

Robert M. Fogelson

D O W N T O W N

Its Rise and Fall, 1880-1950



To Donald and Dorothy Gonson

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*Frontispiece: Lower Manhattan from New York harbor
(King's Views of New York, Boston, 1915)*

torians but also to the few Americans who remember when downtown was a vital part of their lives (when it was, as we used to say, “the city”) and the many Americans who, in the words of one midwesterner, “don’t remember when, because for them, there never was a when.”⁸

I The Business District:

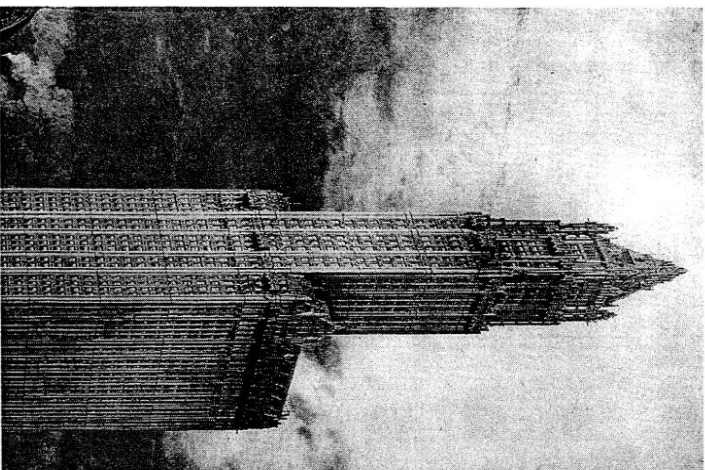
Downtown in the

Late Nineteenth Century

Late in 1919 A. G. Gardiner, an English journalist and former editor of the *London Daily News*, made his first trip to the United States. As his ship steamed into New York harbor, he saw through the late afternoon mist what looked like “the serrated mass of a distant range of mountains, except that the sky-line is broken with a precision that suggests the work of man rather than the careless architecture of nature.” “Gradually, as you draw near,” he observed, “the mountain range takes definition.” It turns into “vast structures with innumerable windows,” taller by far than any buildings he had ever seen.

“It is,” Gardiner wrote, “down town,” the business district of America’s largest city. Here on “the tip of this tongue of rock that lies between the Hudson River and the East River” stands “the greatest group of buildings in the world”—crowned by the Woolworth Building, fifty-three stories of offices resembling “a great street, Piccadilly or the Strand, that has been miraculously turned skyward by some violent geological ‘fault.’” Here scurry the “hosts of busy people” who carry out “all the myriad functions of the great god Mammon.”¹ Here, said Gardiner, was the symbol of the American metropolis and the immense country that lay behind it.

By the time Gardiner first set eyes on “downtown,” the word was roughly one



hundred years old. But it meant something quite different in the early nineteenth century. For New Yorkers like Philip Hone, a prominent businessman, one-time mayor, and indefatigable diarist of the 1830s and 1840s, downtown had a geographical meaning. When Hone spoke of downtown, he meant the southern part of Manhattan Island—just as he meant the northern part when he spoke of uptown. Here he was following the customary usage according to which south meant down and north meant up. Thus when Hone walked south from his home on Great Jones Street, then at the northern edge of the built-up district, to City Hall, he went downtown—just as George Templeton Strong, another well-known New Yorker, went uptown when he walked from his father's house on Greenwich Street, near the southernmost point of Manhattan, to Grace Church, then under construction on what was at the time upper Broadway.² (A century and a half later Americans still speak of downstate when they refer to Illinois south of Chicago and upstate when they refer to New York State north of New York City.)

Already the nation's largest city in 1830, New York grew phenomenally over the next forty years. Its population soared from under 250,000 to nearly 1.5 million, and its economy expanded at a rate that amazed contemporaries. Together with the huge influx of immigrants, what a special New York State Senate commission called "the inexorable demands of business" transformed the structure of the city, turning lower Manhattan mainly into stores, offices, workshops, and warehouses and upper Manhattan largely into residences. As early as 1836 Hone, who then lived on lower Broadway, feared he would soon be forced to move uptown. "Almost everybody downtown is in the same predicament," he wrote, "for all the dwelling houses are to be converted into stores. We are tempted with prices so exorbitantly high that none can resist." Hone moved. So did Strong's father, whose family was no longer willing to remain on Greenwich Street once stores, saloons, and boarding houses opened up near their elegant home in the 1840s. By the 1850s the change was striking. Noting that "Calico is omnipotent," *Putnam's Monthly* remarked that the dry-goods trade has spread with "astonishing rapidity over the whole lower part of the city, prostrating and obliterating everything that is old and venerable, and leaving not a single landmark," not even the "dwelling houses of our ancestors." As Mr. Potiphar observed in a popular novel of the times, "When Pearl street [the center of the dry-goods trade] comes to Park Place [a fashion-

Previous page: The Woolworth Building, New York, ca. 1914 (King's Views of New York, Boston, 1915)

able residential neighborhood in lower Manhattan], Park Place must run for its life up to Thirtieth street."³

Although New Yorkers continued to speak of downtown and uptown when referring to the southern and northern sections of Manhattan, the words gradually took on a functional meaning that reflected the changing structure of the city. Strong, who had gone to work in his father's law firm on Wall Street in the 1840s, soon began to use "downtown" when he meant the business district and "uptown" when he meant the residential. And in the 1850s, *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* wrote of the "down-town men" who "slip uneasily through the brick and mortar labyrinths of Maiden-lane and of John-street," two of lower Manhattan's busy commercial streets. As men went downtown to work, women went downtown to shop (and also to pay bills, to deal with household matters, and, in some cases, to work). By the 1870s the functional meaning had largely superseded the geographical. As *Wood's Illustrated Hand-Book*, a guide written mainly for the British, explained, "The expressions 'down town' and 'up town' are employed to designate the business and social quarters of the city"—one devoted to "commerce, traffic, and law," the other to "private life." "If caprice takes you down town," George Makepeace Towle, U.S. consul at Bradford, informed his British readers, "you soon find yourself in the very whirl and maelstrom of commerce and trade. . . . As you proceed uptown, quiet and insouciant ease takes the place of the bustle and hurry of the down town quarters."⁴

During the mid and late nineteenth century the word "downtown" spread to many other cities, to large ones like Boston and small ones like Salem and Worcester. The word "uptown" also spread, though to far fewer cities. Outside New York both words lost their original meanings. Susan E. Parsons Brown Forbes, a Boston schoolteacher, wrote of going "down town" in the early 1860s, even though downtown Boston was north of her home on Waverly Place. After she and her husband moved to Springfield in 1866, she continued to make trips "down town," even though downtown Springfield was east of her new home on State Street. Much the same was true in Chicago, where a journalist writing just after the great fire of 1871 remarked, "As I passed up West Madison Street, I met scores of working girls on their way 'down town,' as usual, bearing their lunch-baskets as if nothing had happened." Yet the girls were walking east, not south. The words lost their original meanings because in very few cities was downtown south and uptown north as they were in New York. Downtown lay to the south in Detroit, but to the north in Cleveland, to the east in St. Louis, and to the west in Pittsburgh. In Boston, a resident pointed out in 1880, downtown was in the center of the city. Uptown was

north of downtown in Cincinnati, but south of downtown in New Orleans and San Francisco. In New York, a Philadelphia real estate journal wrote in 1886, "everybody down town must go up town; here everybody down town can scatter to the four points of the compass."⁵

By the end of the century, if not earlier, downtown was synonymous with the business district virtually everywhere in urban America. When the word first appeared in dictionaries in the early 1900s—it was not included in Webster's Dictionary in 1881 or in Worcester's Dictionary in 1886—that was how it was defined. "Uptown," which had appeared in Webster's as early as 1870 and in Worcester's ten years earlier, was defined as "the upper part of a town or city." But it was commonly understood to mean the residential section, especially the affluent residential section. And it had already acquired the connotations of wealth, elegance, sophistication, and social prominence that were still strong a century later. As well as a new word, "downtown" was, as Webster's noted, an American word. It was virtually unknown in England and other Western European countries. Well into the early twentieth century English travel writers thought it necessary to explain the meaning of "downtown" to their readers. And even today the English speak of the city center when they mean the urban core—just as the French use *le centre de ville*, the Spanish *el centro*, the Germans *das Zentrum*, and the Italians *il centro*. American reporters and public officials routinely refer to "downtown" in cities all over the world, but the word does not have much meaning outside the United States. For downtown was not only an American word, it was also a uniquely American place.⁶

As a place, downtown was hard to define. Legally, it did not exist. Unlike the city of which it was a part—indeed, unlike every parcel of real estate in the city—downtown had no formal boundaries, no precise lines to show where it began and where it ended. Nor did downtown exist politically. For governmental purposes, every American city was divided into wards. In some cities downtown lay in one ward, in most it spread over two or more. In none—not even in Chicago, where the business district and the first ward overlapped closely—did downtown and one or more wards have the same boundaries. And in some, like Detroit, where each ward ran in a narrow strip through the whole city, downtown and the wards were completely distinct. In virtually every city downtown had some sort of physical boundaries, usually a bay, a lake, a river, or, in a few cases, a combination of them. But nowhere did these boundaries define downtown with precision—except perhaps in Pittsburgh, where downtown was hemmed in by the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers

on the north, south, and west and by a steep hill known as the "Hump" on the east.⁷ And nowhere did these boundaries confine downtown to its original site.

Although hard to define, downtown was easy to locate. It was the destination of the street railways, which were still pulled by horses in the 1880s, the elevated railways, which ran above the streets of New York, and the local ferries, which carried millions a year in a handful of cities. Except where the steam railroads were barred from entering it, downtown was also the site of the railroad terminals. Downtown was the home of the tall office buildings, ten to fifteen stories high by 1890. These skyscrapers, as they came to be known, were more than just very tall; they were also very convenient. In buildings like Chicago's "Rookery"—"a little city in itself," one Chicago resident called it—a businessman could "find under one roof his customers, his bankers, his principals, his restauranter [*sic*], his barber and his bootblack." Downtown was also the site of Macy's, Wanamaker's, Marshall Field's, and other huge department stores. Another nineteenth-century innovation, which came after the railroad station but before the skyscraper, the department store was designed to be what H. Gordon Selfridge of Marshall Field's called the "downtown home" for its customers, mostly middle- and upper-middle-class women, for whom it provided such amenities as tearooms, writing tables, and even nurseries, where they could leave their children while shopping. As late as 1890 downtown was the only part of the city wired for electricity. At night, when darkness fell over the rest of the city, what a Houston journalist described as "a perfect burst of sunlight" lit up many of downtown's streets, shops, hotels, restaurants, and theaters. Brilliantly illuminated, downtown at night was "indescribably exhilarating," wrote an English visitor at the turn of the century.⁸

Although these buildings were very large, downtown itself was very small. According to Mayor Nathan Matthews, Jr., downtown Boston had only 217 acres, just over a third of a square mile, or less than 1 percent of the entire city. Without rushing, the Massachusetts Rapid Transit Commission noted, a man could make a circuit of downtown Boston, about a three-mile walk, in one hour. Downtown Pittsburgh was even smaller. In a city of 41 square miles, it covered less than a third of a square mile. According to estimates made in the early 1890s, downtown Chicago had one-half to three-quarters of a square mile, a tiny fraction of the midwestern capital's 169 square miles. Downtown New York was somewhat larger.⁹ To look at it another way, downtown Pittsburgh was only two and a half times as large as the Carnegie steel company's plant in nearby Homestead, the site of the infamous industrial dispute in

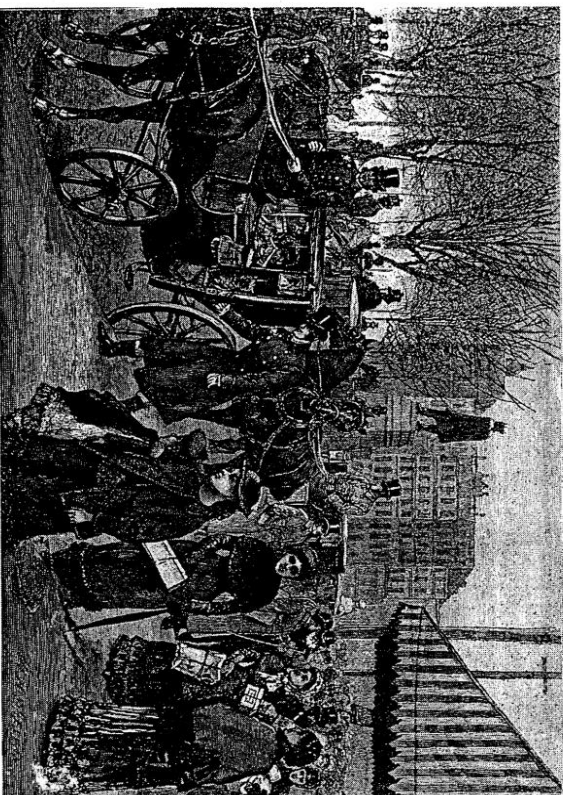
1892. Downtown Chicago was not much larger than the Union Stockyards, the slaughterhouses later immortalized by Upton Sinclair, and a little smaller than the Pullman Palace Car Company's works, located in George M. Pullman's model town a few miles south of the city. Downtown Boston was only slightly larger than Mount Auburn Cemetery, a rural cemetery on the Cambridge-Watertown line, where more than a few downtown businessmen and professionals were buried. Downtown New York was somewhat smaller than Central Park. And downtown San Francisco could have fit easily into the University of California's sprawling campus in nearby Berkeley.

In view of how small downtown was, it was striking how much business was done there. More trade was done in downtown Chicago than in the rest of the city combined, the *Chicago Real Estate and Building Journal* wrote in 1897, by which time the city had grown to 195 square miles. And trade was just part of the picture. Downtown Chicago also housed all of the city's financial institutions, most of its professional offices, and many of its light industries. "No place on earth [has] such a congregation of business interests," said Washington Hesting, a Chicago resident.¹⁰ Downtown Chicago was by no means unique. In every big city downtown was the business district. The retailers and wholesalers worked there, as did the bankers, financiers, insurance, utility, and corporate executives, the lawyers, realtors, architects, engineers, and accountants, the clerks, typists, salesmen, salesgirls, and messengers, and many craftsmen and laborers. The courts, government agencies, and post and telegraph offices were located downtown, as were most hotels, restaurants, places of popular amusement, and institutions of high culture. Downtown was the site of nearly all the city's businesses except heavy industries (like steel mills), noxious activities (like slaughterhouses) and a wide range of neighborhood trades and shops, many of which catered largely to one or another of America's many ethnic groups.

Also striking was how much business downtown was done by women. Long gone was the day when respectable women were loath to venture into the business district without an escort. Except for places like Nashville's Men's Quarter, Omaha's Douglas Street, and Seattle's Yessler Way, tiny enclaves of boarding houses, saloons, pawnbrokers, cigar stores, gambling dens, and Turkish baths, no part of downtown was off-limits to women in the late nineteenth century. By then women worked there, in offices, hotels, restaurants, shops, lofts, factories, and department stores; the largest of which had well over a thousand salesgirls. Women also went downtown to dine, to watch plays, and to listen to lectures. Above all, women did their shopping downtown. They flocked to the great department stores on Market Street

in Philadelphia, State Street in Chicago, Canal Street in New Orleans, and Broadway, the "Ladies Mile" of New York. Watching so many women shop on lower Fulton Street, commonly known as "the Broadway of Brooklyn," one journalist was led to imagine "what Eden might have been were Adam and his part in life dispensed with." Many women went from one store to another, sometimes buying, sometimes window-shopping. Others went to only one, shopping on one floor, lunching on another, relaxing on a third, finding everything they needed, one woman wrote, "without having been obliged to leave the store."¹¹

Downtown acted on men and women alike as a small but extremely powerful magnet. In New York, a London *Times* correspondent wrote in 1887, "half a million or more rush 'down-town' every morning, and back 'up-town' at night"; hundreds of thousands more crossed the East and Hudson rivers, commuting from Brooklyn and New Jersey. Hundreds of thousands made the daily trip downtown in Boston, Chicago, and other cities. Some workers left home as early as six, and some shoppers as late as eleven, but most people went downtown between seven and nine—and returned home between five and seven. Referring to what would later become known as rush hour in New



New York's "Ladies Mile," ca. 1885 (Henry Collins Brown, ed., *Valentine's Manual of Old New York*, New York, 1927)

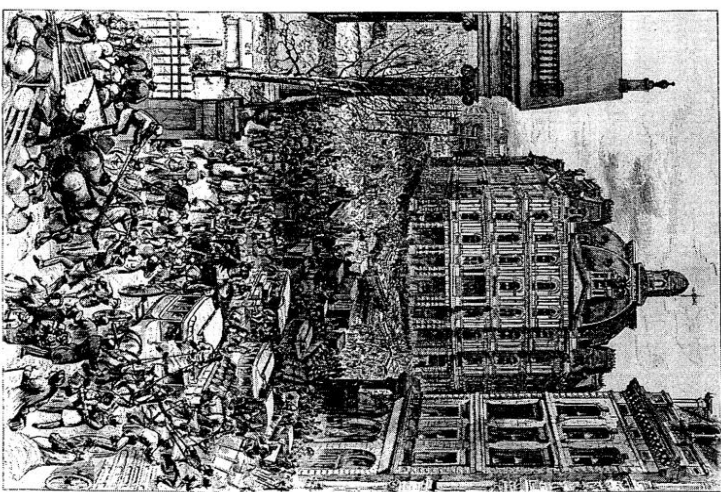
York, a French visitor wrote in the 1860s, "Neither the boulevards [in Paris], the Strand [in London], nor the Corso of Rome in carnival time can give an idea of this tumultuous movement." A few walked downtown. Some took ferries, in many of which, one Englishman noted, "everyone pushes up unceremoniously against his neighbour till there is scarcely anything of his neighbour left." Others journeyed by steam railroads, especially in Boston. And in New York many rode the els, which were so crowded, one writer remarked, that passengers "have literally to fight their way out of the cars [and] are often carried one or two stations beyond their destination." But most came by street railways—horse-drawn cars, cable cars, and, as a result of a technological breakthrough in the late 1880s, electric cars. The street railways carried twice as many passengers in the United States as in the rest of the world combined in 1890. And they transported far more people per capita even in ordinary American cities like Denver and Cleveland than in Berlin, Vienna, and other great European capitals.¹²

With so much business and so many people crammed into so little space, downtown was extremely congested. Besides street railways, all sorts of vehicles—some carrying people, others hauling freight—jammed the streets. On one day in the mid 1880s more than twenty-two thousand of these vehicles, or one every two seconds, passed the intersection of Broadway and Fulton Street between seven a.m. and six p.m. Even with the help of the police, traffic was regularly tied up on Broadway for ten minutes or more, one observer noted:

For those who are not obliged to cross the choked-up thoroughfare, the scene is full of a brief amusement—hack-drivers, truckmen, omnibus drivers, swearing vehemently at each other, or interchanging all kinds of "chaff," passengers indignantly railing at the delay, and police officers yelling and waving their clubs in their attempts to get the machinery of travel again moving smoothly. If, at such a time, a fire engine comes rattling up the street, post-haste for a scene of a fire, and attempts to enforce its right of way, the confusion becomes doubly confused, and the scene a veritable pandemonium.¹³

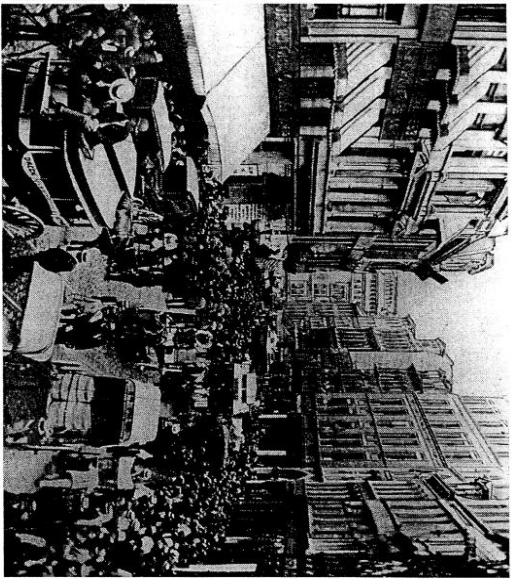
The sidewalks were as congested as the streets. As *American Architect and Building News* complained in the early 1890s, downtown Boston's sidewalks were "jammed to suffocation with pedestrians," many of whom were "elbowing each other off the sidewalk into the gutter." The sidewalks were so crowded in the retail center, the *Boston Herald* noted, that now and then the women shoppers "were obliged to hold their paper boxes above their heads to keep them from being crushed."

Downtown was very busy. Except for the shoppers, many of whom went



A traffic jam on Broadway, 1883 (Harper's Weekly, December 29, 1883)

about their business in a leisurely manner, everybody was in a great hurry, rushing to and fro, trying to get as much done as possible. Downtown Chicago, one of the busiest business districts, was "like three hundred acres of the New York Stock Exchange when trading is active," wrote one journalist. Downtown was also dark, particularly in winter. The tall buildings hid the sun, as did the smoke that spewed out of the coal furnaces. Also blocking the light was what an English visitor called a "perfect maze of telephone and telegraph wires." Integral features of the city's communications system, the wires crossed and retraced one another like "the meshes of a net." Downtown was very noisy, too. Drills whined, bells clanged, brakes screeched—a terrible din. "A few more years of the present indescribable uproar in Chicago," a St. Louis newspaper wrote, "and the people there will do nothing but make signs. As it is now, you see thousands of them walking along talking to themselves as if they had just escaped from an asylum for the insane. It is



Crowds in downtown Boston, 1889
(Courtesy of the Bostonian Society/
Old State House)

the only way they can think." It was noisy indoors as well, especially in restaurants at lunchtime. Of New York in the late 1860s, one writer observed: "From 12 o'clock to 3 of the afternoon, the down-town eating-places are in one continuous roar. The clatter of plates and knives, the slamming of doors, the talking and giving of orders by the customers, the bellowing of waiters, are mingled in a wild chaos. . . . Everybody talks at once; everybody orders at once; everybody eats at once; and everybody seems anxious to pay at once."⁴

Things slowed down at night, after the stores, offices, and other businesses closed. Downtown Philadelphia, a guidebook pointed out in the early 1870s, "though bustling and noisy enough during business hours, is a perfect desolation after six o'clock, and the thousands who throng there all day long are miles away, resting, most of them, in comfortable homes, with plenty of living-room about them." Outside its entertainment district, even downtown New York was still at night. The stillness, an observer remarked, was relieved only "by the blaze of lights in the newspaper establishments of Printing House Square and the Western Union Telegraph Building, by the occasional tramp of the policeman or reporter, or the rattling of the casual carriage over the stony pave." Downtown was quiet at night because few people lived there. Speaking of New York, one writer observed in the early 1880s, "In the strictly commercial quarters dwellings are very rare, and the population is made up almost entirely of janitors and their families, who occupy the upper floors of business houses and public buildings." Much the same was true in Cincinnati, where a visitor remarked in the late 1880s that virtually "everyone lived in the suburbs," and Chicago, where a guidebook noted in the early 1890s that residences were "entirely excluded from the business district." Only in small cities like Atlanta, Nashville, and Richmond did many people still live downtown in the 1890s.¹⁵

Once the most densely populated part of the city, downtown had been losing residents for a long time. The loss was most conspicuous in downtown

New York, part of which lay in ward 2, a small ward on the eastern side of lower Manhattan. Between 1850 and 1890, when New York grew from about 500,000 to more than 1.5 million people, the population of ward 2 dropped from more than 6,000 to fewer than 1,000. By 1890 ward 2 had only twelve persons per acre, far fewer than any other ward in Manhattan, far fewer even than ward 12, a sparsely settled district on the Upper West Side. Only ward 24, a huge and as yet largely undeveloped section of the North Bronx, had fewer persons per acre. The pattern was much the same in other cities. Although the population of Pittsburgh went up fivefold between 1850 and 1890, ward 3, one of four wards in downtown Pittsburgh, lost more than three-quarters of its residents. And though the population of Philadelphia nearly doubled between 1860 and 1890, the number who lived in ward 5, the core of downtown, decreased by close to one-third. As people moved out of downtown in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and other big cities, their homes were sometimes turned into boarding houses for single men. More often they were demolished to make room for stores and offices or converted into business quarters—the former kitchens "occupied by followers of Blackstone," wrote the *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* in the mid 1880s, and the former dining rooms "filled by insurance men, manufacturers and representatives of our industrial and commercial interests."¹⁶

As Philip Hone noted, some people moved out of downtown because they were offered "exorbitantly high" prices for their property. Commercial property commanded such "fabulous prices," wrote a New York real estate journal, that many homeowners looked forward to the time when their residences would be sought for business purposes. Other people moved away to escape what a Cambridge newspaper editor termed "the moral and physical miasma of the metropolis." If, as Mr. Potiphar believed, "One can't live among shops," how could one live among saloons, brothels and boarding houses, much less amid immigrants, criminals, and periodic riots? Far more appealing to the well-to-do was the new vision of what historian Robert Fishman calls the bourgeois utopia, a suburban setting at the heart of which was a single-family home on a tree-shaded lot—a setting that presumably offered the advantages of both urban and rural life (and the disadvantages of neither). To these suburban enclaves moved many downtown businessmen who no longer felt it necessary to live above their workplace or within a short walk of it. As the street railways opened up hitherto inaccessible areas, the less well-off followed. As an upper Manhattan realtor pointed out, "They find that up our way they can rent a comfortable cottage for less than they pay for a tenement or flat in the crowded down-town districts, while they get the advantage of pure

country air and a little plot of green around them." Often they had no choice. At the same time that many downtown residences were being demolished to make way not only for stores and offices, but also for streets, parks, and other public improvements, the high land values made it "absolutely impossible," said one Bostonian, "to build a tenement house in the heart of the city."¹⁷

The emergence of downtown was a vital part of the transformation of the American metropolis, a transformation that was over in most big cities by the late nineteenth century and would be over in most small ones by the early twentieth. At its core was a strict separation of businesses and residences, a high concentration of businesses downtown, and a wide dispersal of residences elsewhere. Commenting on the change, the *Philadelphia Illustrated* wrote in 1871 that in Philadelphia, "as in every great metropolis, wealth separates the home from the workshop, and the accumulated riches are displayed and spent far from the spot where they are laboriously garnered." After observing that Boston's business "is all done on the little peninsula on which the original town was located," the *Chicago Tribune* said in 1893, "Speaking broadly, Boston works on the peninsula and sleeps on the main land." Most big cities were, as the *Globe* wrote of Boston in 1873, "two cities—the city of warehouses and the city of dwellings." The city of warehouses was dense, public, competitive, noisy, and jarring; the city of dwellings was diffuse, private, supportive, quiet, and soothing—"a place of repose" from the world of business. This dichotomy was striking in Chicago, wrote a Scot who visited the city in the early 1890s. Of the city's many contrasts, none impressed him as much as "the difference between its business and its residential quarters. In the one—height, narrowness, noise, monotony, dirt, sordid squalor, pretentiousness; in the other—light, space, moderation, homelikeness."¹⁸

Downtown fascinated contemporaries for many reasons, not the least of which was that they saw it as uniquely American. Nothing like downtown existed in Europe, they believed—except for the City of London, the small historic center of the giant British metropolis. In European cities, wrote *American Architect and Building News* in 1877, businesses and residences were spread over "pretty much the whole territory," not confined to separate quarters, as in American cities. They were separated, if at all, not horizontally but vertically. Speaking of Paris, *American Architect* noted in 1878, "the whole city is in layers: a layer of shops and warehouses, a layer of lesser business and domestic apartments, layers of first-class, second-class, and third-class dwellings, and layers of cheap lodgings above." Paris, said Albert Shaw, an American who knew a good deal about Europe, was an extreme case of a city

without a well-defined business core. But European cities were much more like Paris than New York and Chicago, where, Shaw pointed out, "the whole tendency is to concentrate business in a compact area and then distribute residential districts over a pretty large territory."¹⁹ Nowhere in Europe, Americans held, were businesses as concentrated (and residences as dispersed) as they were in the United States. And nowhere, except in the City of London, were the business districts so thoroughly depopulated.

Americans attributed the rise of downtown to a number of things, the most important of which was what Frederick Law Olmsted, the nation's foremost landscape architect, called in 1871 "a strong and steadily increasing tendency" toward the separation of businesses and residences. As Olmsted saw it, this tendency was a recent development. For centuries European tradesmen had lived under the roof of their shop with their wives, children, servants, and apprentices. Even well into the late eighteenth century "the largest bankers and merchants of London, Amsterdam and Paris still maintained their domestic and commercial establishments under the same roof, and the Stewarts and Tiffanes [prominent nineteenth-century New York retailers] of the day had a door opening between their show rooms and their family dining-rooms." During the early and mid nineteenth century, however, many merchants and other tradesmen moved their homes away from their workplaces. And by the late nineteenth century the separation of businesses and residences was well along, especially in American cities. This development, Olmsted wrote in 1879, pulled "most large and thriving towns in two opposite directions—one to concentration for business and social purposes, the other to dispersion for domestic purposes. The first leads toward more compact and higher buildings in business quarters, the other toward broader, lower and more open buildings in residence quarters."²⁰

Olmsted traced the separation of businesses and residences to the "law of progress," "a fixed tendency among civilized men" to enhance the "cleanliness and purity" of domestic life, which could not be done amid factories, wharves, shops, and offices. Land-use segregation was as much a result of this law as sewers and waterworks. Richard M. Hurd, president of the Lawyers Mortgage Insurance Company and the nation's leading real estate economist, offered another explanation. Although he held that the separation of businesses and residences was the first step in the evolution of cities, he saw it as a "natural result" of the growing demand for commercial space, which drove residences out of the business district. Some Americans believed that the separation of businesses and residences reflected a peculiarly Anglo-American view of proper domestic life. As *American Architect and Building News* noted in

1878, "the visible juxtaposition of business and dwelling . . . offends the Anglo-Saxon sense of domesticity." Other Americans contended that the separation of businesses and residences illustrated the law of development as laid out by Herbert Spencer, a British philosopher who was very popular in the United States. According to this law, wrote New York's *Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* in 1881, all things, including cities, develop from the simple to the complex, the homogeneous to the heterogeneous.²¹ But no matter how Americans explained the separation of businesses and residences, most of them believed it was a natural development.

The compactness of downtown, Americans thought, was a manifestation of the nature of business and the preferences of businessmen. "Trade tends to centralization," Representative Henry W. Muzzey of Cambridge told the Massachusetts House of Representatives in the early 1880s. "Buyer and seller alike seek a common mart." *California Architect and Building News* made the point even more forcefully. "Every enterprising man seeks to get as near the center as possible," it wrote in the late 1880s, "and will put up with great limitations and inconvenience rather than leave the heart of trade and commerce." Centralization was commonplace in the first-class dry-goods trade, the *Chicago Tribune* noted. "Custom and fashion have very closely restricted the localities available for such purposes. Anybody who wants to succeed must get into one of those localities." Lawyers, said a Bostonian, also prefer to work in the same district, close to one another (and presumably close to their clients, other professionals, and the courts and city halls). Even manufacturers, the *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* wrote in 1888, "desire to be as near the centre of the city as possible, within easy reach of banks, post-offices, express offices and those [merchants] who deal in the material which they use."²²

Why did businesses, even businesses in competition with each other, tend to locate in the same small section of the city? Olmsted held that as commerce expanded businessmen had to take on more and more duties, many of which required meeting with other businessmen and professionals who worked out of separate offices. With the growing specialization of businesses and professions, a transaction that formerly took one meeting now took several. For businessmen, distance was time; and as time was money, centrality was vital. Hurd argued that retailers clustered in compact sections not because they did business with one another but because they expected that the other retailers would help them attract customers. Shoppers, they believed, came to the retail section because they were confident they could find all they wanted there. Shoppers who went to one store would probably go to others. Most Ameri-

cans, however, believed that the tendency of businesses to locate in the same small district did not need to be explained, that it was self-evident that centralization facilitated the transaction of business. As Craig McClure, a St. Louis architect, said in 1896, "The advantage of being able to do business with a dozen people in as many different lines without leaving your building or at most your block is too apparent to need argument."²³

The depopulation of downtown, Americans believed, was a function of the basic laws of economics. As Hurd explained, urban land went to "the highest bidder"—"the highest bidder being the one who can make the land earn the largest amount." And businesses, especially retail businesses, could generate far more income from a piece of real estate than could residences. How much more was indicated by the disparities in property values. In Chicago, for instance, first-class retail space on State Street was worth three thousand dollars a front foot in 1883, which was half again as much as office space on LaSalle Street, but five times as much as "aristocratic" residential property on Michigan Avenue and ten times as much as first-class residential property on Dearborn Street. As property went to "the highest bidder," it was converted from residential to commercial use, a process that Adna F. Weber, a prominent urban demographer at the turn of the century, called "city-building." In the early history of the city, Weber argued, the original settlement becomes the business district.

But if the city prospers, the time will come when this old center is more and more needed for strictly business purposes: houses disappear before the march of office-buildings, government buildings, banks, etc., until the only residents left are the janitors and portiers, the keepers of the great buildings. With continued growth, the business center extends itself and steadily pushes the dwellings toward the circumference, until at length the municipal limits are reached and passed.

This process, Weber wrote, was well along in New York and other big cities.²⁴ Residents were sometimes unwilling to make way for the expansion of business. Writing about New York's lower Fifth Avenue, which was in the path of the growing retail district, the *Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* observed in the late 1870s that it housed many old and wealthy citizens "who have stubbornly and resolutely determined not to be removed except by the undertaker." Although these people had "lifelong and priceless associations" with their homes, the journal predicted that sooner or later they would have to sell and that slowly but surely their dwellings would be converted into stores. Residents could not hold out against the pressures to make way for business,

the *Real Estate Record* insisted. Nor should they, argued the *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*. Writing in the mid 1880s, it held that the "encroachments of business" upon a residential neighborhood were "a healthy innovation," a signal of growing prosperity and enhanced real estate values. These encroachments were not at all like the "inroads of vice," "a sure precursor of loss and degeneration," which drove out respectable people and drove down property values.²⁵

Of the other things to which Americans attributed the rise of downtown, the development of the street, steam, and elevated railways was regarded as the most important. As early as the mid nineteenth century Americans had marveled at how the railways had opened up remote residential sections to the middle and upper middle classes. Well into the early twentieth century Americans were hopeful that the railways would enable the working classes to escape the slums—and the many medical and moral problems commonly associated with them. During the 1870s and 1880s, however, Americans came to believe that in addition to fostering the dispersion of residences the railways promoted the concentration of businesses. So long as horse-cars were the principal form of public transportation, the *New York Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* observed, there was a fair chance that businesses would move uptown in order to be close to their customers and employees. But with the coming of steam and elevated railways, which effectively reduced the distance between the business and residential districts, merchants, bankers, and other businessmen had good reason to remain downtown. Thus, the *Real Estate Record* pointed out, the railways accelerated the centripetal tendencies of businesses as well as the centrifugal tendencies of residences.²⁶

By the end of the century the *Real Estate Record's* position was the conventional wisdom. In a report prepared for the U.S. Census Bureau, Edward Dana Durand wrote that the street railways, virtually all of which were then electrified, were "probably the most important single influence" in dispersing residences. But they also concentrated businesses, he pointed out, especially retail businesses. A spokesman for Boston's street railways agreed. "Imagine for a moment," he said, "the effect upon the business of Jordan, Marsh & Co., R. H. White & Co., and others, if they had no customers except such as could come to their shops in carriages and omnibuses, or walk." Richard Hurd took much the same position. By virtue of their high speed, he argued, "street railways have wrought a revolution in the structure of cities, scattering population over a wide area, adding value to the circumference by rendering it accessible for residences, and to the center by concentrating traffic within it."

Elevated railways, which ran at even higher speeds, had a similar impact, Hurd added. Both forms of transportation promoted the two prevailing tendencies in American cities, "one toward greater concentration at the business centre, and the other toward greater dispersion of the residence sections."²⁷

Americans viewed these tendencies as reflections of what the *Detroit Free Press* called the "universal law of change." It affected people, buildings, and, not least of all, cities. Noting that "the works of one generation are swept away by the works of the next," Henry P. Tappan, chancellor of the University of Michigan, predicted in the mid 1850s: "He who erects his magnificent palace on the Fifth Avenue to-day, has only fitted out a future boarding-house, and probably occupied the site of a future warehouse." Speaking of New York's bucolic Upper West Side, Andrew H. Green, comptroller of Central Park, commented in the mid 1860s that it "will probably be built with dwellings of a costly character, and these, after having served their day and generation, will give away, as in other localities, to the pressure of the business." Not even cemeteries were immune to change. As historian Michael Holleran has pointed out, nineteenth-century urban cemeteries were "a place for putting bodies, not for keeping them." During the nineteenth century the city of Boston sold off parts of the South Burial Ground for a street, a hotel, a factory addition, even a music hall. Referring to the Granary and King's Chapel burial grounds, Boston's Board of Health predicted in 1877 that sooner or later "the remains of those buried in these cemeteries will be removed, and the ground used for other purposes."²⁸

Change left some Americans with a feeling of loss. Writing in *Harper's Magazine* in the mid 1850s, one lamented: "A man born in New York forty years ago [today] finds nothing, absolutely nothing, of the New York he knew. If he chances to stumble upon a few old houses not yet leveled, he is fortunate. But the landmarks, the objects which marked the city to him, as a city, are gone." Most Americans, however, saw change as a sign of improvement, an affirmation of their faith in material progress. In a nation where change was relentless—where, as Alexis de Tocqueville had observed in the 1830s, "a man builds a house in which to spend his old age [and] sells it just before the roof is on," "plants a garden and lets it just as the trees come into bearing"—few people developed much of an attachment to old buildings and old places. Barely a month before the great fire of 1872 destroyed most of downtown Boston, the *Globe* hailed the city's rapid growth, citing its new "palatial residences, elegant parks, [and] superb avenues," and boasted that "old landmarks and localities have almost completely disappeared." The *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* complained that the city's old landmarks—the "relics of

[William] Penn's days"—were disappearing too slowly. "The time for narrow stairways creaking with age, and low ceilings blackened with the lamp smoke of a long century, and little fort-like windows and narrow doorways, has gone," it declared in the mid 1880s. "The spirit of improvement is on us, and these old buildings, respectable with their associations, must go."²⁹

Old buildings, Americans assumed, would be replaced by new buildings, short buildings by tall buildings. Residences would make way for businesses. And residents would move out of the center. Fashionable retail shops would follow in the path of affluent residential neighborhoods. Wholesale firms would move into buildings vacated by retail stores. And new banks and office buildings would be erected in old retail and wholesale districts. But no matter how much the cities changed, Americans believed that they would always have a downtown, an extremely compact, highly centralized, largely depopulated business district to which nearly all the residents, even those who lived far away, would come every day to work, to shop, to do business, and to amuse themselves. "Everything must have its nucleus," declared H. W. Kirchner, a St. Louis architect, in 1896, and every city must have its downtown.³⁰

Some Americans objected to the concentration of business. Explaining his opposition to a proposed elevated railroad, Mayor Carter H. Harrison, Sr., of Chicago declared in the mid 1880s, "I don't believe in centralizing wealth by centralizing business. Business ought to be scattered instead of being centered in the heart of the city." Another critic of concentration was E. D. Lindsay, a New York architect. Admitting that he would be delighted to design a five or six hundred foot skyscraper, he nonetheless expressed the hope that "the rage for making as much money out of a given piece of land, or for crowding everything that is best into one section of the city, which amounts to the same thing, will some day come to an end." A few Americans even favored the European practice of spreading out the business sections over the American practice of "doing the greatest amount [of business] on the smallest space of ground." One of them was George A. Lespinasse, a former New York real estate broker who had lived in Paris for a while. To a reporter's remark that perhaps "business could not be so conveniently and economically carried on when distributed over a larger area," Lespinasse replied, "Why not?" Such dispersal would have been inconvenient in the past, but now, with the improved transit facilities available, it would be quite satisfactory.³¹

Other Americans objected not so much to the concentration of business as to its excessive concentration. One objection was that too much business was done in some parts of downtown as opposed to others. Boston's retail district

should be compact, said Herbert L. Harding, secretary of the Citizens' Association, but it should not be confined to Washington and Tremont streets. Another objection was that too much business was done in the downtown areas as opposed to the outlying districts. Arguing that downtown Chicago, which covered half a square mile, did more trade than the rest of the city, which covered nearly two hundred square miles, the *Chicago Real Estate and Building Journal* declared, "This is congestion with a vengeance." So many people shop downtown that "none are left to patronize the midway and suburban district stores." Yet another objection was that so much business was done in such a small area that the congestion was intolerable. The streets and sidewalks were packed so tightly, Harding remarked, that a great many ladies "will not shop in the crowded section." For the good of downtown, it was essential to enlarge the business district and, in the words of the Massachusetts Rapid Transit Commission, spread out "the heaped up tide of humanity which now chokes Tremont and Washington streets."³²

But most Americans did not object to the concentration of business. "I think that the more business is concentrated the better," said Chicago architect Henry Ives Cobb in the early 1890s. Cobb was especially impressed by the Windy City, which had a highly centralized business district even before the elevated railway loop was erected along its perimeter in the late 1890s. "There is no city in the world where it is so easy to transact business as in Chicago," he said. W. L. B. Jenney, another Chicago architect and a pioneer in the design of the steel-frame skyscraper, agreed. "Business is so concentrated that strangers claim that they can do more business in a given length of time here than in any other city," he noted. Concentration, Cobb, Jenney, and others held, greatly facilitated business. Given what the San Francisco *Evening Post* called "a constant and unremitted intercourse" among merchants, it was a decided advantage for them to be close to one another (and close to the bankers, lawyers, shippers, insurance agents, and other businessmen and professionals on whom they depended). Nothing brought them closer than the skyscraper. Much time was saved now that many suppliers, customers, and advisers had offices under the same roof, wrote one observer in the early 1890s, and a businessman "scarcely needs to go outside at all to transact any portion of his affairs."³³

Downtown, most Americans believed, was supposed to be very crowded. Crowds are "just what the city of Boston wants," said Charles H. Dalton, chairman of the Boston Subway Commission, in 1894. "The larger the crowd, the better they [Bostonians] like it. It is the purpose of the city to have a great many people come here and do business with them. The more, the merrier."

Crowds were a sign of prosperity, as was congestion. If the congestion grew intolerable, the cities should devise ways to relieve it—not discourage people from doing business downtown. Noise and bustle were out of place in residential neighborhoods, Americans believed, but not in business districts. There they were signs of progress, Linus M. Child of Massachusetts told a state legislative committee in 1880. Taking issue with Bostonians who objected to a proposed elevated railroad on the grounds that it would be too noisy, he asked the chairman: "Would you like to walk down Washington Street, sir, and have it grown with grass, and not a noise to be heard, so that you could hear a pin drop, the whole length of the street? Is that what you want in Boston? Is it not desirable to have some noise, some bustle, some dust, something to show that the restless energy of man is at work there?" If anyone "is afraid of noise and bustle," Child told the committee, "he had better leave Boston and go to Salem."³⁴

Some Americans were also concerned about the dispersion of residences. The growth of downtown, they pointed out, drove middle- and upper-middle-class families from the center to the periphery. Left in their wake, amid stores, lofts, warehouses, and offices, were single men, mostly lower and working class, who lived in boarding houses, cheap hotels, and tenement houses. This change created two problems, both of which seemed to grow increasingly serious in the late nineteenth century. One was fiscal. As these Americans saw it, the exodus of the well-to-do threatened to erode the tax base of the cities. In the absence of sales and income taxes, the cities relied on property taxes for the bulk of their revenue. As residential dispersal picked up, more and more property owners paid taxes not to the cities in which they worked but to the suburbs in which they lived. At a time when municipal expenditures and indebtedness were soaring—a time when, as historian Clifton K. Yearley has pointed out, the financial machinery of most big cities was breaking down—this development aroused a good deal of concern.³⁵

The other problem was political. As some Americans pointed out, the exodus of the middle and upper middle classes threatened to undermine the governance of the city. Effective governance, it was widely believed, depended on these groups. As Helen Campbell, who later organized the Consumers' League of New York, put it, "The poor are too poor, the rich too rich, to be anything but indifferent as to whether the city government is administered economically or otherwise." But the middle and upper middle classes, among whose ranks were found "the best citizens," were moving to the suburbs. "If the best citizens slumber in the suburbs," warned Reverend Amory H. Bradford, "the worst will run and ruin the cities." New York's *Real Estate Record and*

Builders' Guide, which usually reflected the views of the downtown property owners, took much the same position, declaring that the governance of the city was far too important to be left in the hands of the few remaining residents. "It will never do," the journal wrote in 1879, "to commit the future control of the metropolis to the 'longshoremen, the porters, the office cleaners and the watchmen, who will be the main occupants of the few residences in the business part of Manhattan Island.'" Bradford and others also believed that this exodus would accelerate the polarization of urban society, its division into a plutocracy and a proletariat. At a time when many Americans feared that the nation was on the verge of class warfare this prospect aroused a good deal of concern too.³⁶

But most Americans did not share these concerns. To the contrary, they regarded residential dispersal as an extremely auspicious development—"by far the most cheering movement of modern times," declared Adna Weber. They believed that the suburb was, in Olmsted's words, "the most attractive, the most refined, the most soundly wholesome" form of domestic life. For professionals and businessmen the suburbs offered a haven from the workplace, an idyllic setting in which they would do a little gardening in the morning and, after returning from a hard day downtown, dine with the family and maybe sit outdoors, reading a paper and smoking a cigar, under "their own semi-rustic 'vine and fig-tree.'" For working people, the suburbs provided an escape from the tenement houses, which were seen by many as the breeding ground of most urban problems—as, in the words of E. R. L. Gould, a leader of the model tenement movement, "standing menaces to the family, to morality, to the public health, and to civic integrity." The move to the suburbs, it was also believed, promoted the rise of home ownership, the benefits of which were spelled out by the *Detroit Free Press* in the mid 1860s. The man who owns his own home feels that he has "an interest in society," it wrote, and "becomes a better citizen and supporter of the local, State, and national governments under which he lives, [one who] sustains all regulations looking to quiet and good order."³⁷

Many Americans also downplayed the fiscal impact of residential dispersal. Suppose, they reasoned, many middle- and upper-middle-class residents moved to the suburbs. They would still work, shop, do business, and seek entertainment in the cities. As a result the cities would become "more and more an exchange and mart for commerce," wrote New York's *Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* in the late 1870s—if "less and less a place for living." So just as residential property would become more valuable in the suburbs, commercial property would become more valuable in the cities. As the cities'

property values went up, so would their property taxes. By this logic, residential dispersal would ease the cities' fiscal problems, not aggravate them. Many Americans also downplayed the political impact of residential dispersal. They thought there were other ways to ensure the middle and upper middle classes more of a say in municipal government than to discourage the movement to the suburbs. One was to incorporate the suburbs into the cities, another to put the metropolitan district under a single government. Although the schemes for metropolitan government went nowhere, Philadelphia, Chicago, New York, and other cities expanded their boundaries in the mid and late nineteenth century. And despite evidence of growing opposition to annexation and consolidation in the suburbs, Americans assumed that the cities would continue to expand in the years ahead.³⁸

Some Americans objected to the separation of businesses and residences. One of them was O. B. Bunce, a publisher, playwright, and novelist and editor of *Appletons' Journal*, a New York periodical, in the early 1870s. To Bunce, the separation of dwellings from shops, clubs, and cultural institutions was inimical to city life. "A man who loves the town desires to walk out his front door into all its activities," Bunce wrote in 1872. "He does not want to undertake a journey every time the opera, the theatre, the club, the art-gallery, or the library, is to be visited." Even if rapid transit one day connected the periphery with the center, the journey would need much planning and take much time. A vibrant metropolis, one that provided the "mental stimulus" of city life, is more than "a collection of villages," Bunce claimed. It thrives on compactness, not diffusion, by mixing, not segregating, activities. Cities should turn inward, not outward; they should encourage intensive development in the center, not low-density development on the periphery. With the advances in elevator technology and fireproof construction, Bunce wrote, it was now possible to build tall apartment houses in the middle of cities. Crowned with roof gardens, the apartment houses would offer residents fresh air and other suburban amenities without depriving them of "spontaneous and immediate" access to the pleasures of city life.³⁹

Other Americans objected not so much to the separation of businesses and residences as to the consequences thereof. By far the most troublesome were the traffic jams that tied up the major thoroughfares, especially during rush hour. This "diurnal stampede," as one journalist called it, was exasperating. But it was inevitable—at least as long as so many Americans were obliged to travel a long way twice every day between their home and their workplace. Some Americans were so troubled by these traffic jams that they urged their countrymen to adopt the European practice of separating businesses and res-

idences vertically rather than horizontally—a step that would have reduced commuting and thereby relieved congestion. Businesses and residences could be separated as effectively by one story as by several blocks, wrote *American Architect and Building News* in the late 1870s. The journal favored "reserving the one or two lower stories of the buildings over the greater part of the city for shops and offices, and the upper stories for dwellings which have no connection with the business premises below." As late as the early 1900s *American Architect* was still insisting that "there is no good reason why the retail-shop with apartments occupying the upper stories should not be the rule in this country as it is abroad."⁴⁰

But most Americans did not object to the separation of businesses and residences. Far from it. The good community, they thought, was one in which the home was separate from the workplace—one in which, as Charles Mulford Robinson, a well-known city planner, wrote in the early twentieth century, people no longer live above their shops and "sleep within call of the factory whistle." A residential neighborhood had no place for stores and offices, much less for lofts and warehouses. Arnid residences, Richard Hurd declared, these businesses were a "nuisance," a veritable danger to the community. Given these sentiments, it was little wonder that when business invaded a residential street or square the well-to-do "flee before it," in the words of *American Architect and Building News*, "as from a pestilence." To put it another way, most Americans did not want to live above the store. Rather than vertical separation of businesses and residences, they preferred horizontal separation—or, as *American Architect* put it, the separation "of quarters as well as premises." Horizontal separation was desirable, wrote Olmsted. "If a house to be used for many different purposes must have many rooms and passages of various dimensions and variously lighted and furnished, not less must [the] metropolis be specially adapted at different points to different ends." It was also feasible, said Weber. "All that is needed is cheap and rapid transit between the home and the workplace."⁴¹

Just as most Americans did not want to live above the store, neither did they want to live above one another. As one midwesterner observed in the mid 1870s, "ninety-nine Chicago families in every hundred will go an hour's ride into the country, or toward the country, rather than live under or above another family." Philadelphians felt the same way, remarked the *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*. The Parisian flat, six, seven, and eight stories high, "is with us an impossibility," wrote *Appletons' Journal*. Whereas the Parisian "lives out-of-doors," on the boulevards, the American "attaches more importance to the secluded comforts and pleasures of a home." As a

rule he was more than ready to sacrifice easy access to shops, clubs, and cultural institutions in order to reside in a single-family house in a suburban setting. Unlike Bunce, most Americans were not favorably impressed by apartment houses—not even by the luxurious apartment houses built for the upper middle class in the late nineteenth century. Apartments, they believed, provided less space and privacy than single-family homes, not to mention fewer personal comforts and none of the moral benefits. Tainted by association with tenements, apartment houses also raised a specter of promiscuity that seemed to threaten both family and society. The apartment house is “the most dangerous enemy American domesticity has had to encounter,” *Architectural Record* declared in the early twentieth century.⁴²

Rivalry among cities was natural, Americans believed—as natural, wrote Richard B. Watrous, secretary of the American Civic Association, as rivalry among individuals, nations, business interests, and political parties. Also natural was rivalry among suburbs, a notable example of which was the vigorous competition of the residential communities of northern New York City, southern Westchester County, eastern Long Island, and western New Jersey. What was not natural, Americans believed, was rivalry within cities and rivalry between cities and suburbs. What was not natural was rivalry between the business district and the residential districts, between the center and the periphery, between downtown and uptown. Underlying this belief was the assumption that the metropolis was, in the words of one historian, “an interdependent system of differentiated but complementary parts,” a system wherein each part operated in harmony with every other. The business district was the most important part. It was the part, wrote the *Baltimore Sun* in the aftermath of the great fire that destroyed much of downtown Baltimore in 1904, “from which the entire population must draw its sustenance, either directly or indirectly.” But the residential districts were also a very important part, the part from which most Americans derived their personal well-being. A city needed both parts. And each needed the other. “Broadway and Wall Street are as necessary to the suburbs,” an observer wrote in the early 1850s, “as the suburbs are to them.”⁴³

According to the conventional wisdom, the suburbs did not pose a threat to the cities. As New York’s *Real Estate Record and Builders’ Guide* wrote (with some exaggeration) in the late 1870s, the middle and working classes were moving from the city to the suburbs, leaving behind the very rich and very poor. But it was not as if New York was losing people to other cities, to such rivals as Boston, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. Indeed, the *Real Estate Record*

said, “It is idle to deplore the fancied loss of our population when we can point to teeming multitudes on the surrounding hills and valleys,” the outlying districts of metropolitan New York. Moreover, no matter how appealing the suburbs were as places to live, they would never be attractive as places to work. “The exchanges, the factories, the storehouses, the homes of the arts and sciences,” the *Real Estate Record* declared, “will ever find their most congenial atmosphere and favorable conditions within the city proper.” Thus the more people went to the suburbs to live, the more they would come to the city to work—and “to amuse themselves, to make purchases and to transact business.” Or as the Chicago *Real Estate and Building Journal* put it in 1888, the growth of the “tributary districts” would increase the demand for “trading places ‘down town.’”⁴⁴

Nor, according to the conventional wisdom, did the cities pose a threat to the suburbs. Although the suburbs depended on the cities for their livelihood (and for a wide range of goods and services), the cities depended on the suburbs for their amenities. Just as the suburbs could not survive without the cities, so, Olmsted said in the late 1860s, “no great town can long exist without great suburbs.” The suburbs had their boosters. But unlike city boosters, they held that the growth of their community depended, in the words of John Ford, editor of the *Cambridge Chronicle*, on “its attractions as a place of residence.” The suburbs would thrive not by competing with the cities for commerce and industry but by competing with other suburbs for the middle- and upper-middle-class families that were seeking to escape the burdens of urban life—the noise, filth, and tumult, the crime, disorder, and poverty. They would prosper by offering prospective homeowners a vision of the good community, a rustic, spacious, largely homogeneous, and almost exclusively residential environment, an environment that emphasized the home, rather than the workplace, and stressed the cult of domesticity, as opposed to the cult of efficiency.⁴⁵

The belief in spatial harmony was so deep-seated that it flourished amid the fears of social conflict that erupted in urban America in the late nineteenth century. Americans held to the belief that the parts of the city were in accord at the same time they adhered to the position that the people of the city were on the verge of class warfare. And they hailed the separation of the city into business and residential districts at the same time they deplored the polarization of society into a plutocracy and a proletariat. This deep-seated belief in spatial harmony was nicely reflected in the metaphors commonly used to describe the city. The city was like “a house of many chambers,” wrote J. F. Harder, a New York architect. Writing at the end of the nineteenth century, Harder said:

"Its waterways, bridges, railroads and highways are the entrances, vestibules and exits; its public buildings are the drawing rooms, its streets the halls and corridors. the manufacturing districts the kitchens and workshops; tunnels and subways are its cellars, and its rookeries the attic; the parks and recreation places are its gardens, and its systems for communication, lighting and drainage are the furniture."⁴⁶ Americans also likened the city to a wheel, albeit a very large wheel. According to this metaphor, the business district was the hub, the major streets and street railways were the spokes; the city borders were the rim, and the residential sections were located along the spokes, between the hub and the rim.

By far the most common of these metaphors was the human body. Speaking of New York, a visitor from South Carolina remarked in the early 1850s that the city was like "a human being": "The City Hall [is] the heart, the Tombs [a downtown jail] the stomach, the Five Points [a notorious slum] the bowels, the Parks the lungs, Broadway the nose, the Piers the feet (as from these the travelling commences), Wall-street the pocket, the hotels the mouth, the theatres the eyes, the Bowery the aorta, the Avenues the veins, and Nassau and Ann streets the brains."⁴⁷ This metaphor grew more popular in the late nineteenth century, when many social scientists espoused the view that society was analogous to a human organism and that the laws of society were analogous to the laws of the organic universe. In the meantime this metaphor became more precise (if less complex), as Americans gradually reached a consensus about the relationship between specific parts of the city and specific parts of the body. By the end of the century, if not earlier, the parks were commonly regarded as the "lungs" of the city, the streets as the "arteries," the depots and wharves as the "mouth," the telegraph and telephone lines as the "nervous system," and the business district, not the city hall, as the "heart." Indeed downtown was called "the heart of the city" virtually everywhere, even in cities like Chicago (and later St. Louis and Omaha), where it was popularly known as "the Loop," a name that caught on a decade before the elevated railway loop was built.

A house, a wheel, and the human body are quite different. But as metaphors of the American city they had a few things in common. Unlike, say, a volcano, a popular metaphor of American society in the late nineteenth century, they were reassuring. They were also apolitical. The "interests" (if they can be called that) of the hub, spokes, and rim were the same. So were the "interests" of the different rooms of a house and the different organs of the body. Yet another thing these metaphors had in common was that they consisted of separate parts, all of which were vital to the well-being of the others. As a Baltimore

resident put it, "[j]ust as in the human body, the hand or the head or the heart cannot be sick by itself, but the whole body is sick; just as a fever from a wounded limb spread to every part of the frame, so with this body [the city] of ours." Applied to the city, these metaphors strengthened the idea of harmony among its parts, and especially between the center and the periphery. Just as the body could not thrive without a sound heart, so, Americans assumed, the city could not thrive without a vibrant downtown. Reflecting the prevailing view at the end of the nineteenth century, *Building Managers Magazine* pointed out a couple decades later: "The business district of a city is as important to the welfare of the whole city as the heart is to the whole body. If the heart is weak or congested, or does not function properly, the mind is sluggish; the spirit is depressed; the extremities lose strength and the whole body suffers."⁴⁸

The belief in spatial harmony was especially deep-seated among the downtown businessmen and property owners. It was reflected not only in what they said but in what they did—and in what they did not do. A notable example was their disinclination to organize voluntary associations to promote the interests of downtown. To put their behavior in perspective, it is useful to bear in mind that during the late nineteenth century Americans formed a legion of such associations to defend the interests of other parts of the city. These associations appeared in New York in the late 1860s and surfaced later in Chicago, Baltimore, Cincinnati, and San Francisco. They proliferated everywhere in the 1880s and 1890s, by which time most cities had dozens of them. Organized along neighborhood or other territorial lines, these associations were designed to supplement the ward and other political organizations and provide property owners an additional (and presumably a highly responsive) voice in municipal affairs. Whether called improvement associations, taxpayers' associations, or property owners' associations, they all engaged in much the same types of activities. They pushed the municipal authorities to open, widen, and pave streets, to build sewers, schools, and parks, and to get rid of nuisances. They also called for street railway extensions and rapid transit lines—indeed for virtually anything that would give their part of the city a competitive edge over other parts and thereby increase its property values.⁴⁹ By the end of the nineteenth century these associations were operating just about everywhere in the cities—everywhere, that is, except downtown. As the *New York Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* reported in 1901, Manhattan and the Bronx were covered by these organizations; a few districts, such as the Upper West Side and Washington Heights, had as many as four or five of them. Other than a small portion of ward 21, which ran from East Twenty-

sixth to East Forty-second streets, the only district that did not have an association was lower Manhattan, the site of downtown New York. The story was much the same in other cities. As Chicago's Subway Advisory Commission pointed out in the mid 1920s, the downtown business interests had never seen fit to organize an association to promote the well-being of the Loop. "[Of] all the important districts of Chicago, the most important of all appears to be the only district without some sort of district organization." Many cities had downtown clubs of one kind or another, but they were strictly social clubs that offered businessmen a place to dine, meet, and relax, as opposed to quasi-political bodies whose purpose was to lobby on behalf of the business district. All cities also had chambers of commerce, merchants' associations, and boards of trade. But as a leader of the Chicago Association of Commerce pointed out in 1911, these citywide groups watched out for the interests of the entire city, not just of the business district.⁵⁰

One reason the downtown business interests were disinclined to organize associations of their own was that they thought the citywide commercial organizations, of which they were usually the most influential members, would suffice. Indeed, the outlying business interests would later complain that these citywide organizations were too attentive to the welfare of the downtown business interests. The second reason was that the downtown businessmen and property owners believed that the interests of downtown and the other parts of the city were the same. As the Chicago Subway Advisory Commission put it, the outlying districts may be rivals, but the downtown district "is the unquestioned and intimate partner of all [of them]." The first downtown association I know of was formed in San Francisco, but not until 1906, when in the wake of the earthquake and fire that destroyed the center of the city some downtown retailers rented space on Van Ness Avenue, about a mile west of the business district. Fearing a general relocation of retail trade, a group of downtown business and real estate interests organized the Downtown Property Owners' Association, which mounted a campaign to rebuild the business district as quickly as possible and thereby stabilize the retail district. Although the campaign was successful, it did not inspire other cities to follow San Francisco's lead.⁵¹

The deep-seated belief in spatial harmony notwithstanding, rivalry within cities was widespread in the late nineteenth century. In New York, for example, downtown property owners saw no reason their property taxes should be spent for the benefit of what one city official called "uptown corner lot speculators." Some New Yorkers also complained that the elevated railways enhanced the value of uptown property at the expense of downtown property, es-

pecially downtown property along which the railways ran. Many Bostonians opposed elis on these grounds too. In Pittsburgh and other cities the outlying districts were resentful that the business district was normally the first to get water mains, sewer lines, and paved streets. Intra-city rivalry took another form in Black Rock, an old neighborhood two miles from downtown Buffalo, where some boosters worried that the extension of a streetcar line from downtown would "drain completely the life-blood of Black Rock." Once the line is built, one of them asked, "How long do you think the people of the Rock will continue to patronize their local merchants?" New York and Chicago real estate journals made similar points, predicting that the elevated railways would so facilitate movement between the center and the periphery that they would sap the vitality of neighborhood and suburban stores. The elis would leave the midway districts "barren and desolate," warned Chicago's *Real Estate and Building Journal*.⁵²

Another form of intra-city rivalry pitted one part of downtown against another or against a nearby section that aspired to become part of downtown. A striking example was the battle over the site for the new Philadelphia city hall that started in the late 1860s. On one side were businessmen and property owners from ward 5, the home of the old business district, who lobbied for Independence Square and, after it was ruled out, for Washington Square, two sites that would have stabilized downtown Philadelphia. On the other side were business interests from ward 9, the home of a new business section west of downtown, who preferred Penn Square, a site that would have accelerated the westward drift of the business district. After a long struggle, the voters selected the Penn Square site. Similar fights occurred elsewhere. In Omaha rival property owners fought to channel the growth of downtown in different directions, one to the west and another to the south. In spite of vigorous opposition from property owners in the eastern part of central Omaha, downtown moved west along Farnam Street. In San Francisco William C. Ralston, one of the wealthiest of California's mining kings, waged a long campaign to move the business district south of Market Street. Although he invested a fortune, much of it in the building of the luxurious Palace Hotel, his campaign failed.⁵³

Although Americans were aware of the rivalry within cities, they tended to downplay or disregard it. One reason was that intra-city rivalry was much less pervasive and intense than inter-city rivalry. One of the most remarkable features of urban America, inter-city rivalry started in the colonial period, when coastal towns competed with each other for a share of the trade with Western Europe and the West Indies, and reached a peak in the nineteenth century, es-

pecially in the Midwest, where local boosters vied with one another to turn small towns into large cities and large cities into great metropolises.⁵⁴ Another reason was that in the face of such fierce inter-city rivalry, many businessmen and newspaper publishers believed it was vital to stress the harmony of the community. In the competition for commerce, industry, and capital, the success of a town or city might well depend on the ability of its residents to persuade outside investors that they could work together. Yet another reason was that intra-city rivalry, especially rivalry between the center and the periphery, ran counter to the belief in the interdependence of the business and residential districts and to the assumption that the interests of downtown and the other parts of the city were the same.

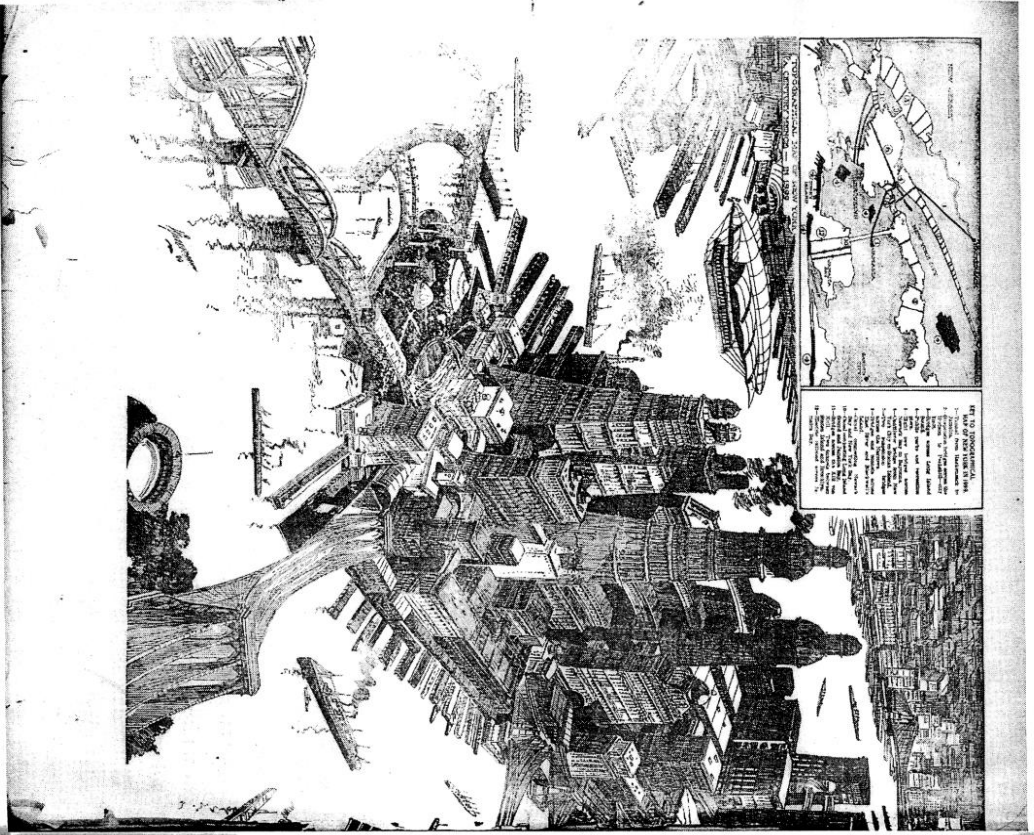
By the late nineteenth century Americans could no more imagine a city without a downtown than they could a skyscraper without an elevator. Although they realized that the city would change over time, they did not believe that the changes would endanger downtown. How Americans envisaged the future of downtown was revealed in a supplement about New York City that was published on December 30, 1900, by the *New York World*, the flagship of Joseph Pulitzer's newspaper empire. The highlight of the supplement, which was titled "New York as It Will Be in 1999: Pictorial Forecast of the City," were two bird's-eye views by Louis Biedermann, a veteran newspaper illustrator. One was of downtown New York and the other, a less detailed drawing, of metropolitan New York. As Biedermann depicted it, downtown New York would be a business district par excellence in 1999. It would be much larger, spreading north into upper Manhattan and east into Brooklyn, and far denser, covering huge box-like skyscrapers, which were linked by elevated sidewalks and aerial walkways and crowned by flat roofs for airship landings. Connecting Manhattan with the outlying residential districts (and also connecting some of these districts with each other) would be more than two dozen bridges and tunnels.⁵⁵ As Biedermann and others saw it, downtown would develop into a more concentrated and less populated business district in the years ahead, one whose well-being depended on the maintenance of the equilibrium between residential dispersal and business concentration in the American metropolis.

The origins of this vision went back at least as far as the mid nineteenth century. As early as 1843, more than half a century before the *World* published its supplement, Caleb Woodhull, a New York businessman, observed that there were parts of Manhattan devoted exclusively to business, parts "in which no one dwells." In time, he predicted, "the whole island will be covered

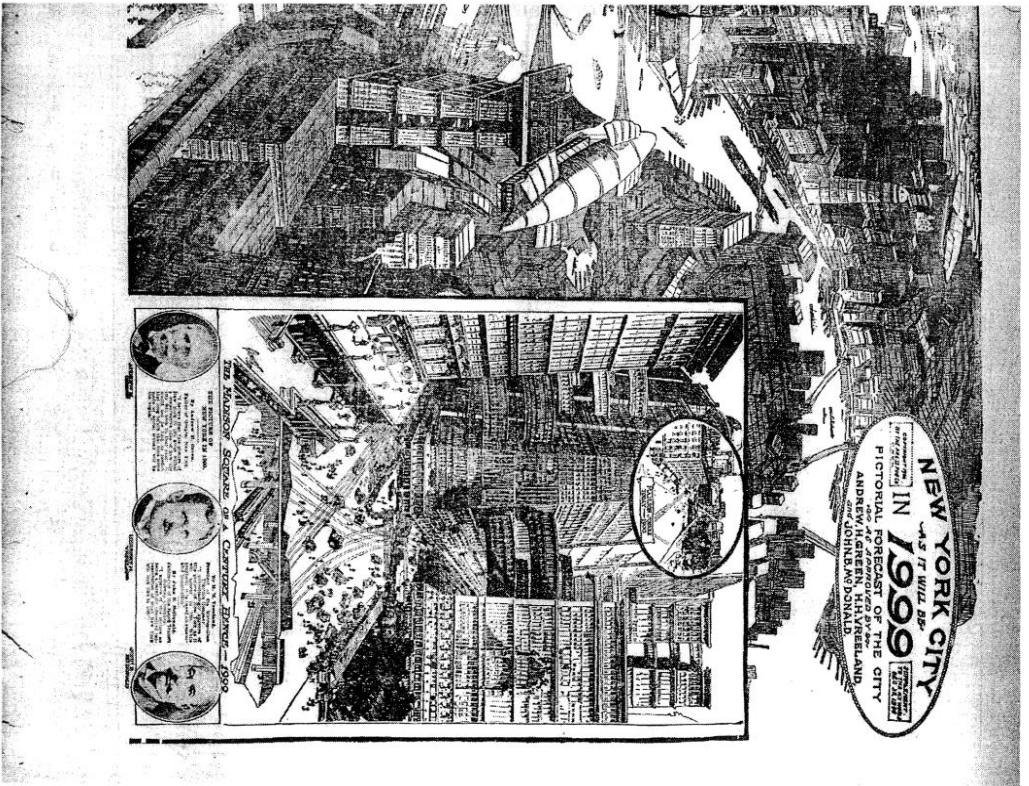
with store houses, and the residences of those doing business there will be on the opposite shores and in contiguous counties." Such predictions later became routine. Early in the 1880s A. B. Mullett, who had gone into private practice in New York after serving as supervising architect of the U.S. Treasury Department, told a journalist that henceforth "concentration will be the rule in the business part of the city"—and diffusion the rule in the residential districts. In time lower Manhattan "will be to the upper portion of the city what the city of London is to the rest of the metropolis of Great Britain." Another New Yorker who saw the future in much the same way was George E. Waring, who was famous for reforming the city's sanitation department. Manhattan will eventually be covered completely by skyscrapers, parks, and public buildings, he predicted in the late 1890s. As more and more New Yorkers move to the outer boroughs—as well as to New Jersey and Westchester County—"it is not unlikely that the whole island will be largely abandoned as a place for residences."⁵⁶

Other cities would develop along the same lines as New York, though presumably at a less rapid pace. Writing in the late 1850s, Sidney George Fisher—a Philadelphiaian who was trained as a lawyer but preferred the life of a gentlemen farmer—noted that street railways were facilitating a wide dispersal of residential areas. Before long, he predicted, everyone will have a suburban villa or country home, with all the advantages of "pure air, gardens and rural pleasures," and "cities will be mere collections of shops, warehouses, factories and places of business." A decade later a journalist wrote that one day "the smoky abyss" of Pittsburgh would be occupied only by factories and other businesses, whose employees would reside elsewhere, "deny[ing] themselves the privilege of living in the smoke." Writing in the mid 1870s, a Cincinnati booster forecast that in time businesses would fully occupy the city's flatlands and residences would spread over the surrounding hills. And late in the 1880s *California Architect and Building News* predicted that while San Francisco's residents would move into the hills (and the adjacent counties) its businessmen would remain downtown, "even if they have to go twenty stories" high to do so.⁵⁷

Some Americans thought these forecasts were exaggerated. Although they conceded that much of downtown would one day be devoted exclusively to business, they doubted that the center of the city would ever be completely depopulated. Most workingmen could not afford to move to the periphery, they pointed out: the costs of housing and commuting were too high. As an official of the U.S. Census Bureau observed at the turn of the century, "suburban life is still almost wholly confined to the well-to-do." To the dismay of tenement-



Louis Biedermann's "Pictorial Forecast" of New York City



(New York World Supplement, December 30, 1900)

house reformers like Robert W. De Forest, recent immigrants from Italy and Russia preferred to live near the center of the city. They were willing to put up with overcrowded and unsanitary tenements in order to be close to one another and to their common cultural and religious institutions. Some of the very rich also preferred to live near the center, usually in town houses or spacious apartments located in well-insulated enclaves not far from their offices and easily accessible to the clubs, museums, and other upper-class institutions so important to O. B. Bunce. Nor was the demand for commercial space limitless, the *New York Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* pointed out. Although it had once predicted that businesses would one day drive residences out of Manhattan, it later changed its mind, arguing that with the coming of the skyscraper businesses would not require "a space anything as large as Manhattan" for another hundred years.⁵⁸

Some Americans also thought these forecasts were incomplete. Most businesses would remain downtown, but as residents moved to outlying sections some businesses would follow them. One New Yorker predicted that the retail district would move north of Central Park and that the theater district would end up in Washington Heights, near the northern end of Manhattan. Another New Yorker went even further, writing that one day "our daughters will shop at the palatial dry-goods stores on Jerome avenue [in the Bronx] just as our wives now do on 6th avenue [in Manhattan]." Andrew H. Green, known as the "Father of Greater New York" for his efforts to consolidate New York with Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island, predicted that a subsidiary financial and business district would arise around 125th Street in upper Manhattan. *And American Architect and Building News* argued at the turn of the century that "in New York, as in London, it may, before long, be necessary to establish branches of the great banks and life-insurance offices in the different boroughs." Probably the most famous advocate of this position was the English author H. G. Wells. Widely read in the United States, Wells predicted that residential dispersal, along with advances in transportation and communication, would lead inevitably to the decentralization of business. "The center would survive, but as 'a bazaar, a great gallery of shops and places of concourse,' not as a full-scale business district."⁵⁹

Few Americans subscribed to Wells's position. Most believed that the dispersal of residences and the concentration of businesses would continue indefinitely. They thought that no matter where people resided, they would travel downtown every day, that the more they went to the periphery to live, the more they would come to the center to work, to shop, to do business, and to amuse themselves; that the greater the demand for residential property in

the outlying districts, the greater the demand for commercial property in the business district. As one journalist put it, the exodus of residents from New York to New Jersey, Long Island, and Westchester County "does not mean that there will be fewer people coming to [do] business in Manhattan. It means that there will be more." From this it followed that the business district would become more concentrated, if less populated, in the years ahead. James B. Richardson, a Bostonian who served on the Massachusetts Rapid Transit Commission of 1892, nicely summed up the prevailing view. Referring to downtown Boston, he stated, "I cannot anticipate *any* time when this district will be less populous, less frequented, or less resorted to for the same or other kinds of business, or for pleasure, than it is now."⁶⁰ At the end of the nineteenth century few Bostonians—or, for that matter, few New Yorkers or San Franciscans—would have disagreed with him.