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Edward Muller, "The Americanization of the City" in *The Making of the American Landscape*, ed. Michael P. Conzen (New York: Routledge, 1994).

Chapter fourteen

The Americanization of the city

EDWARD K. MULLER

A TRAVELER TO AN American city in the 1980s encounters an urban landscape that proclaims its newness alongside the vestiges of its past. American cities appear to be in motion, almost cinematically changing before one's eyes, even those struggling with the ravages of industrial decline. Because growth is gospel in America, change is commonplace and admired. "New" in the landscape presents a dynamic image, while "old" represents a hindrance to growth except where preservation enshrines cherished symbols or finds support in investment incentive policies.

Forests of new office towers in the largest downtowns crowd out smaller 19th- and early 20th-century streetscapes. Huge public housing projects and blighted inner-city slums slowly recede against the press of expanding gentrified historic districts and condominium developments. Obsolete central wholesale districts and waterfronts with abandoned tracks, terminals, piers, and warehouses court rediscovery by entrepreneurs anxious to establish upscale retail, residential, and office complexes.

At a distance from this central redevelopment, in older water and rail corridors, massive factories of former smokestack industries gently rust alongside their shrinking working-class communities graying with age. But beyond these idle zones, around expressway interchanges and airports, spacious office and industrial parks, enclosed shopping malls, and satellite business centers anchor a vast automobile-spawned sprawl, virtually independent of the mother city.

This American city of the late 20th century is a vast, restless, multi-focused urban region, a collection of employment and consumption centers scattered over numerous political jurisdictions. Yet a web of capital investments, electronic networks, and highways knits them together. Relatively new and low in density, these cities roll on expansively with a rectilinear geometry unsympathetic to the physical environment and interrupted only by misaligned subdivisions. However, the visual monotony of gridiron planning belies the differentiated social patterning of this urban milieu. Variations in wealth, duly reflected in the age, quality, and appurtenances of housing, distinguish neighborhoods in this immense

mosaic. Moreover, new generations of oriental and Spanish-speaking immigrants exist uncomfortably alongside older European ethnic and racial migrants in an economy perceived as dividing the population increasingly into two extremes.¹

Despite their great variety, the continual transformation of American cities is to be understood in terms of society's persistent and often contradictory values, its enduring political and economic system, and the inertia of past geographies. The original urban settlements in North America were derivative transplants of European societies, but with each passing era they diverged further from these roots and progressed along an increasingly independent course in step with the flowering of the nation-building enterprise.

American society developed a unifying consensus founded on a capitalistic economy and liberal social philosophy.² Economic activity and change were vested in private enterprise working through private markets with success measured in financial profits and higher material standards of living. The business community, wealthy landowners and the socially established, controllers of capital and its economic institutions, garnered considerable power, especially over public priorities. The public interest has long been defined in terms of the private economy because successful businesses, it has long been believed, redound to the benefit of the entire community.

In concert with this, the liberal social philosophy, stressing the freedom and rights of the individual, complements the individual's (or organization's) economic latitude in the capitalistic system and has long relegated local government to protecting individual rights, nurturing economic interests, and maintaining civil order.³ Value attaches to individual performance, equality of opportunity, tolerance, and political democracy. Formal social distinctions have been few, and fair chances for material advancement, especially in the form of land, or in cities home ownership, undergird an essentially democratic society.

Substantial infusions of diverse immigrant groups have tested this social vision, but a general adherence to the liberal philosophy in a growing economy has militated against rigid class stratification, effected a sharing of power and wealth with upwardly mobile generations, and produced a dynamic, yet untidy social geography. With the increasing complexity of American society, governmental responsibilities have necessarily expanded and undergone redefinition, but the *laissez-faire* conception of government has endured, providing a constant check on public policies seeking to manage the economy or effect social engineering. Americans doggedly adhere to this national framework in the face of technological change, foreign immigrations, recurrent communal impulses, disturbing social inequities, and alternative European political models. As centers of economic activity and power, American cities reflect the geographical consequences of the national political economy and have displayed increasingly marked contrasts with their European counterparts.

The economic landscape

Although the earliest settlers along the Atlantic seaboard concerned themselves with the demands of survival in the frontier and carried with them the directives and models of their European origins, they also worked assiduously towards the success of their economic pursuits and adapted their towns to fit with their aspirations for the New World. By the middle of the 18th century as settlement moved inland and new town founding accelerated, an American urban tradition began to unfold, and its forms have shaped the urban landscape right down to the present.

Towns were initially places of colonial administration and religious community, but trading functions, free of feudal-style obligations, increased their economic value. Individuals viewed land as not only a site for work and residence, but also a source of speculative profit. Thus, land was a commodity and a basis for rising material expectations, though it was neither universally owned nor equally distributed among the citizens.⁴ Property owners exercised freedom from governmental control over the use of their land, except for instances that created a pronounced public nuisance. Formal plans for streets, property, and public spaces preceded the development of most new towns, but they had little influence over the land uses that eventually emerged. Far from the anarchy that such an individualistic economic emphasis might imply, common patterns characterized the urban landscape, because of English origins, market forces, and the diffusion of the new tradition.

Although Spanish and French settlers established distinctive colonial town forms, the more numerous English who brought various town concepts with them eventually established the characteristic American plan. Irregular organic forms oriented to the town's functional focus, usually a waterfront, developed in many of the earliest settlements, as seen today in the tangle of streets of central Boston and lower Manhattan. Rectangular gridiron plans with small lots and little open space also appeared frequently along the Atlantic coast. However, William Penn's plan for his colonial capital of Philadelphia seemed best suited to the requirements of American urban growth. Its formal rectilinearity and broad spatial extent accommodated the city's growth long after its founding in 1682, allowing the orderly and speculative sale of land by absentee investors or prospective settlers. Throughout its 18th-century prosperity, Philadelphia maintained the appearance of order and egalitarianism, so appealing to evolving American sensibilities, with its straight streets and regularly aligned and reasonably uniform houses. A few elaborate aristocratic plans for colonial Williamsburg, Annapolis, Savannah, and later Washington presented alternative models. Nevertheless, the simple egalitarian, speculative, and orderly features of Philadelphia's gridiron, the nation's premier city at century's end, appealed to Pennsylvanians as they moved west and merged comfortably with the developmental orientations of New England and southern frontier migrants.⁵

271 The gridiron was easily understood and facilitated investment, rapid

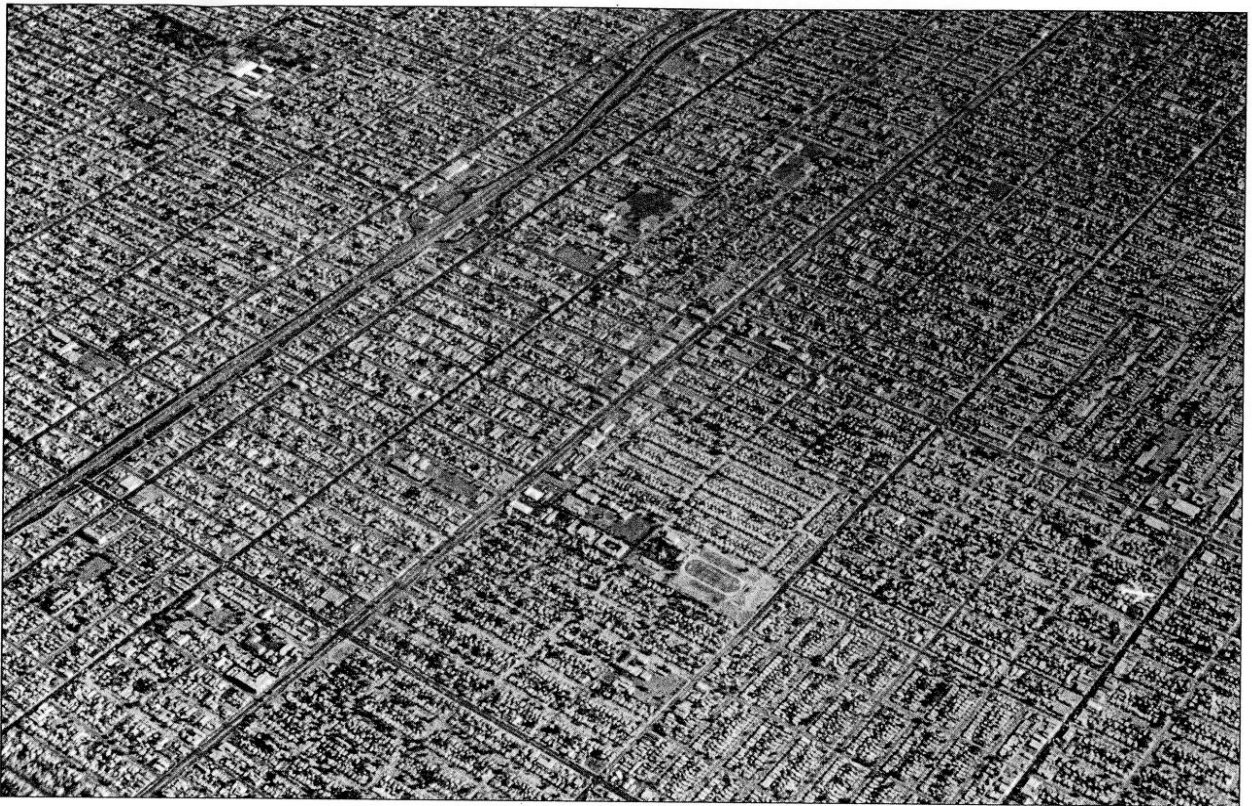


Figure 14.1

Residential tracts south of central Los Angeles. In keeping with the American sense of order, rationality, and expedience, suburbs sprawl in extensive, rectilinear developments across the urban periphery, similar to the repetitive gridiron plans of new towns in the 19th century. Here, even the modern freeway cuts through the area in alignment with the grid.

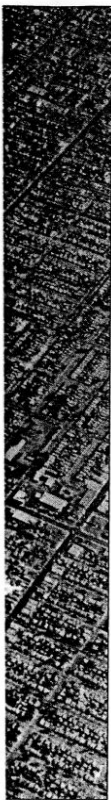
development, and geographical mobility. Quite simply, it worked and fitted with the American rational and egalitarian vision. While grandiose plans such as those of Buffalo and Detroit dotted the 19th-century urban spectrum, the gridiron's rectangular geometry, embellished with market spaces of central squares, spread monotonously across the continent, paying little heed to relief and barely inhibiting cultural aspirations (Fig. 14.1).⁶

Despite Penn's intention to create a spacious town, Philadelphia grew into a compact settlement of narrow lots, dense housing, and little green space. In part, the high density of early cities reflected the geographical constraints of a walking city, but it also resulted from the imperatives of a commerce-oriented economy that revolved around the waterfront (Fig. 14.2). Trade powered the early American city, and access to the marketplace for merchants and shopkeepers drove up central land values. The expansion of commercial land use in the early 19th century occurred outwardly along the waterfront and incrementally away from central markets, driving out residences and often usurping public open spaces. Social and public institutions increasingly competed with difficulty for central locations and often shared the city center uneasily with business activities.

Changes in transportation means and building technology late in the 19th century maintained peak values at the center until after World War II when automobiles, circumferential expressways, and electronic communications reoriented longstanding traditions. The resulting distribution of land values with a central peak and gradual decline away from the center, though elongated along radial transportation axes, significantly ordered the land use patterns of American cities. The initiation of urban planning and zoning in the early 20th century rarely interfered with existing land uses, because planners carefully observed the prerogatives of private property owners and protected existing values. Even as planning became more aggressive after 1950, the goals were often to re-establish the traditional peak valuations, centrality, and vitality of downtown.

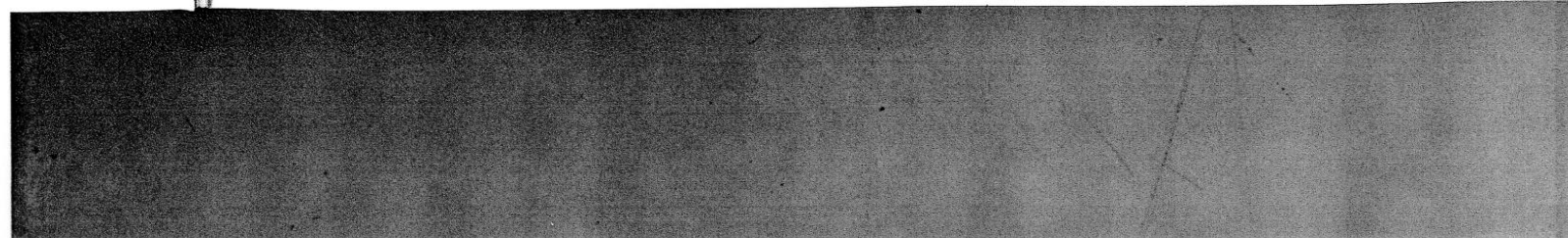
The congested central business areas of the early 19th century evolved into prestigious downtowns that became hallmarks of the American metropolis.⁷ The low skyline of two- to four-story buildings, broken only by shipmasts and steeples, the homogeneous architecture of brick rows or some other regional vernacular tradition, the occasional punctuation by Greek Revival monumental buildings, and the intermingling of all manner of activities (Fig. 14.3) gave way during the mid-19th century to increasingly specialized functional subdistricts, pretentious buildings that conveyed business importance, and determined elegance to attract retail consumers.

Figure 14.2
Tenement buildings on North
Street in Boston's North End,
near the waterfront along
Atlantic Avenue. High land
values in this central district
stimulated cycles of
rebuilding that ended in
these very dense, turn-of-the-
century living quarters.



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Commodity brokers, financial houses, and bankers withdrew from the cacophonous mercantile quarters into ponderous stone edifices befitting their solid respectability. Retailers also left the congeries of warehouses, dressed up with stone and ironfront buildings, and innovated in mass-marketing techniques that promoted consumption habits, appealed to female shoppers, and made shopping a downtown event (Fig. 14.4). Perhaps more than any other institution, the department store with its vast array of goods and broad social appeal signified this transformation of central areas into downtowns.⁸

With the retail and financial districts entrenched as the bedrocks of downtown by the 1890s, the steel skeleton building frame, hydraulic elevator, and electric trolley intensified downtown's centrality by concentrating white-collar workers in tall office buildings. The emergence of corporations with national orientations multiplied administrative functions that were headquartered near sources of capital but distant from sites of production and markets. The subsequent expansion of corporate bureaucracies and legal, financial, and business professions ballooned office employment at the time the new trolleys offered mass transportation for middle-class workers and shoppers. By stacking offices a dozen or more stories high, the skyscraper solved the constraints of earlier walk-up buildings, but it also unleashed the businessman's burgeoning sense of power and importance. Originally a profitable solution to spatial demands, the skyscraper in its awe-inspiring verticality and behemoth scale became the symbol of corporate prestige and a means of competition for status among the captains of industry. By the 1920s shining towers soared dozens of stories above the street, many aspiring to be the tallest in the world. The traditional boosterism of America's businessmen focused during these years

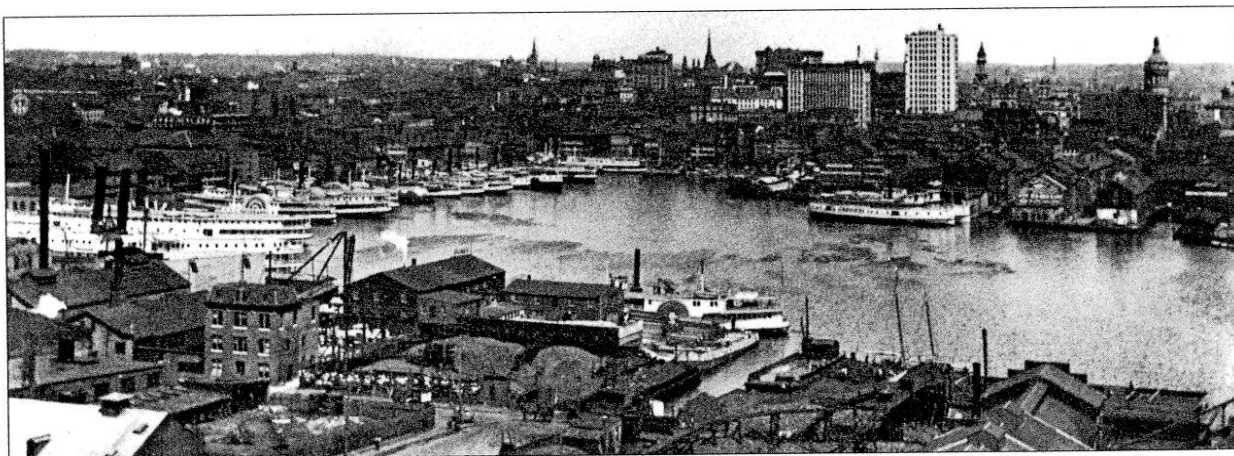


Figure 14.3

Baltimore's inner harbor and downtown in the early 20th century, looking north-northwest. The old warehouses, shipping services, and docks of the original harbor contrasted with the rising modernity of the central business district only a few blocks to the north. After World War II, this and other harbors would attract urban renewal interest.

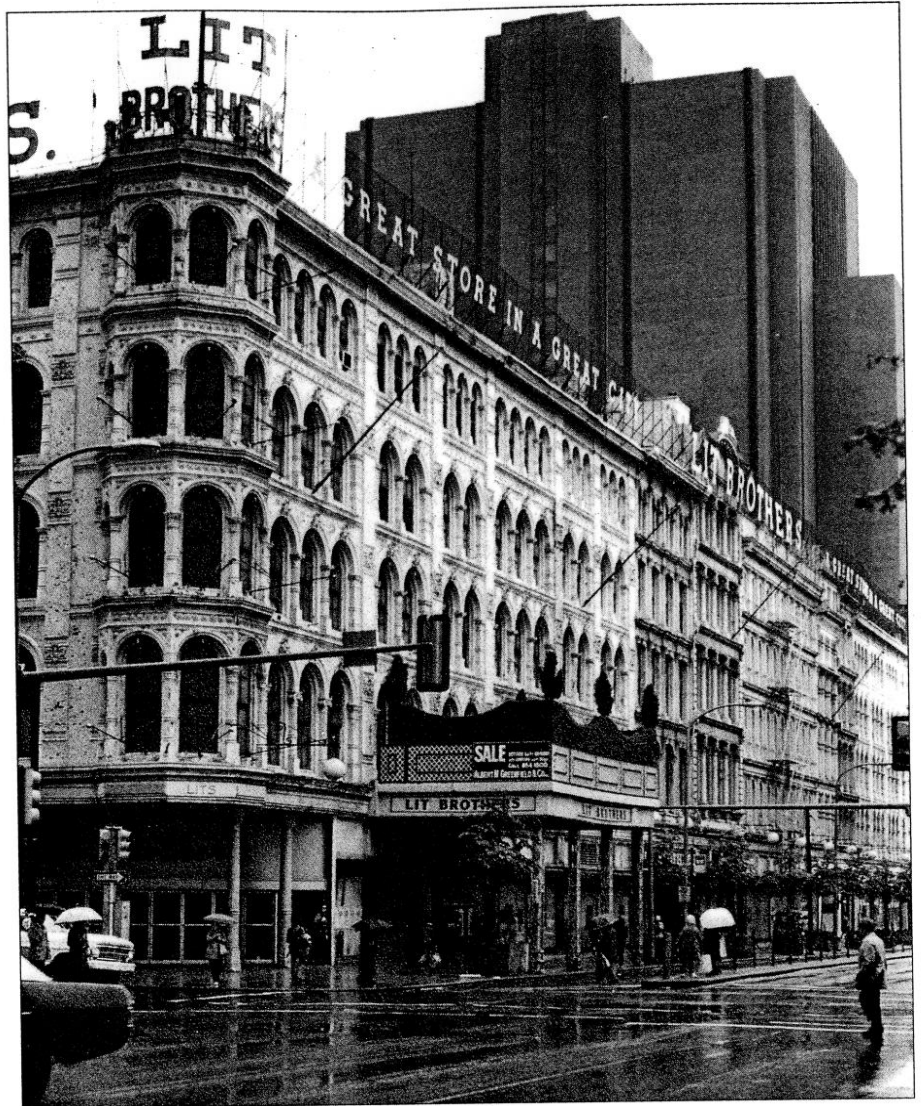
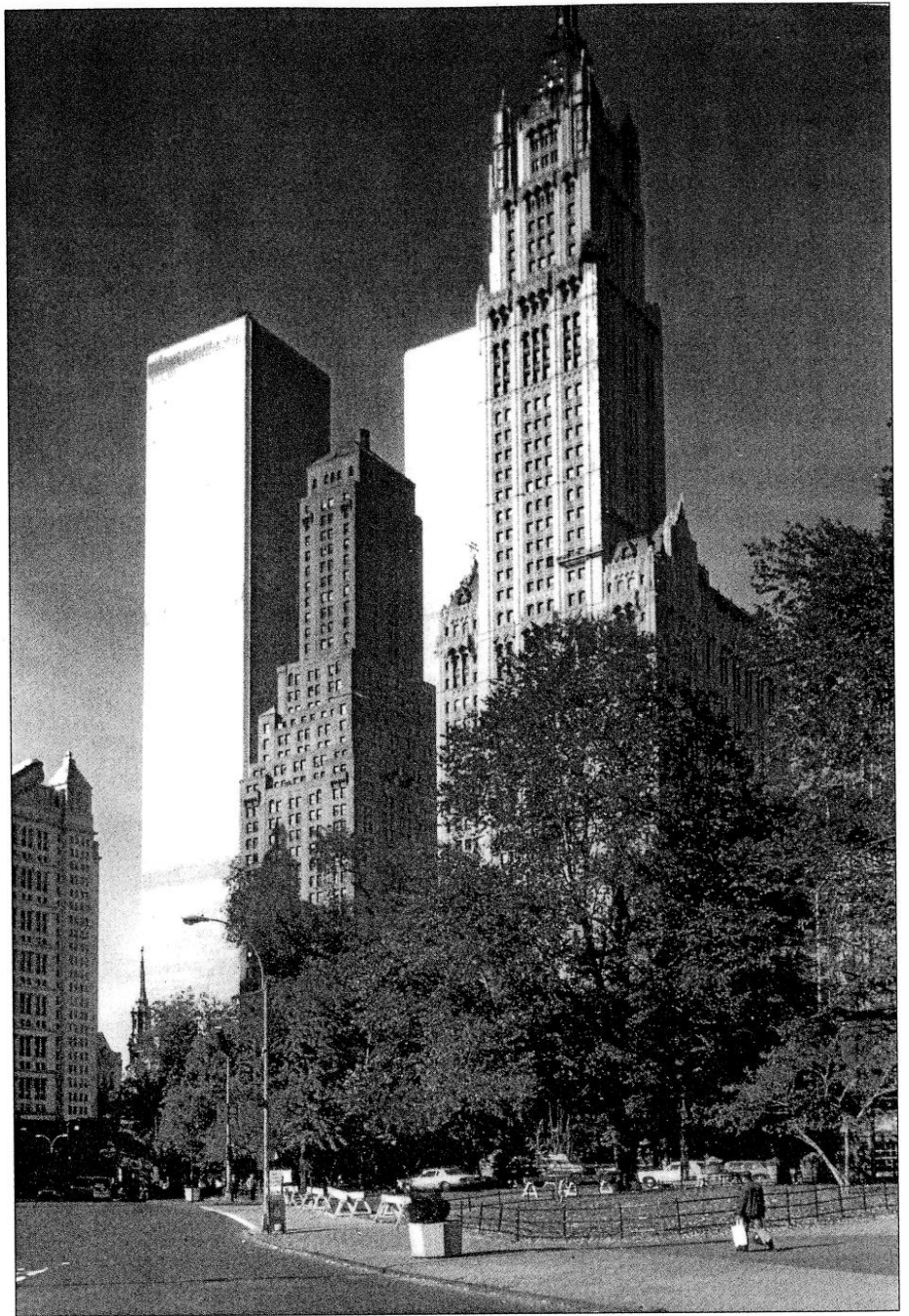


Figure 14.4
Lit Brothers Department
Store on Market Street,
Philadelphia, designed to be
ostentatious and appeal as a
consumer's palace. At the
focus of trolley lines coming
from the suburbs,
department stores anchored
the retail district within
American downtowns.

on the skyscraper.⁹ If the department store made going downtown an exciting event, the office tower trumpeted the city center's power in the metropolis and beyond (Fig. 14.5).

The explosive growth of downtowns spawned a series of subsidiary functions that contributed to their dominant position. Despite high central land values, massive and grand railroad stations usurped downtown space where they coordinated the voluminous daily circulation of commuters and intercity travelers. The tumult in the terminals' cavernous waiting halls epitomized downtown's breathless pace and vitality.¹⁰ Outside traffic congestion and pedestrian pandemonium heightened the sense of being at society's center. Expensive hotels, elegant theaters, movie palaces, fancy restaurants, and less pretentious mass amusements made downtown the entertainment focus as well. Clearly, the era's fashion and modernity were

Figure 14.5
The Woolworth Building in
New York City (center right),
completed in 1913 and an
important early skyscraper,
captured the American
imagination and symbolized
urbanity. Today it shares the
skyline with other tall
buildings, notably the twin
towers of the World Trade
Center, as seen
southwesterly from City Hall.



captured by the towers, terminals, and shops, which signified downtown to urbanites, and for many symbolized the American city at large.

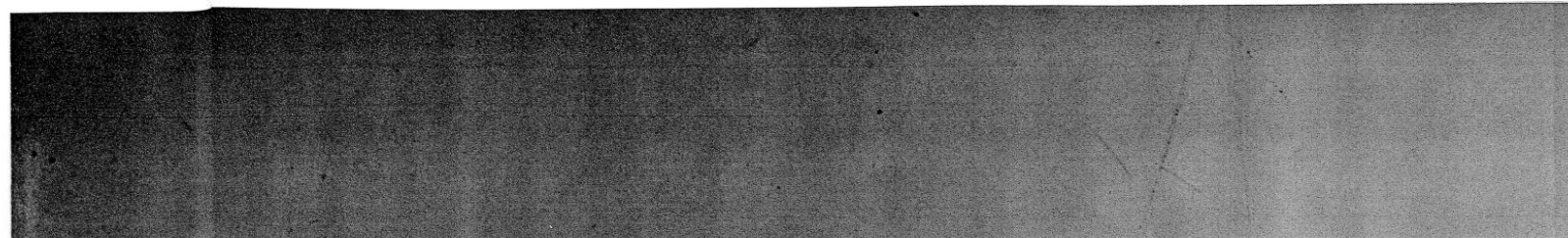
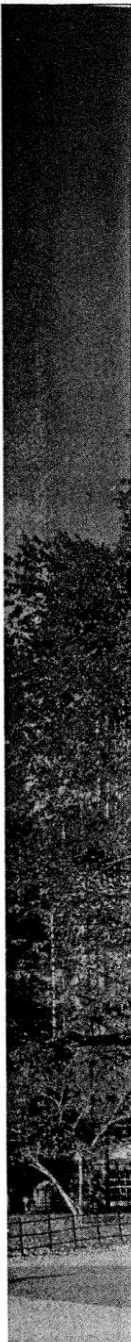
Even as downtown flourished in the 1920s, forces were at work to destroy its centrality and vigor within a few decades. Motor vehicles captured the American imagination and roadways, exacerbating central congestion, cluttering curbspace, and extending urban development miles into the countryside. After World War II, governmental policies stimulated highway building and suburbanization that accelerated the challenge to mass transit and inner-city neighborhoods. By 1960 retailers were following the flight of home owners and industries to distant suburbs. Deteriorating transit facilities, blighted central industrial districts, adjacent minority slums, declining railroad service, and closed department stores tarnished the once glittering image of downtown.

In the 1950s coalitions of public and private civic leaders with economic interests in maintaining central land values and business activity formulated renewal programs that leveraged private investment with federal subsidies for highways, slum clearance, parking garages, and office developments.¹¹ Expressway construction bored through older neighborhoods and split them into separate communities, leveled buildings in great bands around downtown, and usurped blighted waterfronts, cutting the water bodies off from pedestrians. Sprawling interchanges, cement retaining walls, and immense swaths of pavement surrounded downtown redevelopment. Modern Bauhaus architecture, carefully segregated land uses, and super-scaled projects signaled renewal and a vigorous future, but these features and the new highways also froze out pedestrians and squashed an active streetlife (Fig. 14.6).

While urban renewal arrested the physical decline of downtown, in the 1970s a new generation of planners and developers stressed rapid transit, spectator sports, cultural entertainment, streetlife, and waterfront redevelopment. Small parklets with leisure programming, outdoor cafes, pedestrian malls, and linear parks along waterfronts injected open space into downtowns almost for the first time. Retailers now eschewed older practices in favor of combining small vendors in festive markets that strove to convey excitement. While more people-oriented downtowns emerged, the rejuvenation depended on a new generation of even taller office towers. Today, downtown remains the city's premier locus of skyscrapers, regional entertainment, and civic institutions.

In the largest cities, however, downtowns no longer were the only major business district. Suburban centers of offices and stores also flourished, rivaling the size and complexity of downtown.¹² The junction of radial expressways with circumferential beltways and interstate highways created ideal locations for assembling large numbers of workers and shoppers who resided in postwar suburbs. Some corporations tired of downtown's excessive costs and congestion and retreated to suburban sites. Others carved out routine office functions and relocated them within convenient

277 access to a low-paid suburban female workforce. Developers built land-



scaped office campuses in direct opposition to the unruly atmosphere of downtowns, while retailers collected in all-weather malls that became suburban entertainment centers (Fig. 14.7). By the 1970s, a new generation of consumers was maturing, who had never experienced downtown in its heyday and looked upon it as only one of several axes around which to organize their activities. Suburbia's expansive scale required individuals to use automobiles and consequently diminished employment prospects for central-city residents dependent on mass transportation.

While downtown was historically the beacon of the city, manufacturers and wholesalers comprised its energy source. Originally dominating the central waterfront, these industries followed the water and railroad corridors that grew outwardly in ribbons from the center in the 19th century. Early in the century, waterpower sites beyond the city's limits attracted large mill operations, complete with company housing and stores for the workers and their families. As the expanding city overwhelmed these early satellites, some industries again sought large and self-contained sites beyond the urbanized area, this time served by railroads. By 1900 the U.S. Census recognized that traditional city boundaries failed to capture the complexity of the urban region and called it a manufacturing district (later renamed metropolitan).

Location in the city, architecture, building size, and type of industry demarcated the eras of economic development.¹³ Artisans, ship-oriented tradesmen, and piece-work manufacturers packed the lofts of narrow brick

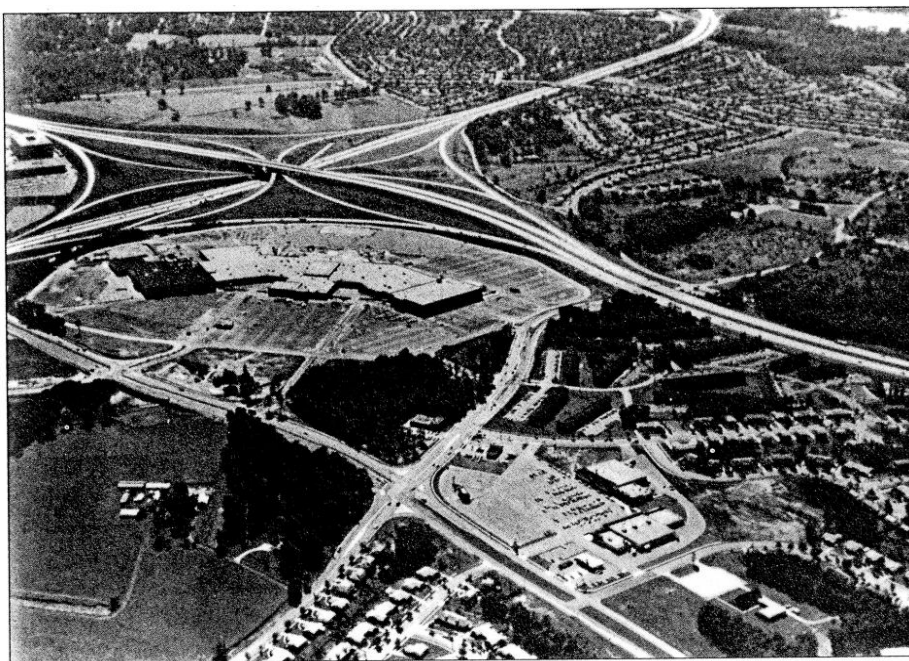
Figure 14.6
The Lower Hill
Redevelopment Area,
Pittsburgh, in a 1956
planners' demonstration
photograph. Containing over
1,500 households and 400
businesses, the buildings
within the area marked out
by the proposed new roads,
Civic Arena, and Crosstown
Boulevard, were eventually
demolished. When
completed, the renewal
project effectively created a
barrier between downtown
and the adjacent black
ghetto.



walk-ups throughout the central waterfront of the early 19th century. Nearby, wholesalers and processors of trade goods such as textiles, leathers, or foodstuffs built three-story structures that consumed an entire city block. The manufacturers of the mid-19th century required more space for storage, assembly, and production. These iron, machinery, or railroad car manufacturers built on the open lands of the expanding industrial corridors, amassing several buildings into complexes employing several hundred workers. By the early 20th century, factories became massive, emphasizing horizontality in one-story structures where automobiles, electrical machinery, or consumer appliances were fabricated. Thousands of workers streamed into these giant complexes through secured plant gates. Beyond the surrounding fences, trolleys, vast parking lots, taverns, and grimy mill towns served the workers. One mill town followed after another, the names often synonymous with corporations—Sparrows Point with Bethlehem Steel or East Pittsburgh with Westinghouse Electric. These corporate giants paid little heed to the environments of the industrial corridors, dumping wastes into adjacent waters and lands, belching soot and toxic chemicals into the air, and sometimes ignoring the needs of dependent communities.

After World War II technically advanced businesses, research divisions, and wholesale distributors chose the flexibility of truck transportation and suburban amenities on the urban periphery. Industrial parks offered cheaper land, access to interstate highways, and landscaped sites near suburban communities. Clustered at interstate interchanges that sometimes coalesced into new industrial corridors around the city, such as Route 128

Figure 14.7
Regional shopping mall in suburban Baltimore, 1972. This view shows the mall, an office plaza (upper left), and a small shopping center (lower center) sharing access to the intersection of two freeways via the road leading off to the left. Surrounding suburban housing tracts would later engulf the farm at lower left.



near Boston, these new industries complicated the simpler spatial pattern of center, corridor, and satellite that characterized the earlier city. Blight, technological obsolescence, and economic restructuring shut down first the central waterfront, then the downtown loft manufacturers, and finally after 1960 the heavy industries of the railroad corridor. As demolition clears these areas, their centrality and often waterfront sites have encouraged imitative or adaptive reuse into industrial parks or entertainment and residential developments (Fig. 14.8; contrast with Fig. 14.3).

Social landscapes

The vision of America transcended purely economic aspirations, however, complicating the forces shaping the urban landscape. Pervasive beliefs in individual liberty, equal opportunity, social justice, and political democracy combined with the nation's rôle as a haven for oppressed peoples to create a culturally plural and socially dynamic society. Behavior, however, did not always conform with belief, generating charged, contentious, and often contradictory social relations in the city. The ever-changing social landscape of the city reflected both the vision and reality of American society—jarring extremes of economic inequality that disrupted the endless middle-class residential blocks, privatized suburban dwellings that contrasted with explicitly demarcated "turfs" of ethnic and racial groups, ceaseless social and geographical mobility that mocked the persistent despair of slums, and the signs and institutions of the contest for economic and political power.

Beginning with the earliest settlers to this New World, immigrants sought an improved standard of living as well as freedom from Old World encumbrances and injustices. As ports of entry and hubs of unskilled jobs, cities retained large numbers of the newcomers. The colonial seaports of Philadelphia and New York contained peoples of diverse religions and languages. Subsequent waves of northwest European immigrants in the mid-19th century and southern and eastern Europeans at the turn of the century complicated the social composition of most cities, except in the South where black Americans contrasted with the white Anglo-Saxon majority. During the initial half of the 20th century blacks moved to northern cities in large numbers, while small hispanic and oriental populations in southwestern and Pacific coastal cities foreshadowed their migration across urban America in the second half of the century.

The cultural plurality resulting from these migrations charged American cities with an incredible social dynamism and tension. Immigrants struggled at menial jobs scattered throughout the city, living in nearby rooming houses, barracks, or other arrangements not always intended for residential purposes. Attracted by the assortment of unskilled jobs in downtowns, recent arrivals, transients, and other poor residents also collected in polyglot central quarters composed of old building stock much subdivided and run



Figure 14.8
Harbor Place in Baltimore,
viewed from the World Trade
Center. Extensive land
clearance made way for new
hotels (upper center and
right), a festival market at
water's edge, and a sanitized
brick plaza—compatible
tourist accoutrements for the
U.S.S. *Constitution*.

down. There were few neighborhoods dominated by a single nationality before the Civil War. In this walking city, workers lived near their job sites or the main loci of employment opportunities. Moreover, the scarcity of housing forced diverse immigrant workers to reside side by side or in clannish pockets that together formed a residential mosaic.¹⁴ Social tensions between foreign and native born workers, protestants and catholics, and racial groups occasionally erupted in violence in the dense quarters, redeveloped with purpose-built tenements at the turn of the century (Fig. 14.9).

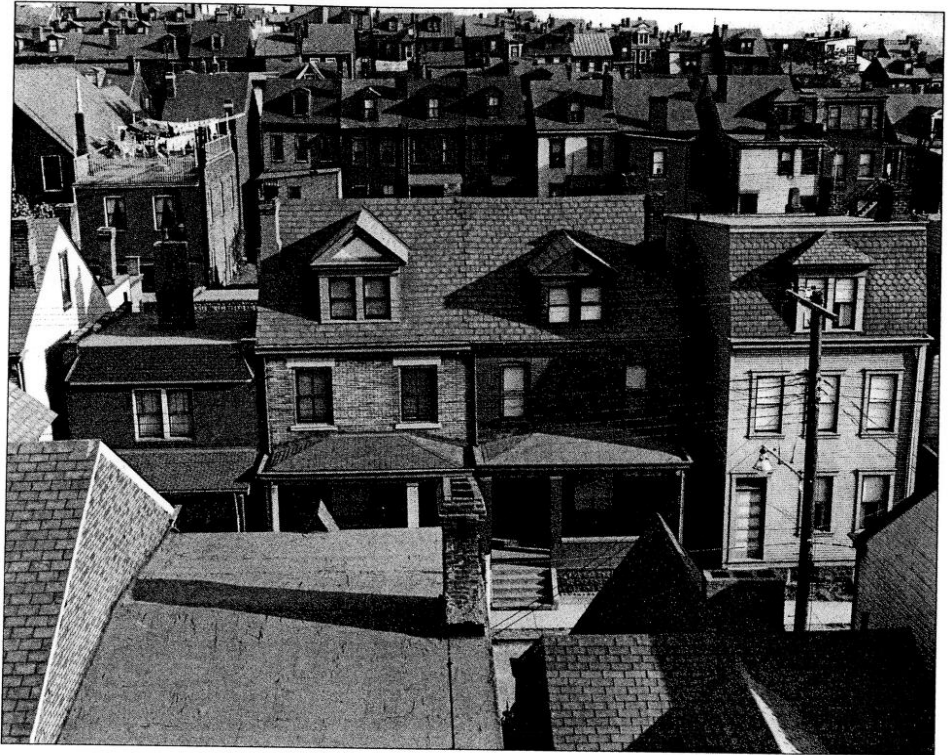
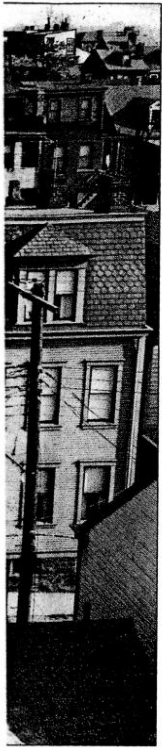


Figure 14.9
Pittsburgh, 1950. By the
middle of the 20th century,
the built environments of the
older neighborhoods
displayed generations of
incremental adaptations and
modifications.

When conditions permitted, immigrants preferred to reside in their own neighborhoods, where kinship, social networks, and community organizations mitigated the tribulations of foreign identity and retail demands created entrepreneurial opportunities. In the second half of the 19th century, the large laborforces of factories and increasing ethnic division of labor fostered the concentration of nationality groups in industrial neighborhoods about the city. Simultaneously, the accelerated suburbanization of middle-income residents freed up a substantial housing stock in older central neighborhoods, where immigrants fashioned self-conscious communities.¹⁵

Overcrowded, poor, and transient, these immigrant neighborhoods exhibited the exotic sights, sounds, and smells of older world, alien quarters in the midst of the New World. Immigrant churches, parochial schools, fraternal orders, and foodstores catered to their countrymen (Fig. 14.10). Rarely was the housing distinctively ethnic, except in the signage and decoration of commercial and community buildings. Employment linkages to nearby industries, economic hardship, and self-conscious ethnic identity more than outright discrimination, generated these separate neighborhoods. Nevertheless, even at their peak, such districts usually harbored members and institutions of other nationalities. Often, a majority of immigrants did not reside in the neighborhood of their compatriots, since many worked and lived throughout the urban region.

*The Americanization
of the city*



By World War I most cities housed several immigrant groups distinguished by their varying longevity in the region, size, economic achievement, and self-conscious ethnicity. With the 1920s restriction on additional immigration, assimilation, and new generations eventually diminished traditional nationality loyalties. The divergent paths of economic mobility and assimilation to American life taken by immigrant children further differentiated the social landscape.¹⁶ Long-term employment stability underlay the persistence of some traditional neighborhoods well past World War II, when successful union contracts propelled workers into middle-class consumption and leisure behavior. In contrast, the precocious economic successes of other groups rapidly dismantled the original immigrant community through either assimilation with the American mainstream or movement into more prosperous neighborhoods, where residents retained some ethnic and religious affiliations but no longer identified closely with immigrant origins. This rise, decline, disappearance, and reformulation of immigrant and ethnic neighborhoods produced a dynamic, patterned social geography in which neighborhood composition could change within two generations or persist for several.

Even as rising incomes and changing social identities reshaped the residential landscape in the 20th century, the influx of black migrants markedly increased social tensions and separation. Southern blacks fled rural poverty and racial discrimination for perceived economic and civil

Figure 14.10
Philadelphia, around 1910.
This street scene in Little
Italy undoubtedly appeared
exotic to middle-class
American residents of the
city.



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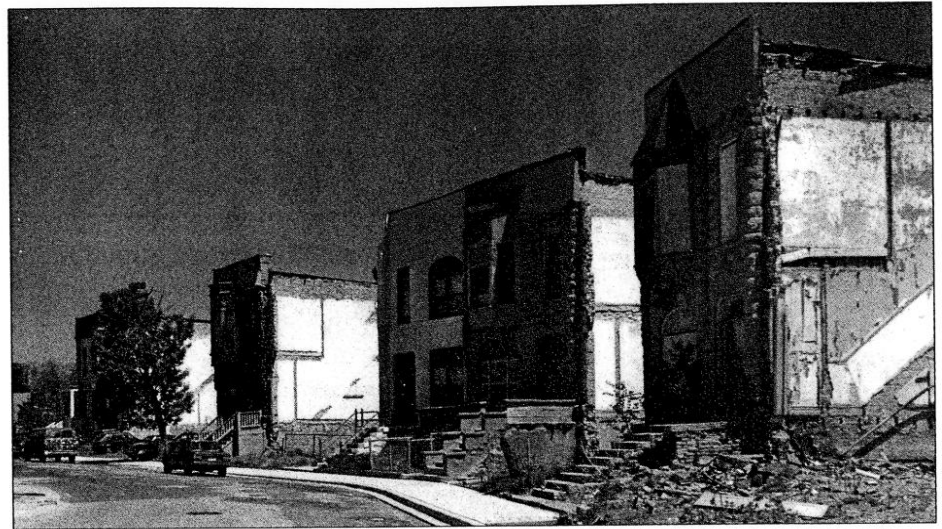
freedoms of northern cities.¹⁷ While the benefits of migration were often tangible, most blacks were relegated to the lowest paying and least secure jobs and still faced discrimination in the city's workplaces, union halls, housing markets, and other institutions. The early migrants before World War I established small communities alongside central immigrant neighborhoods, but the thousands who arrived in the 1920s encountered stiffening resistance from white neighbors. Segregation became institutionalized in governmental policies, real estate practices, and financial lending programs. Hemmed in by discriminatory barriers, blacks piled up in racial ghettos and slowly extended residential beachheads into older, declining immigrant quarters. Built on weak economic foundations and overwhelmed by new migrants, ghettos developed the pathologies of impoverished slums. Extreme deprivation during the Depression and unrealized expectations for World War II's economic opportunities occasioned some racial violence, but the real combustion awaited postwar developments.¹⁸

Migration resumed after the war and could not be contained in the original ghettos. Suburbanization, especially white flight, opened more inner-city housing to blacks, and soon additional neighborhoods were attached to the ghetto. The advancing black population inflamed white working class residents, who were unwilling or economically unable to flee to the suburbs. White resistance, urban renewal, and entrenched discrimination confined expansion of blacks to inner-city areas. This growing minority population changed the demography and power structure of the older city, polarizing it from the white middle-class suburbs that recoiled from the city's problems. Grinding poverty in the ghettos, where dilapidated housing and declining job prospects beleaguered the poor and frustrated the aspirations of the black middle class who could not escape racial stigmatism, exploded under the leadership of civil rights activists in the 1960s. The violence and property destruction starkly demonstrated that black migrants had not been following economic and social trajectories similar to those of European immigrants.¹⁹ This landscape of racial polarization contrasted sharply with the dynamic mosaic that had attended European adaptation and assimilation. Boarded storefronts, vacant lots, abandoned buildings, crowded tenements, littered roadways, and street corners of idle men marked the most desperate districts (Fig. 14.11).

While descendants of European immigrants inhabited a patchwork of working- and middle-class communities and blacks struggled for survival and justice, during the 1970s Latin Americans poured into inner-city neighborhoods as the latest urban migrants. Working at low paying service and manufacturing jobs, establishing their own institutions, creating barrios alive with Latin sounds and outdoor artwork, and participating in local politics, these hispanic newcomers scrambled the economic and racial polarity that had emerged after World War II. Oriental immigrants also carved out niches in several cities, adding an exotic, often economically successful, and sometimes contentious element to the unfolding social geography. While vestiges of European ethnic institutions remain in many

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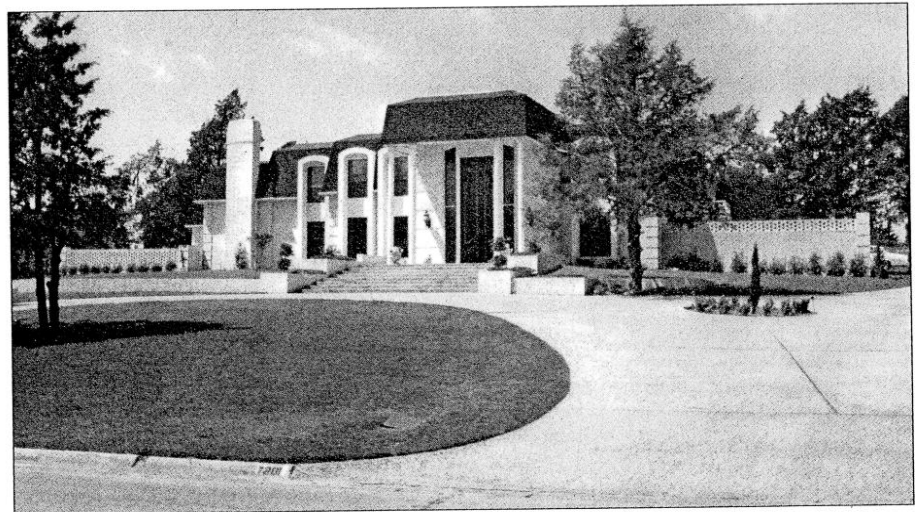
Figure 14.11
Surviving buildings on East
46th Street in Chicago. This
gapped cityscape hints at
the process of past
neighborhood disinvestment
as torchings and demolitions
for health and safety reasons
depleted the housing stock of
the worst affected districts.
Sweat-equity renovation and
black gentrification are taking
hold of this precinct after
years of neglect.



older neighborhoods, especially in the northern manufacturing cities, the distinctive economic rôles, politics, and community institutions of hispanic, oriental, and black groups have maintained, but reformulated, the traditional variegated landscape of the inner city.

Along with long-term economic growth, the enduring faith in individual liberty and a tolerance of diversity enabled American cities to withstand and absorb the periodic influx of immigrants. While advantages of élite lineage and nagging cultural discrimination persisted, this creed, however grudgingly, recognized meritorious performance and rising wealth as worthy attributes. The corresponding emphasis on materialism, reinforced by protestant beliefs, became one means of displaying success and extended middle-class status to a broad spectrum of society (Fig. 14.12).

Figure 14.12
Flashy residence in
Oklahoma City, built during
the oil-boom days of the early
1970s. Manicured lawns and
a palatial driveway set off a
home struggling with its
mixed French Empire, Greek
Revival, and California
Modern inspiration.



Blessed with immense land resources, Americans believed that property ownership both imbued owners with status and security and formed democracy's foundation. Although renting shelter was a longstanding practice, home ownership in the city became not only an obtainable goal but also increasingly widespread among the populace. The building fabric of cities reflected regional vernacular traditions, whether composed of wood or brick, row-houses or separate dwellings, or myriad other features. In the earliest cities, small lots, modest and little differentiated domestic architecture, and socially mixed neighborhoods presented an egalitarian appearance that masked social inequalities, except for those of the wealthy or severely destitute.²⁰ By the mid-19th century, the deteriorating environment, worsening congestion, and increasing foreign immigration rekindled an anti-urban bias and fueled an emerging domestic ideology among middle-class Americans, which stressed the family's moral rôle in nurturing order amidst urban chaos. A separate dwelling on a landscaped lot set apart from the city's clamor solved the agrarian ideal and the family's moral imperative. Families with the time and income to afford commuting to work undertook the suburban trek that emphasized a private familial existence. While architectural individuality and bucolic community planning appropriately accompanied this process in the 19th century, mass transportation and construction increasingly made suburban developments accessible to middle-class families, paradoxically homogenizing the appearance of these new residential areas.²¹

When the city's well-heeled residents relocated in newer suburbs, their old elegant houses, indeed their former neighborhoods, often filtered down to less prosperous buyers and eventually faded into the general landscape. But some wealthy neighborhoods like Philadelphia's Society Hill or Baltimore's Bolton Hill either maintained their social identity, aging with a genteel patina amidst inner-city decay, or avoided complete decomposition long enough for the architectural rescue of today's gentrification (Fig. 14.13).

The autonomy and privacy of the automobile embodied the suburban expression of individual freedom and economic mobility. Suburbanites incorporated the automobile into their life-style before World War II. However, increases in blue-collar incomes and leisure time, inexpensive automobiles, and governmentally subsidized highways and home financing after the war brought suburban living in reach of working-class families. Residential developments with minimal visual variety sprawled monotonously across gigantic swaths of land, broken only by highways, shopping centers, and factories until the major suburban commercial developments of the 1960s. Although the low density and institutional sterility which distinguished these neighborhoods from the city invited social criticism, the middle-class inhabitants evolved lifestyles that paradoxically combined voluntary participation in leisure and special interest organizations with an obsession for familial privacy (Fig. 14.14). Freedom from close community supervision blended with conservative concerns for neighborhood norms to yield only superficial demarcations of individuality such as in color or

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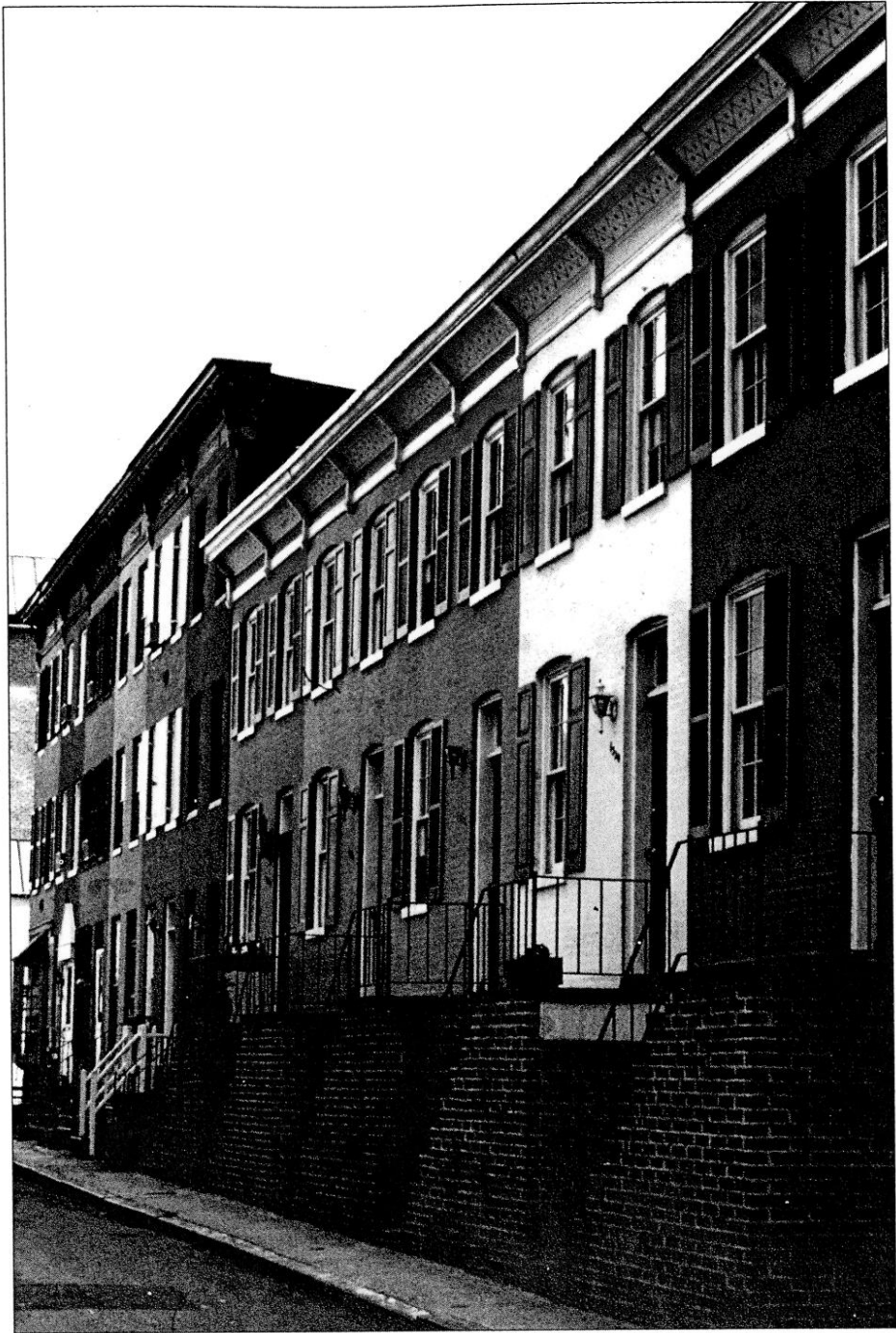


Figure 14.13 Rutter Alley in Baltimore. In some cities, gentrification has reached into lower-income areas, displacing former residents who must find alternative housing in a tight market. Note the trim shutters, coach lamps, and painted cornice of these renovated row-houses.

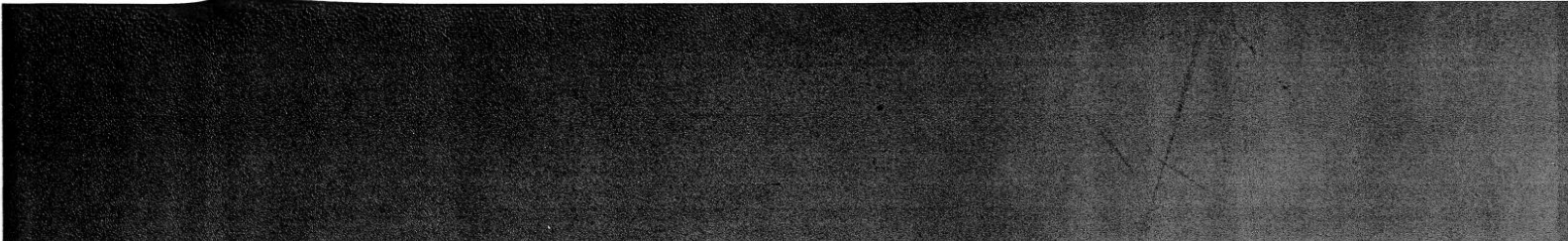


Figure 14.14

A mass-produced suburb in Pennsylvania, around 1960.

In this inexpensive residential development note the uniformity of bungalow design, lack of garages, and undisguised utility provision.

The spare quality of new suburban subdivisions may soften after a generation of plant and tree growth.

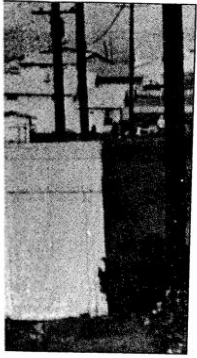


decoration on the otherwise massproduced landscape.

The suburban landscape reflected the prevalence of automobiles in its organization, architecture, and land use. Expansive and horizontal suburbs shunned a pedestrian scale for complete dependence on automobile movement. Isolated stores and shopping centers were surrounded by massive parking lots or strung out for miles along highways. There were dozens of automobile-oriented stores and drive-in services from restaurants to banking. Residential blocks no longer had service alleys, so that garages and paved driveways obscured house façades. Adolescents designated streets for "cruising" in their cars as a form of entertainment. Regional shopping malls offered entertainment programs but provided limited community-wide integration. Only public schools, churches, sports organizations, and local crises, such as the prospect of an unwanted development or resident, created community involvement beyond home and personal networks. Sprawling one after another, the suburbs came to form a bewildering array of communities, maintaining identification with the metropolitan region through employment linkages, the media, and professional sports teams.²² In the larger metropolises, the original cities' hold over suburban sentiments diminished with each generation.

Governance and the landscape

This America, in which the emphasis on individualism often became excessive materialism and tolerance crumbled under the weight of nativism and racism, included nevertheless an abiding belief in basic rights for all its citizens. The plight of the disadvantaged in the competitive, capitalist economy and often intolerant social milieu periodically stimulated reform movements for social justice. Aggrieved groups and organizations acting on behalf of the underprivileged have used the legal system, political power available in a representative democracy, and organized protest to redress social inequities. In the years before massive industrialization and immigra-



tion transformed the cities, municipal governments tended to support business concerns for economic growth, civil order, and infrastructure, leaving social issues to the individuals involved or to private organizations.²³ The city's increased social and physical complexity after the mid-19th century forced local government to become more involved in social welfare and allowed established immigrant groups to compete for political power. But, the inclusive political spectrum did not benefit the city's newcomers and poor.

In a spurt of reform at the turn of the century, private organizations worked to improve housing, environmental quality, and health and social services through both the prodding of local government and private sector initiatives. Extensive parks, playgrounds, settlement houses in immigrant neighborhoods, sanitation and water systems, housing codes, and philanthropically bestowed cultural institutions ameliorated the harsh inner-city world of the industrial metropolis. Unfortunately, the reluctance to tamper with the private enterprise system or pre-empt private property prerogatives limited reform results. Despite the creation of imaginative master plans, new professional urban planners only minimally influenced private development in the early 20th century and performed meek advisory rôles for municipal government, which focused on technical issues like traffic flow. Instead, civic leaders and architects orchestrated the display of the industrial city's rising status around planned civic centers composed of new public buildings, nonprofit institutions, and official monuments.²⁴

The devastating Depression of the 1930s finally forced government at all levels to become more active in urban issues. In a partnership with city authorities, the federal government financed new highways, bridges, airports, and other municipal services, underwrote slum clearance, and subsidized private redevelopment projects.²⁵ Low-income public housing especially signaled the departure from strictly private sector proclivities. Massive housing projects, promising decent housing for all Americans, replaced decrepit tenements with spare, but modern low and high-rise buildings arranged in compounds of several blocks. By the 1960s the large number of these housing projects dramatically altered the inner-city landscape, contrasting in scale, texture, and spatial arrangement with the previous century's extant neighborhoods (Fig. 14.15).²⁶ These housing policies joined with other social programs to redistribute some income to the urban poor, but did little to release them from the separate world of the inner city.

The new directions in social policy only initially aggravated the racial polarization between city and suburb. They provided meager handouts, instead of meaningful economic opportunities, that confined poor blacks to segregated public housing in already segregated areas, while whites either benefited from governmental programs that promoted suburbanization or resented governmental largesse targeted for inner-city blacks. Civil rights pressures for open housing and fair employment practices, along with the rioting of the 1960s, finally riveted white society's attention and obtained

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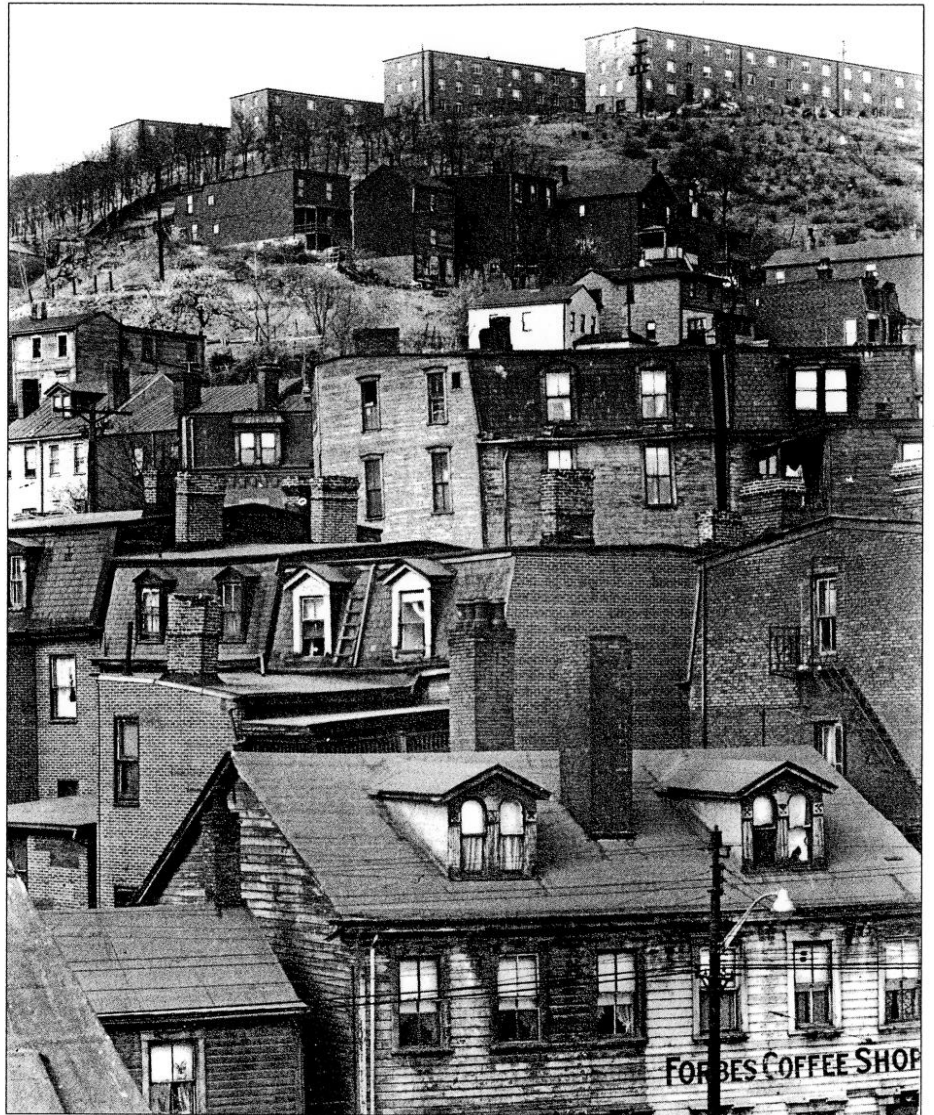
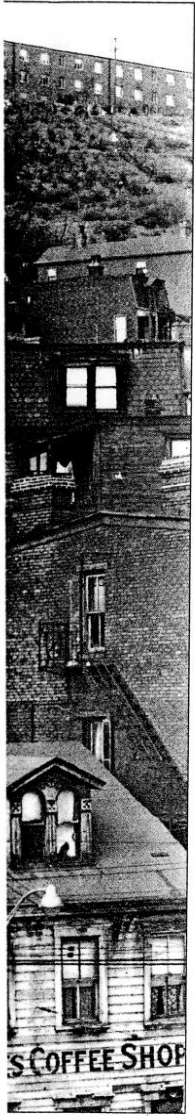


Figure 14.15
Terrace Village, Pittsburgh,
in 1951. Although some of
the nation's earliest public
housing exhibited
architectural merit, after
World War II most projects
added little of redeeming
value to the landscape,
except for replacement of
substandard buildings that
were no longer habitable.
Here, the visual contrasts
between old and new are full
of irony.

legislation for an integrated society. While race continued to separate neighborhoods and schools within the urban region after the 1960s, economic abilities came to provide a more important distinction in the social landscape. With legal support, more members of America's distinctive racial groups enjoyed economic success and moved beyond their former neighborhoods into integrated areas, leaving behind a tragically isolated and deprived racial underclass in central ghettos.²⁷

290 National concerns for air and water quality after World War II also embraced cities where automobile pollution, industrial dumping, waste production, and sewage disposal presented awful problems. Protest, regulatory legislation, and finally recognition of developmental implications



slowly led to the improvement of urban air, water, and land usage. By the 1970s improving environmental conditions and governmental subsidies stimulated development of waterfront amenities and residences on older blighted properties, which espoused outdoor life-styles for middle-class consumers who would replace former poor residents. For middle-class residents, the city as a place to live emerged alongside the traditional perspective of the city as a place of work.²⁸

The American way

Ever since Coca Cola signs began appearing in the farthest corners of the world, commentators have bemoaned the Americanization of the world's landscape. American cities originated from European roots and measured their progress for a century or two against European standards. Nevertheless, they eventually developed a self-conscious identity and associated form, which reflected the society's particular ideology, economy, and social composition.²⁹ By the mid-20th century the almost single-minded devotion to economic pursuits had produced the dramatic profile of downtown skyscrapers that overshadowed weakly defined cultural and administrative spaces, the spontaneous patchwork of monotonous grid plans, a paucity of open public space in central areas, and the fascination with newness and large size. Boosters trumpeted growth, progress, modernism, and size as hallmarks of greatness. Growth occurred largely within the limitations of investment prudence and without much in the way of governmental oversight. The freedom vested in private enterprise and property ownership created landscapes filled with contradictory, sometimes conflicting, land uses, frequent change, and uneven sprawl into the countryside. Embracing individual privacy and eschewing high urban densities, middle income residents chose home ownership, maximum personal space, and landscaped lots in the suburbs. Immigrants and lower-income residents crowded into tenement quarters, separate from the middle class mainstream; they too were free in theory to make their own choices.

The repercussions of privatized growth and excessive materialism, as seen in deleterious environments, suffocating traffic congestion, spotty infrastructural services, visual chaos, and unattended social needs, became the responsibilities of governmental officials, planners, reformers, and business leaders, fearing a declining investment environment, a negative city image, or at worst social upheaval. In early America, civic leaders had attacked issues that affected the city's economic growth, presented an immediate crisis, or were within the narrow purview of private charity. However, the problems resulting from rapid immigration and industrialization generated a debate that progressively redefined the public interest and responsibilities of local government. The ability in a political democracy of new economic, ethnic, and special interest groups to enter this debate broadened the scope

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Increased governmental regulation, coordination, and initiative and the private sector's public service programs carefully work within a political and ideological framework of partnership that preserves private enterprise's independence and protects the rights of individuals, property owners, and exotic social groups, albeit within circumscribed limits of freedom prescribed by the expanded conception of public interest. The contradictions in American society generate vacillation over the merits of public and private initiatives, responsibilities for fostering economic growth, and means for providing municipal and social services. Nevertheless, the abiding faith in individualism, private enterprise, and equal opportunity maintains an American distinctiveness amidst the internationalization of many urban technologies, policies, and landscapes.

- 34 Devine 1983.
- 35 Dunn 1983; Jones 1938.
- 36 Dunn 1983.
- 37 Warren 1973.
- 38 Clark 1929, vol. 3, pp. 157-64; Dunn 1983, vol. 2, pp. 151-2.
- 39 U.S. Bureau of the Census 1975, Series Q148-162.
- 40 Hall & Markusen 1985.

14 *The Americanization of the city*

- 1 For a popular description of the modern American city, see Lockwood & Leinberger (1988, pp. 31-56).
- 2 Bellah 1986, Ch. 2; Lemon 1972, Preface and pp. 1-13; Warner 1968, pp. ix-xii.
- 3 Teaford 1975.
- 4 Vance 1971, pp. 101-20.
- 5 Vance 1977, pp. 245-69.
- 6 Reps 1979.
- 7 Muller 1980, pp. 747-55.
- 8 Barth 1980, pp. 110-47.
- 9 Goldberger 1981.
- 10 Stilgoe 1983, pp. 30-45.
- 11 Mollenkopf 1983.
- 12 Muller 1981, Ch. 4.
- 13 Hoover & Vernon 1962, pp. 21-73.
- 14 Burstein 1981, pp. 174-203.
- 15 Ward 1971; and Zunz 1982.
- 16 Bodnar *et al.* 1982.
- 17 Gottlieb 1987.
- 18 Spear 1967; Kusmer 1976.
- 19 Hirsch 1983.
- 20 Wright 1981, Ch. 2.
- 21 Jackson 1985, pp. 45-137; Doucet & Weaver 1985, pp. 560-87; Warner 1962.
- 22 Jackson 1985, pp. 157-282; Muller 1981, Chs. 2 & 3.
- 23 Rothman 1971.
- 24 Teaford 1984; Lubove 1969; Scott 1969; Tunnard & Reed 1956, pp. 136-53.
- 25 Gelfand 1975.
- 26 Bauman 1987.
- 27 Wilson 1987; Lukas 1985.
- 28 Daly 1987.
- 29 Wissink 1962; Lichtenberger 1970, pp. 45-62.

15 *Landscapes redesigned for the automobile*

- 1 See Dodds 1961, p. 146.
- 2 *Ibid.*
- 3 Wik 1972, p. 233.
- 4 Jackson 1985, p. 161.
- 5 Rae 1981, p. 57.
- 6 Jackson 1985, p. 162.
- 7 Dodds 1961, p. 147.