoods the people who can afford to leave have already left. Those who have remained often live in substandard housing because nothing else is available, or that is all they can afford. They travel the streets with the

Americans have been moving from cities to suburbs since World War II. Many people view a house in the suburbs as a sign of success.





The residential areas of America's cities have fallen into disrepair, with crime and squalor becoming common. One of the causes of such urban blight is the flight of businesses to suburbs. Here an unemployed worker walks outside a closed paper mill in Fitchburg, Massachusetts.

fear that they could be robbed or mugged. The unemployed sit on stoops and park benches, unable to find adequate employment. Drug dealers openly operate drug markets in abandoned buildings or right on the street. Graffiti scrawled on overpasses, walls, and boarded-up storefronts convey messages of anger, frustration, and desperation. In the worst neighborhoods people no longer call the police with problems because they know the police will not come. In these neighborhoods, gangs, not police, often rule the streets.

Even with all of these problems, most people recognize that cities remain important to America's future. State and local governments, private businesses, and private citizens are finding ways to restore America's cities. They are finding new ways to redevelop downtowns and revitalize blighted neighborhoods. Even more importantly, people are redefining the role of America's cities with an eye toward the future. Despite their problems, cities will remain vital and help shape America in the future.



The Evolution of Cities

IN 1916 THE POET Carl Sandburg described the city of Chicago in the opening poem of his book *Chicago Poems*.

Hog Butcher for the World,
Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,
Player with Railroads and the Nation's
Freight Handler;
Stormy, husky, brawling,
City of the Big Shoulders . . .

In these few words Sandburg captured perfectly the industry and vitality of Chicago during the early years of the twentieth century. Other American cities of the time could have been described in a similar way.

If Sandburg were to visit Chicago today, however, he would have trouble recognizing the city he knew. Much of the nation's freight now bypasses Chicago, traveling by air and trucks instead of by rail. The stockyards and packing plants that made Chicago a world leader in meat processing have all but disappeared, and many of the toolmakers have gone out of business or have left the city to manufacture their products elsewhere. Sandburg's "City

(Opposite page) An early-twentieth-century photo of the city of Chicago. Once a leader in many industries, Chicago today suffers from the same urban blight that plagues many cities.

of the Big Shoulders,” the vibrant center of commerce and industry, has changed.

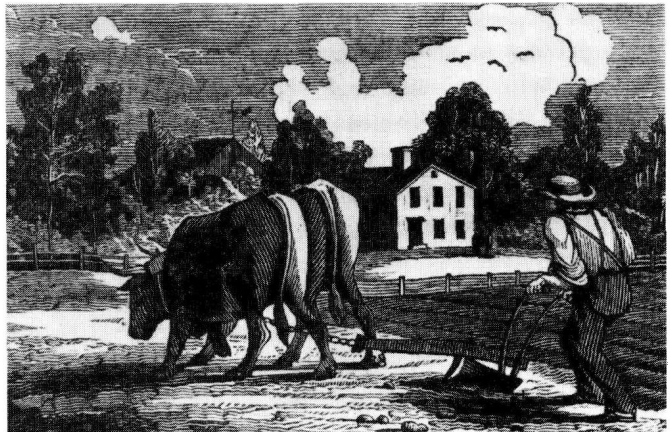
Like Chicago, all American cities have been continuously evolving. Their populations have risen and fallen. Businesses have come and gone. Living standards have dipped and climbed. Worn buildings, streets, and bridges have needed repairs. New houses have grown old and required renovation or replacement.

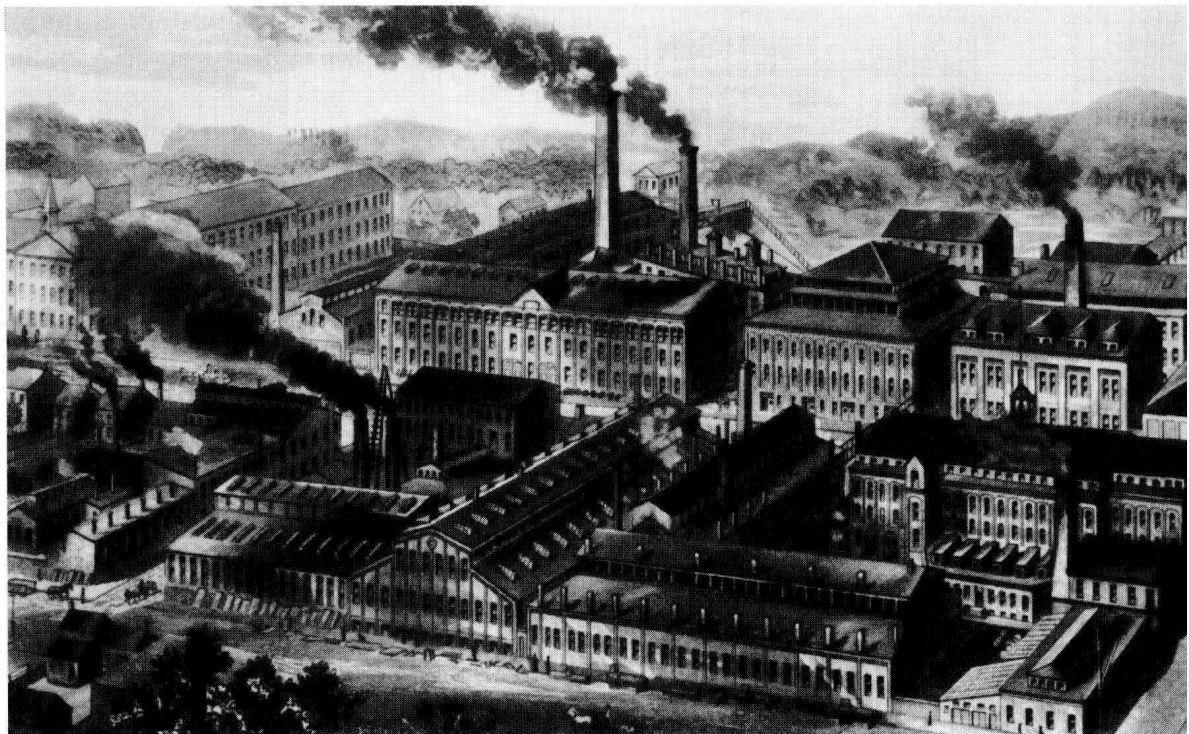
This ongoing evolution of cities has been influenced by many factors. Major shifts in population, changing economic patterns, rising technology, and advancements in transportation have shaped the growth and development of America’s cities.

The rise of the city

The first Europeans who settled in America in the 1600s began to carve cities out of the wilderness. These early cities were primarily ports that imported goods from England and shipped goods from America back across the Atlantic. Colonial Philadelphia, Boston, and New York were important port cities that carried on much of the nation’s trading. Although these and other cities helped the colonies to develop,

America began as a rural nation and remained one until as late as 1850, when 85 percent of America’s people made their living from the soil.





America was still primarily rural. Most of the colonists lived on farms.

Even after the colonies won their independence from Great Britain in 1783, the new United States of America remained a rural nation. Historians estimate that as late as 1850, 85 percent of the nation's population still lived in rural areas and made their living as farmers.

If the United States was a rural nation, it was also a nation of craftspeople. Most of the clothing, furniture, household items, and other goods produced in the nation were made by hand at home or in small factories. During the nineteenth century, however, advancements in manufacturing technology allowed goods to be produced in large numbers under a single roof. As mass production replaced hand craftsmanship, small factories evolved into larger factories.

The Rogers Locomotive Works factory in Paterson, New Jersey, in the 1880s. Similar factories drew many people away from the farm, as they hoped to escape the backbreaking labor necessary for success.

Factories were usually located near major transportation routes, first along rivers or near natural harbors along the coasts. Such locations allowed products to be dispersed more easily throughout the nation. As railways began to criss-cross the nation after the Civil War, replacing rivers as the main mode of transportation, railroad intersections also attracted factories.

At the same time that technology was creating jobs in factories, it was reducing the number of jobs on the farm. Heavy manual labor increasingly was replaced by machine labor. Freed from backbreaking farm labor and lured by the prospect of factory jobs, the nation's population began moving toward the manufacturing centers.

Across the nation the population of America's cities swelled. People born in the city were joined by people migrating from rural areas and immi-

This view of Market Street in Chicago in the early 1900s shows how densely packed with people and industry the city had become.



grants from other countries. By the early 1900s America was no longer a rural nation. According to statistics compiled by the U.S. Department of Commerce's Bureau of the Census, only 34 percent of the nation's population still lived on farms in 1910. Thousands of little villages and towns were withering away, rendered obsolete by the changing economic and social trends. Many of these little settlements gradually disappeared from the landscape.

An industrialized nation

America had become a nation of industrial cities. With their busy factories, cities had become the economic engines that powered the nation's economy. Factories and businesses in the cities had become the source of jobs for the majority of the nation's workers. From coast to coast millions of men and women traveled downtown to work each day. Like magnets, cities continued to attract people from farms and small towns and from other countries. Between 1910 and 1950 many American cities doubled, even tripled, in population.

By 1950 the era of the industrialized, densely populated American city had reached a dizzying peak. In the century between 1850 and 1950, cities had helped transform America from a struggling, rural nation into a prosperous, industrialized nation. Flush with wealth, cities had become the centers of American culture, housing the nation's great museums, libraries, and theaters. People strolled through green parks and admired monuments that honored the nation's history. From New York City's skyscrapers to the lush, green gardens of San Francisco's Golden Gate Park, America's cities represented the collective vision of a nation.

The middle of the twentieth century, however, proved to be the high point for the industrialized city. Over the next forty years changing economic

A photo shows a bustling Los Angeles in the early twentieth century. As cities became more populous, problems such as crime and poverty also grew.



and social conditions would alter many cities across the nation. Millions of Americans would move out of the central city. The places where many Americans shopped and worked also would leave the city. The importance of cities as manufacturing centers would decline.

Moving to the suburbs

As cities grew, they became crowded, noisy, dirty, and often unsafe. The same quest that had encouraged large masses of people to migrate to the city—the desire for a better life—made many people become disenchanted with life in the city. People longed for the open space, the safety, and the quiet of less populated areas. Others, eager to own their own homes, found city housing unavailable, inadequate, or too expensive. Many followed their dreams to the suburbs, growing communities of single-family homes with garages and backyards. The suburbs grew on the outskirts of the central city but were still close enough to make traveling to a job in the city practical.

The growth of suburbs accelerated dramatically after World War II when inexpensive