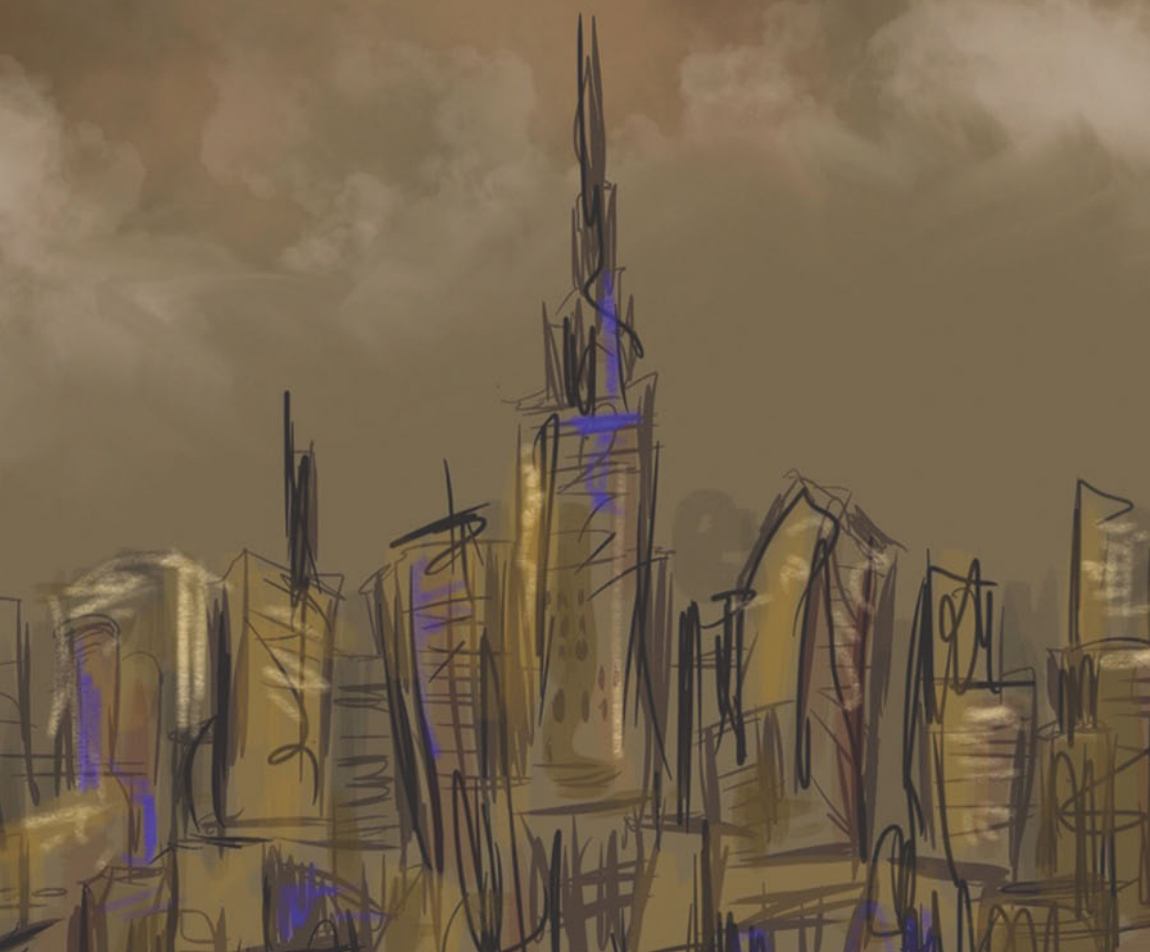


# AMERICA'S URBAN HISTORY

LISA KRISOFF BOEHM and STEVEN H. COREY



# America's Urban History

The history of the American city is, in many ways, the history of the United States. Although rural traditions have also left their impact on the country, cities and urban living have been vital components of America for centuries, and an understanding of the urban experience is essential to comprehending America's past. *America's Urban History* is an engaging and accessible overview of the life of American cities, from Native American settlements before the arrival of Europeans to the present-day landscape of suburban sprawl, urban renewal, and a heavily urbanized population.

The book provides readers with a rich chronological and thematic narrative, covering themes including:

- The role of cities in the European settlement of North America
- Cities and westward expansion
- Social reform in the industrialized cities
- The impact of the New Deal
- The growth of the suburbs
- The relationships between urban forms and social issues of race, class, and gender

Covering the evolving story of the American city with depth and insight, *America's Urban History* is the first stop for all those seeking to explore the American urban experience.

**Lisa Krissoff Boehm** is Interim Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences at Worcester State University.

**Steven H. Corey** is Professor and Chair of the Department of Humanities, History, and Social Sciences at Columbia College Chicago.

Together, they are the editors of *The American Urban Reader*, an anthology of primary and secondary sources in American urban history.

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# America's Urban History

Lisa Krissoff Boehm and  
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*For Christopher D. Boehm and Alexandra Filindra*

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# Acknowledgments

This book was formally born during lunch at the Prudential Center in Boston, when Steve Corey, Lisa Krissoff Boehm, and Kimberly Guinta (Routledge) were touching base about the final production of our previous adventure, *The American Urban Reader: History and Theory* (Routledge, 2011) during a meeting of the American Historical Association. “Might you now be interested,” Lisa asked, “in having us write a comprehensive history of the American city?” Kim expressed her approval. Not worrying too much about the work ahead, the new book project began.

We did not know at that time that Steve would soon move on from serving as the Chair of the Urban Studies Department and Professor of Urban Studies at Worcester State University to become Professor and Chair of the Department of Humanities, History, and Social Science at Columbia College Chicago, and that Lisa would alternately serve as Interim Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences at Worcester State University, Chair of the Urban Studies Department and Professor of Urban Studies at Worcester State University and the Senior Associate Dean of Academic Affairs and Professor of History at Emmanuel College, Boston. While our last book, *The American Urban Reader*, grew out of seemingly endless meetings in the City Lab when we both conveniently worked at Worcester State University, *America’s Urban History* is the product of the powers of technology, including airplane transportation, Skype, texting, telephone, and email. Thus it makes sense that the volume ends with a discussion of the ways in which technology affects urban life.

We want to thank Worcester State University for granting us a summer research grant used to travel to archives and purchase materials for further study. We want to thank Emmanuel College for granting the project funding through the Summer Research Program. This funding enabled student Emily Larkin to join the project during the summer of 2013 and offer her invaluable insights. Emily’s reading of the manuscript proved a great help, as she showed us how to make the work more accessible to students.

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# Introduction

## Discovering and Defining the “City Upon a Hill”

### **The Salience of Urban History**

The history of the American city is in many ways the history of the United States. Although the agricultural tradition of rural America has left an indelible mark on the physical and cultural landscape, the United States (U.S.) is essentially an urban nation, and has been so for a much longer period and to a greater degree than is generally acknowledged. Indeed, it is impossible to understand the fundamental narrative of American history without appreciating the nation’s urban past. The same can be said for other nations, particularly in Europe. Since 2007–2008, when the world’s population became more urban than rural, the history of cities in general has also become a roadmap for the planet’s future.<sup>1</sup> [See Table I.1 “Global Urban Population and Percentages by Region.”]

This book explores the history of that portion of North America now called the United States through an urban lens. While there are multiple stories to be told about the people and places that make up America’s history, there is clearly a narrative that encompasses how Native Americans established dense settlements, European colonists “planted in towns” to create new cities, and generations of slaves, immigrants, and people of all social and economic backgrounds contributed to the development of the varied urban forms that we live and work in today. Technology too, especially in the form of transportation, communication, and manufacturing infrastructure, has shaped modern urban forms and lifestyles in a myriad of profound ways.

We are aware that some readers may consider our use of the words “America” and “American” to refer to people, places, and events in the United States, or the territory that became the United States, as chauvinistic. However, we are simply employing the dominant terminology of scholars and social commentators of our own time, and in previous generations, and imply no insult or claim of uniqueness and/or American exceptionalism. Where patterns and attitudes distinctive to the United States are uncovered, they are contextualized and historicized with experiences of other nations and regions. We cannot employ the term United States to cover the entirety of the book, for the volume begins prior to the founding of the nation.

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In examining America's urban past, one is learning much that is critical to understanding the present. The United States is one of the most heavily urbanized places in the world. Even though several dozen countries have a higher percentage of their residents living in areas officially designated as "urban," only two nations, China and India, have larger urban populations. China and India, however, have significantly lower urbanization levels, at 51 and 30 percent respectively, compared to 82 percent in the United States. [See Table I.2 "The World's Twenty Largest Urban Populations by Country."] Indeed, urban forms dominate the residential landscape of the United States and range dramatically in size, shape, economic function, and social composition. While highly populated and physically sprawling metropolises like New York City and Los Angeles, as well as medium-sized cities like Boise, Idaho and Birmingham, Alabama are commonly associated with being "urban," that label also applies to large and medium-sized towns such as Arlington, Massachusetts and smaller, quiet, country-squire suburbs like Hinckley, Ohio.

Long before the Fourteenth Census of the United States for 1920 confirmed that the majority of Americans resided in urban spaces, cities, both real and imaginary, played a central role in the cultural, economic, political, and social life of North America. European nations planned the settlement of their colonies around the idea of cities. Urbanization in North America, though, predated the arrival of Europeans, although the most populated pre-Columbian settlements, or what remained of them, were certainly unfamiliar to the early Europeans who lived along the Atlantic seaboard and arrived after the heyday of the largest pre-Columbian cities and towns. Urban imagery and lifestyles, though, were foremost in the minds of both the Europeans who encouraged the migration of others, and those who immigrated in order to exploit the riches of the vast land and forge a new life in the Americas. Whether in the quest to discover lost civilizations such as "El Dorado," establish thriving trading centers, or build a new "Wilderness Zion," cities served as the idealized form of settlement and the benchmark of success for Europeans.

The most enduring urban allegory in American history comes from the early years of English settlement. In 1630 John Winthrop delivered his famous sermon, "A Model of Christian Charity," before disembarking from the ship *Arabella* (also written as *Arbella*) to settle Boston, Massachusetts. To emphasize the importance of the Puritan mission to create a new utopian community, Winthrop selected the biblical image of a "City Upon a Hill" and reminded his followers that "the eyes of all people are upon us." Much has been made of the "City Upon a Hill" metaphor: it has inspired generations of Americans, for better or worse, to believe that the United States is God's country and an exceptional nation. Winthrop's sermon, however, stressed the need for justice and mercy, noting that all people were knit together in one body by the bonds of God's love. Winthrop, in essence, was calling for a Commonwealth, where rich and poor lived together, tied by mutual and reciprocal bonds of Christian love and responsibility. These themes have resonated throughout American history and have served as an important source of inspiration for social reformers,

particularly those who dealt with the dramatic transformations associated with the rise of the modern city in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>2</sup>

Although numerous towns and a handful of larger port cities existed during the colonial and early national periods of American history, a distinctly new form of urbanization emerged alongside industrial manufacturing in the first half of the nineteenth century. Cities in the United States, like those in Great Britain and other parts of Europe, were becoming much larger and more numerous, helping to spearhead the development of the American frontier. For example, New York City (then confined to the island of Manhattan) contained just 33,131 people in 1790, edging out Philadelphia's 28,522 to rank as the nation's largest city. By 1850, New York's population soared to 515,547, making it the largest city in both North and South America. In terms of absolute numbers, there were just twenty-four urban places within the United States in 1790 (defined, as discussed below, as places with a population of 2,500 or more people) containing just over 5 percent of the nation's population. By 1900, there were 1,743 urban areas containing 40 percent of the nation's population, with New York City again the largest with 3.4 million people. And in the 1920s, New York City and its metropolitan area finally surpassed London and its environs as the world's largest city and metropolitan area respectively.<sup>3</sup> [See Table I.3 "The Urbanization of the United States, 1790–2010."]

While these figures surely indicate growth, they often fail to capture exactly what was transformed, and how. Nor do they address what factors make a place urban. Is it population size? Is it density? Does the inclusion of the word "city" as part of a municipal area's official name make that place urban? Do the words "city" and "urban" even mean the same thing? Ensuing chapters illustrate that definitions of urban have changed considerably over time and place as cities and their surrounding metropolitan regions grew and developed into new and different configurations. We also realize that there will be some degree of uncertainty accompanying the use of the words "town," "borough," and "municipal," as well as "rural," "agrarian," and "country-side" in this volume, just to name a few of the most often employed terms dealing with how and where people live and work throughout the United States. When necessary, greater clarity and sharper definitions will be provided, especially when the words reflect ideas and trends particular to a certain period of time or location.

## **What is a City? What is Urban?**

In general, "city" and "urban" are used interchangeably today by social and cultural commentators, government officials, and even scholars such as ourselves, despite their divergent etymology. Indeed, the word "city" derives from the Latin "civitas," which refers to a city and its inhabitants, or citizens. The word "civitas" is also at the base of "civilization" and therefore forms the long-standing association in Western thought between the notion of human



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progress and the establishment and development of cities. The word “urban” itself comes from the Latin “*urbs*,” which denotes physical features or the built environment. Such distinctions, though, have been largely lost over time and have been subsumed by bigger questions about the nature of urban life and the meaning of large, densely populated cities.

The tremendous reconfiguration of social and physical space that characterized the rapid rise of urban centers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries fascinated, and even shocked those who observed it first hand. Since then, social commentators and scholars alike have been intrigued by the question “What is a city?” Not surprisingly, attempts to address this question have led to numerous lines of inquiry, schools of thought, and even questions about the nature of urbanization itself. Perceptions of the city and urbanization have been varied, although much of the vast scholarly literature distinguishes between urban as a place, a process, and a way of life. Our own approach draws from noted sociologist and demographer Kingsley Davis’ characterization of urbanization as “the proportion of the total population concentrated in urban settlements, or else . . . a rise in this proportion.”<sup>4</sup> Even this description, though, needs greater clarity and historical context to explain how perceptions of cities and urbanization are shaped by larger cultural, economic, political, and social trends.

### **Urban as a Place**

Designating a specific location as urban involves what seems at first glance to be a relatively simple act: counting people. However, during the nineteenth century, the relative newness of rapidly developing cities—as well as the emerging field of statistics itself—made it difficult to determine exactly how inhabitants and other aspects of urbanization should be tallied. For example, even the most basic question of how many people made a place “urban” lacked uniform agreement, a condition that, as noted below, remains prevalent throughout the world today. Remarkably, in the United States, not even the federal agency charged with counting the nation’s population, the Bureau of the Census, could come up with a uniform threshold number for urban, or even a way to accurately separate out those who lived in a populous area from a rural one situated within the same county.

The inability to distinguish urban and rural populations was noted as early as 1854 by J.D.B. DeBow, the Superintendent of the Census, who lamented that hundreds of important towns and cities, especially in the South and West, were essentially under-represented in census returns. Even with this limitation, though, he estimated that 25 percent of the country lived in an urbanized area, meaning a village, a town, or city.<sup>5</sup> DeBow’s calculation is considerably higher than the roughly 15 percent figure currently used by the Bureau of the Census as an estimation of the percentage of the U.S. population that was urban in 1850. [See Table I.3 “The Urbanization of the United States, 1790–2010.”]

To better account for the urban population, DeBow proposed a two-tiered method to classify and present population statistics, with the first being “Towns and Cities,” each with a population of more than 2,000 people, and the second “Cities,” with more than 10,000 occupants.<sup>6</sup> While this split system was not adopted, in 1874 the Bureau of the Census did use a threshold of 8,000 for urban, although that was lowered to 4,000 in 1880, and then to 2,500 in 1910. In the 1930s, the Bureau of the Census used the 2,500 mark to go back and recalculate the size and number of urban areas since the first federal census in 1790; today these figures are the most commonly cited by demographers, historians, and other urban scholars examining change in American cities over time.

Except where noted, 2,500 is used throughout this volume as the urban threshold for the United States since 1790. That figure also remains at the core of census definitions of urban to the present, although it has been modified over the last century to include such things as densely populated clusters in larger rural communities or unincorporated places, known as “extended cities” or “census designated places.” Amalgamations of urban areas over large geographical areas of densely populated settlements are also at the core of the term Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) and other variations used by U.S. government agencies.

Although 2,500 people hardly makes a location a metropolis, it does help distinguish it from being rural. Today, over 80 percent of the United States population lives in an urban area, whether in “urban clusters,” large cities, suburbs, or sprawling MSAs. In fact, by 2010, almost a dozen cities in the United States contained a million or more inhabitants within their incorporated municipal boundaries, with the largest, New York City having almost 8.2 million inhabitants, followed by Los Angeles with roughly 3.8 million and Chicago at 2.7 million. [See Table I.4 “Twenty Largest Cities in the United States by Population, 2010.”] That same year, there were over 180 separate MSAs containing 250,000 or more people, stretching across the country from coast to coast, with the twenty largest containing between 2.7 and almost 19 million people. [See Table I.5 “Twenty Largest Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) in the United States by Population, 2010.”]

The total number of people residing in a specific area is just one of several ways that government agencies across the world classify locations as urban. Other categories include population density, or the ratio of people to a specific geographical unit such as acre, mile, or kilometer. Fifty-one nations currently use some combination of population tallies and density, albeit with considerable variation. Sweden, for example, defines urban as any place with more than two hundred inhabitants, Denmark uses the figure of 250, and Canada uses 1,000. Greece sets the number for urban at 10,000, and Japan sets the bar considerably higher, at 30,000. In addition to counting people, countries also designated locations as urban by economic activity, for example, if more than half of the population is involved in non-agricultural occupations. Other delineators for urban can include those of a functional nature—for instance, urbanity

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may be defined by the level of infrastructure development (paved roads, sewers, waterworks, and electricity). Administrative or legal status, such as whether a location serves as a regional capital, may also define urban. Thirty-nine nations, including India, use economic activity, and well over half of the 228 nations that report urban data to the United Nations use a variation of administrative and functional criteria.<sup>7</sup>

### **Urban as a Process**

Equally important as population tallies is an examination of the ways in which a location becomes urban, or as Kingsley Davis notes, even more urban. Urbanization as a process, therefore, is broadly conceived to include population distribution, most notably the movement of people to densely populated areas, as well as accompanying social, economic, and physical organization and transformation of space. In short, we argue throughout the following chapters that urbanization can be best understood as the creation of new cultural, economic, political, and social relationships. Therefore, urbanization cannot be measured by mere statistics, since it embodies such things as economic opportunity, freedom of worship, cultural vitality (including diversity), individual reinvention, and familial cultures.

The rise of cities occurred alongside a number of concomitant trends that accentuated the promise of urban life and, simultaneously, gave rise to or exacerbated an array of existing social problems, such as racial and ethnic conflict, the development of political machines and corruption, inadequate housing, poor sanitation and widespread industrial pollution, and increasing economic inequality. These were just some of the issues foremost on the agenda of civic and business leaders, social reformers, and government representatives who sought to reinvent the city according to their own ideals. Central to these efforts was the rise of systematic social inquiry designed to provide a factual basis and common understanding of public policy concerns.

In the early nineteenth century, practitioners in the budding fields of public health and statistics helped lay the groundwork for social investigations of urban problems by examining demographic trends such as birth and death rates, the spread of sickness and death, and potential sources of environmental contamination. In fact, subsequent inquiries into social conditions led directly to the development of modern social science and specifically to the formation of the contemporary academic disciplines of economics, history, political science, and sociology. These early scholars were also public policy activists, deeply involved in the hands-on collection of data and the proposal of remedies for social issues that, more often than not, involved populations located in and near dense urban areas. While these academics and social reformers shared similar impulses to improve the human condition, they also became increasingly specialized in their specific research and advocacy agendas. Once again, the city as the subject of scholarly inquiry and reform had multiple ways to be viewed.<sup>8</sup>

## Urban as a Way of Life: Competing Schools of Thought

Examining urbanism as a way of life has preoccupied the work of urban sociologists, social psychologists, cultural anthropologists, and other scholars since the early twentieth century, all of whom ask questions as to how people experience and perceive cities and related urban processes. Sociologists at the University of Chicago, most notably Robert E. Park, Ernest W. Burgess, and Louis Wirth, pioneered the study of the urban way of life that came to fruition during the 1920s as the now infamous “Chicago School of Sociology,” or simply the “Chicago School.” Park and his colleagues took to the streets of America’s second-largest city and created essential theories on the nature of urban life, drawing from biology and other sciences in conceiving of cities as living organisms and relations between people and their environment as social ecology. Louis Wirth’s 1938 article, “Urbanism as a Way of Life,” became the definitive statement of the Chicago School, arguing for a sociological definition of the city and the existence of a unique urban personality. While Wirth and his colleagues encouraged generations of social scientists, policy makers, and historians to see urbanism as distinct human ecology, they also emphasized social breakdown and, as political scientist Dennis R. Judd noted, the “deleterious effects of urban life.”<sup>9</sup>

After World War II, the ecological determinism of the Chicago School began to wane with the rise of counter-theories such as the social psychological perspective of symbolic interactionism popularized by Harold Blumer and Anselm Strauss. Symbolic interactionism emphasizes that people are active interpreters of their environment, and Strauss’s work emphasized the ways in which cities held meaning for those living within them. Other challenges to the ecological mode of the Chicago School included Herbert Gans, who posited that a sociological definition of the city, as postulated by Wirth, does not exist, since there is no single urban, or even suburban, way of life. Instead, argued Gans, the lifecycle and socioeconomic class status of city residents determined mobility and actions within urban spaces.<sup>10</sup>

In the late twentieth century, urban theorists turned more and more to models that applied to rapidly expanding cities in the South, like the dynamic, multiethnic Miami and the healthcare, energy, and transportation-based Houston, as well as cities in the Southwest and Pacific coast. Not surprisingly, a new school of urban thought emerged around the sprawling metropolitan region of Los Angeles, which captured the imagination of the producers of popular culture. Los Angeles and its future are the subject of countless books, films, television shows, and other forms of art. Many artists imagine the city as a dystopian symbol, some considering the city an anti-model for other urban spaces, and some as representative of the urban future. As geographer Michael Dear notes, in 1993 architect and planner Marco Cenzatti published a pamphlet declaring the existence of a new school of thought, the LA School, which drew on the popular works of historian Mike Davis and argued that

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Los Angeles intellectuals were a part of a new laboratory of urban scholarship. As Dear explains:

Just as the Chicago School emerged at a time when that city was reaching new national prominence, Los Angeles is now making its impression on the minds of urbanists worldwide. And, like the Chicago School, their theoretical inquiries focus not only on a specific city, but also on more general questions concerning urban process. Cenzatti identifies one theme common to all adherents of the LA School, and that is a focus on *restructuring*, which includes deindustrialization and reindustrialization, the birth of the information economy, the decline of nation-states, the emergence of new nationalisms, and the rise of the Pacific Rim. Such proliferating logics often involve multiple theoretical frameworks that overlap and coexist with the project of postmodernism, and it is no accident that Los Angeles has come to be regarded as the prototypical postmodern metropolis.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Organization and Approach of *America's Urban History***

So how does this volume resolve competing notions on what is urban? We start by dividing America's history chronologically into the five broad stages of urbanization identified by historian Carl Abbott as those common to the work of fellow historians and historical geographers. The first is the colonial period from the seventeenth century to the 1810s; the second is the "take-off" era of rapid urbanization from 1820 to 1870 that resulted in the establishment of a "continental urban system." The third is a period of sustained rapid growth and the establishment of an industrial heartland from 1870 to 1920. The fourth is the transformation of cities by the automobile from 1920 to 1970, which resulted in a slowing of urban growth. And the final stage is the realignment of the urban system, due to electronic communication, and the stabilization in the degree of urbanization since the 1970s.<sup>12</sup> To this trajectory we add a chapter on the earlier, pre-Columbian stage and then an expanded discussion of contemporary urban life that stresses the intersections of globalization and technology in the creation of more environmental and socially sustainable places to live and work.

*America's Urban History* examines the evolution of urban space and various social, cultural, political, and economic aspects chronothematically. While we move through chapters chronologically we also pause on particular themes to explore them in greater depth and with more emphasis. We occasionally move back and forth between selected time periods and the present to provide our readers with necessary information. We seek to make clear larger historical trends, especially in relation to how people lived, worked, and understood the transformations that occurred around them.<sup>13</sup>

We have constructed *America's Urban History* as a broad synthesis that builds from contributions in a variety of historical subfields and related

academic disciplines. While, on a structural level, American urban history is its own distinct area of inquiry, the reach of its practitioners is so broad and so deep that it encompasses almost all of the major trends and themes in the development of the United States. Many scholars publishing in urban history no doubt consider themselves “Americanists” (historians focused on the nation or geographical area) rather than solely “urbanists” (scholars focused on urban themes and subjects), and for good reason—essential elements of city life and urban processes extend beyond municipal boundaries and have remained constant over time. For example, as was true centuries ago, trends in the countryside today contribute to the ebb and flow of migration to cities, and vice versa, while densely populated urban landscapes rely on more rural areas for foodstuffs, and the countryside relies on the city for financial investment and economic livelihood.

While the urban narrative of this book is sweeping, and closely related to the national story found in general history surveys, it differs in the coverage of key events and larger trends. For instance, while World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II all garner substantial coverage in survey texts, the Depression’s influence on American government and cities necessitates that far more space in this volume be dedicated to that period than to the causes, events, and impact of either world conflict. While we utilize examples drawn from throughout the vast and markedly differentiated United States, we are careful to reiterate material that is relatively well known in urban history so that readers newer to the field will learn about significant events and personages. In order to enhance geographic, thematic, and theoretical breadth and depth, though, we also rely on more regional or even unheralded examples that help round out the nation’s urban story.

Chapter 1, “Pre-Colonial and Seventeenth-Century Native American Settlements,” enhances the traditional story of urbanization in America by examining the city of Cahokia near the present-day city of St. Louis, Missouri, as well as Chaco Canyon in the state of New Mexico, and other densely populated settlements built by Native Americans. While these urban areas did not survive to become thriving cities today, they did have an influence on the development of the United States, as Native Americans fashioned the landscape through thousands of years of settlement and cultural accretion. At its height around 1100 AD, Cahokia was every bit as urban as major European cities and one of the largest cities in the world, with 10,000 people at its core, surrounded by another 10,000 or 20,000 inhabitants in a 50-mile radius. It is crucial to note too, that Europeans colonizing North America encountered a pre-established culture and economy, and utilized Native American societal configurations and even the lands previously cleared by Native Americans as the foundations of their own urban-based society.

Chapter 2, “Transplanting Cities and Urban Networks: Spain, France, and The Netherlands in Colonial America, 1565–1821” illustrates just how much Europeans relied upon real and fictionalized cities to understand, organize, and transplant their culture into the New World. When combined with the

establishment of English colonies in Chapter 3, “City, Plantation, Metropolis: The Anglo-American Urban Experience, 1587–1800,” the degree to which urbanization predated the establishment of agricultural settlements in North America becomes clear. The development of English colonies, though, differed considerably from those of other European powers and best illustrates why, contrary to expectations, North America became primarily an agrarian landscape in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries before resuming its urban trajectory in the nineteenth century.

Cities were also instrumental in the expansion of Euro-American settlements beyond the original thirteen English colonies. As we argue in Chapter 4, “An Urban Frontier: The American West, 1800–1869,” the celebration in popular culture of the rustic settings and rugged individualism of nineteenth-century rural America misses the real story that cities were the actual spearheads of economic, political, cultural, and social development in the North American continent. Better known is the story of how industrialization, combined with tremendous physical migration within and international immigration to the United States during the nineteenth century fueled the growth of large central cities in the Northeast and Midwestern portions of the United States. While we faithfully recount the rise of large industrial cities in this period, we also examine how people responded to dramatic transformations of work, space, and social relations through the lens of public policy debates and the establishment of social science in Chapter 5, “The Urban Cauldron: City Growth and the Rise of Social Reform, 1820–1920.”

By the 1920s, the ascendance of urban America was both an established and a highly contested point of fact. As explored in Chapter 6, “The Urban Nation: Middletown and Metropolis, 1920–1932,” Americans were both attracted to and repelled by what they saw in cities. Perhaps no period of time better illustrates America’s long-held fascination with the progress of cities, and deep suspicion of the morals and social diversity found within, than the era between the end of World War I and the start of the Great Depression. Urban America, though, was more than large industrial cities; it also included the expanding residential suburbs. Even through the economic boom of the 1920s came to a crash in the early 1930s, with many cities teetering on the brink of financial ruin and social disorder, urban America proved to be not only resilient but also on the cutting edge of attempts to reinvent basic social, political, economic, and cultural relationships. As detailed in Chapter 7, “New Deal, New Cities: The 1930s,” one of the most remarkable transformations was the creation of a direct relationship between the federal government and cities through the programs and policies of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Those New Deal agencies and agendas that outlived the Great Depression fundamentally shaped the post-war urban and suburban landscape, especially when it came to funding the removal of dilapidated “slum” neighborhoods, building new federal highways, and underwriting the mortgages of new single-family homes outside of incorporated city limits. Chapter 8, “War and Postwar Metropolis: Cities, Suburbs, and Exurbs in the 1950s,” tells a now

familiar narrative about the development of suburbs as both urban space and symbols of escape from stagnant and even decaying city neighborhoods. While many civic and business leaders noted that traditional downtowns had lost their luster and faced increasing competition from suburbs, cities themselves still remained attractive to newcomers, particularly poor whites and African Americans from the rural South, as well as Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, and a growing number of Latinos from outside the United States.

The 1960s witnessed an array of social and political transformations that led to an ever-widening gap between the residents of cities and those of surrounding suburbs, as well as a protracted period of uncertainty associated with large and medium sized-cities, called the “long urban crisis.” While many social commentators were willing to abandon cities in the midst of racial tensions, deindustrialization, and decaying physical infrastructure and social services, a new optimism from government officials in Washington, D.C. rekindled hope that cities could be rebuilt to regain their economic and social leadership positions. Chapter 9, “The Frontier of Imagination: American Cities in the 1960s,” surveys the promise of programs like President Lyndon Baines Johnson’s War on Poverty and the disastrous effects of urban renewal programs, such as the redevelopment of Boston’s West End.

The promise of urban reinvention did not end with the optimism of the 1960s, nor did the myriad problems facing the American economy. As deindustrialization and income inequality intensified in the 1970s–1980s, so too did the urban renewal efforts of civic and government leaders. Chapter 10, “Attempting Revival and Renaissance: The 1970s–1980s,” provides a broad overview of successful urban renewal projects such as Harborplace in Baltimore and Faneuil Hall in Boston, as well as the rise of a distinctly different form of urbanization, namely the federally supported urban sprawl, particularly in Phoenix, Arizona and throughout the Southwest and Southern states. *America’s Urban History* ends with Chapter 11, “The Modern City: Fear, Technology and Inequality, 1990–Present,” which recounts the numerous ways in which dire predictions for the demise of large central cities failed to materialize. In fact, the Twenty-second Census for the U.S. in 2010 revealed that, for the first time since 1920, cities actually grew at a faster rate than suburbs. The appeal of the central business districts of older cities is especially remarkable, given the pervasive culture of fear that developed during the long urban crisis, and was reaffirmed on a national level in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City on September 11, 2001.

## The Urban Prospect

In his commercially successful *Triumph of the City* (2011), Harvard economist Edward Glaeser touts the city as humankind’s greatest invention and its best hope for the future.<sup>14</sup> While not the first person to celebrate the achievements and promise of urbanity, Glaeser does remind us of the long-standing association of progress with cities. Glaeser’s jubilant proclamations on the promise of



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city life aside, though, his work also highlights contemporary perceptions of urban failure. Such attitudes can be traced directly back to the period immediately following the American Revolution and were amplified in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by the negative consequences of rapid urbanization. In the process, fear and misperception of cities turned into downright hostility for many people scared of change.

*America's Urban History* traces the larger contours of America's dichotomous perception of cities as places of opportunity and suspicion, success and failure, as well as degeneration and rebirth. Along the journey, it also examines the ways in which the development of new urban forms arose from deep-seated divisions of society along the lines of race, class, and gender. America's urban story, however, is about much more than fear and social conflict. Cities have served as centers of economic opportunity, hope, and success for generations and remain, despite pronouncements to the contrary, vibrant and integral to the success of the nation.

*Table I.1* Global Urban Population and Percentages by Region (2011 estimates)

<i>Region</i>	<i>Overall Population</i>	<i>Urban Population</i>	<i>Percent Urban</i>
Africa	1,045,923,000	413,880,000	39.6
Asia	4,207,448,000	1,895,307,000	45.0
Europe	739,299,000	539,010,00	72.9
Latin America and Caribbean	596,629,000	472,175,000	79.1
North America	347,563,000	285,805,000	82.2
Oceania	37,175,000	26,280,000	70.7
All regions (world)	6,974,036,000	3,632,457,000	52.1

Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, "File 1: Population of Urban and Rural Areas and Percentage Urban, 2011" (2012), <http://esa.un.org/unpd/wup/CD-ROM/Urban-Rural-Population.htm>.

*Table I.2* The World's Twenty Largest Urban Populations by Country (2010–11 estimates)

<i>Country or Territorial Unit</i>	<i>Total Urban Population</i>	<i>Overall Population</i>	<i>Percentage of Overall Population Urban</i>
1 China	682,890,434	1,349,585,838	51
2 India	382,110,512	1,220,800,359	31
3 United States	259,668,225	316,668,567	82
4 Brazil	174,878,371	201,009,622	87
5 Indonesia	127,338,183	251,160,124	51
6 Japan	116,182,057	127,253,075	91
7 Russia	105,165,356	142,500,482	74
8 Mexico	90,652,339	116,220,947	78
9 Nigeria	86,555,739	174,507,539	50
10 Pakistan	69,952,470	193,238,868	36

11	Germany	60,048,976	81,147,265	74
12	Turkey	57,696,557	80,694,485	72
13	France	56,058,869	65,951,611	85
14	Iran	55,179,045	79,853,900	69
15	Philippines	51,591,674	105,720,644	49
16	United Kingdom	50,716,459	63,395,574	80
17	Congo (Democratic Republic)	48,098,155	75,507,308	64
18	Bangladesh	46,477,980	163,654,860	28
19	Italy	41,807,962	61,482,297	68
20	South Korea	40,730,729	48,955,203	83

Source: *The World Factbook 2013–14*. Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency (2013), <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>.

Table I.3 The Urbanization of the United States, 1790–2010\*

Year	Number of Urban Places (2,500 or more persons)*	Urban Population	Total U.S. Population	Population Percent Urban	Population Percent Rural
1790	24	201,655	3,929,214	5.1	94.9
1800	33	322,371	5,308,483	6.1	93.9
1810	46	525,459	7,239,881	7.3	92.7
1820	61	693,255	9,638,453	7.2	92.8
1830	90	1,127,247	12,860,702	8.8	91.2
1840	131	1,845,055	17,063,353	10.8	89.2
1850	237	3,574,496	23,191,876	15.4	84.6
1860	392	6,216,518	31,443,321	19.8	80.2
1870	663	9,902,361	38,558,371	25.7	74.3
1880	940	14,129,735	50,189,209	28.2	71.8
1890	1,351	22,106,265	62,979,766	35.1	64.9
1900	1,743	30,214,832	76,212,168	39.6	60.4
1910	2,269	42,064,001	92,228,496	45.6	54.4
1920	2,728	54,253,282	106,021,537	51.2	48.8
1930	3,183	69,160,599	123,202,624	56.1	43.9
1940	3,485	74,705,338	132,164,569	56.5	43.5
1950	4,307	96,846,817	151,325,798	64.0	36.0
1960	5,445	125,268,750	179,323,175	69.9	30.1
1970	6,433	149,646,617	203,302,031	73.6	26.3
1980	7,749	167,050,992	226,542,199	73.7	26.3
1990	8,510	187,053,487	248,709,873	75.2	24.8
2000	9,063	222,360,539	281,421,906	79.0	21.0
2010	9,644	249,253,271	308,745,538	80.7	19.3

\* Note: Since 1910, the U.S. Bureau of the Census has systematically employed a threshold population of 2,500 to define locations under certain conditions as “urban.” During the 1930s, the Bureau projected that threshold backward to classify places enumerated since 1790 as urban or rural (meaning, simply, not urban). The threshold of 2,500 people remains at the core of subsequent reformulations of urban—notably those done in 1940, 1950, and 2000—that account for metropolitan growth, density variation, and unincorporated urban territory. In 2000, the actual number of individual urban places declined to 3,634, and in 2010 to 3,601 after the Census Bureau introduced the concept

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of “urban clusters” that groups many smaller urban areas together. In order to remain consistent with earlier definitions, this table uses the 1950 urban concept for 2000 and 2010 (from Gibson, see below in sources).

*Source:* U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, “Table 4. Population: 1790–1990,” *1990 Census of Population and Housing: Population and Housing Unit Counts, United States* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office), 5, available at <http://www.census.gov/population/www/censusdata/files/table-4.pdf>; U.S. Census Bureau, “2010 Census Urban and Rural Classification and Urban Area Criteria,” July 22, 2013, [www.census.gov/geo/reference/ua/urban-rural-2010.html](http://www.census.gov/geo/reference/ua/urban-rural-2010.html); Campbell Gibson, “Figure 2.3. Number of Places of 2,500 or More Population by Size of Place for the United States: 1790–2010,” in *American Demographic Chartbook: 1790 to 2010*, [http://www.demographicchartbook.com/Chartbook/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=15&Itemid=16](http://www.demographicchartbook.com/Chartbook/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=15&Itemid=16).

*Table I.4* Twenty Largest Cities in the United States by Population, 2010  
(incorporated places)

<i>Rank</i>	<i>City</i>	<i>Population of Incorporated Area (rounded to nearest thousand)</i>
1	New York, NY	8,175,000
2	Los Angeles, CA	3,793,000
3	Chicago, IL	2,696,000
4	Houston, TX	2,099,000
5	Philadelphia, PA	1,526,000
6	Phoenix, AZ	1,446,000
7	San Antonio, TX	1,337,000
8	San Diego, CA	1,307,000
9	Dallas, TX	1,198,000
10	San Jose, CA	946,000
11	Indianapolis, IN	830,000
12	Jacksonville, FL	822,000
13	San Francisco, CA	805,000
14	Austin, TX	790,000
15	Columbus, OH	787,000
16 tie	Fort Worth, TX	741,000
16 tie	Louisville/Jefferson County, KY	741,000
18	Charlotte, NC	731,000
19	Detroit, MI	714,000
20	El Paso, TX	649,000

*Source:* U.S. Census Bureau, “Table 27. Incorporated Places with 175,000 or More Inhabitants in 2010—Population: 1970–2010,” *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2012* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2011), 34–35.

*Table I.5* Twenty Largest Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) in the United States by Population, 2010

<i>Rank</i>	<i>MSA Name and Area Covered (States)</i>	<i>Population (Rounded nearest thousands)</i>
1	New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island (NY-NJ-PA)	18,897,000
2	Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana (CA)	12,829,000
3	Chicago-Joliet-Naperville (IL-IN-WI)	9,461,000

4	Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington (TX)	6,372,000
5	Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington (PA-NJ-DE-MD)	5,965,000
6	Houston-Sugar Land-Baytown (TX)	5,947,000
7	Washington-Arlington-Alexandria (DC-VA-MD-WV)	5,582,000
8	Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach (FL)	5,565,000
9	Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Marietta (GA)	5,269,000
10	Boston-Cambridge-Quincy (MA-NH)	4,552,000
11	San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont (CA)	4,335,000
12	Detroit-Warren-Livonia (MI)	4,296,000
13	Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario (CA)	4,225,000
14	Phoenix-Mesa-Glendale (AZ)	4,193,000
15	Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue (WA)	3,440,000
16	Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington (MN-WI)	3,280,000
17	San Diego-Carlsbad-San Marcos (CA)	3,095,000
18	St. Louis (MO-IL)	2,813,000
19	Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater (FL)	2,783,000
20	Baltimore-Towson (MD)	2,710,000

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, "Table 20. Large Metropolitan Statistical Areas—Population: 1990–2010," *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2012* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2011), 26–28.

## Notes

- 1 The date that the majority of the world's population became urban was calculated by researchers at North Carolina State University and the University of Georgia as May 23, 2007 using data models from the United Nations. These researchers held that on that date, 3,303,992,253 people on the planet resided in urban areas while 3,303,866,404 lived in rural settings. See "Mayday 23: World Population Becomes More Urban Than Rural," *Science Daily* 25 May 2007 (<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/05/070525000642.htm>), accessed July 19, 2012. Other sources, particularly United Nations publications, use the year 2008 as the point at which the population of the world became more urban than rural, such as; United Nation's Population Fund (UNFPA) *State of World Population 2007: Unleashing the Potential of Urban Growth* (<http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2007/english/introduction.html>), accessed July 19, 2012; and UN News Service, "Half of Global Population Will Live in Cities by End of this Year," *UN News Center* 26 February 2008 (<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=25762>) accessed July 19, 2012.
- 2 For more on Winthrop's sermon, see John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity (1630)," in Steven H. Corey and Lisa Krissoff Boehm, eds., *The American Urban Reader: History and Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 96–97.
- 3 The size and number of cities in the United States are the historical figures used by the U.S. Bureau of the Census since the 1930s. See Campbell Gibson, "Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790 to 1990," Population Division Working Paper No. 27, U.S. Bureau of the Census, June 1998 (<http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/twps0027.html#urban>), accessed July 16,

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2012. Unless otherwise indicated, all numbers and rankings for urban places in the U.S. will be the official figures of the Bureau of the Census.
- 4 Kingsley Davis, "The Urbanization of the Human Population," *Scientific American* 213, no. 3 (September 1965), 41.
  - 5 For the inability to distinguish urban and rural within the same county and the twenty-five percent figure see J. D. B. DeBow, *Statistical View of the United States. . . Being a Compendium of the Seventh Census. . .* (Washington: A. O. P. Nicholson, Public Printer, 1854), 192–193.
  - 6 DeBow, *Statistical View of the United States*, 28.
  - 7 Michael Pacione, *Urban Geography: A Global Perspective* Second Edition (New York, Routledge, 2005), 20–25; John J. Macionis and Vincent N. Parrillo, *Cities and Urban Life* Fifth Edition (New York: Prentice Hall, 2010), 3–9; and J. John Palen, *The Urban World* Eighth Edition (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2008), 7.
  - 8 The activist agenda of academics and the development of modern social science in the nineteenth century is explored in greater detail in, Steven H. Corey and Lisa Krissoff Boehm, "Examining America's Urban Landscape: From Social Reform to Social History," in Corey and Krissoff Boehm, eds., *The American Urban Reader*, 3–21.
  - 9 Louis Wirth, "Urbanism as a Way of Life," *American Journal of Sociology* 44, no. 10 (July 1938): 1–24; and Dennis R. Judd, "Theorizing the City," in Dennis R. Judd and Dick Simpson, editors, *The City, Revisited: Urban Theory from Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 6.
  - 10 Macionis and Parrillo, 134–138; Mark Hutter, *Experiencing Cities*, Second Edition (Boston: Ally & Bacon, 2012), 3–21; and Herbert J. Gans, "Urbanism and Suburbanism as Ways of Life: A Reevaluation of Terms," in *Herbert J. Gans, People, Plans, and Policies: Essays on Poverty, Racism, and Other National Problems* (New York: Columbia University Press and Russell Sage Foundation, 1991), 51–69. An excerpted version of Gans's work is in Corey and Krissoff Boehm, *The American Urban Reader*, 31–40.
  - 11 Michael Dear, *The Postmodern Urban Condition* (New York: Blackwell, 2000), 20–21.
  - 12 Carl Abbott, "Urbanization," in David Goldfield, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Urban History* Volume 2 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007), 852.
  - 13 We borrow the chrono thematic approach as employed by Martin V. Melosi in his work *The Sanitary City: Urban Infrastructure in America from Colonial Times to the Present* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).
  - 14 Edward Glaeser, *Triumph of the City: How Our Greatest Invention Makes Us Richer, Smarter, Greener, Healthier, and Happier* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2011).

# 1 Pre-colonial and Seventeenth-Century Native American Settlements

## Introduction: Indigenous Footprints

Urban settlements in the continental United States (U.S.) date back at least 1,400 years, and fundamental relationships and processes that comprise urbanization reach back even further. Traditional American history survey textbooks, and even urban history narratives, though, either rarely mention Native American communities or relegate them to a few preliminary pages in order to contrast the pre-colonial indigenous ways of life with the dramatic transformations brought about by contact with Europeans. Our understanding of American urban history is enriched when we consider in detail the story of populous Native American settlements, such as the city of Cahokia in the American Midwest, the Iroquois and Algonquin longhouses in the Northeast, and the canyon dwellings of the Southwest. This chapter argues that Europeans did not encounter a land unencumbered by history; rather, they came upon a landscape rich with its own history—a land shaped by diverse peoples living in varying patterns of settlement. In fact, Europeans benefited greatly by launching their colonial ventures in regions in which Native Americans had already cleared ground and established economic patterns that helped lay a foundation for the Europeans' immense mercantile wealth.

Although urban communities created by American Indians (we use the terms Native American and American Indian interchangeably throughout this volume) did not evolve in a straightforward manner, without interruption, into present-day cities, examining their history informs the evolution of the built environment in the United States. In terms of physical appearance, Native American settlements were often dissimilar, having been constructed by various peoples over different periods of time, and in regions as physically distinct as the rocky, arid landscape of the Southwest and the dense forests of the Northeast. The most populous communities, though, shared certain characteristics common not only with each other, but also with urban forms found throughout the world, regardless of historical epoch. And while pre-colonial or pre-Columbian (meaning before European contact) settlements are interesting and historically important in their own right, they also resonate in contemporary American culture. U.S. cities and suburbs are grounded,

literally, in the society and physical landscape fashioned by the interaction of European and native peoples.

Historian Coll Thrush finds Seattle, Washington to be a prime example of how American cities have historical roots in Native American places. As Thrush asserts, “Every American city is built on Indian land, but few advertise it like Seattle.” Thrush notes that Seattle is reputedly a haunted city, with stories circulating about how a white settler, Joshua Winfield, built his home directly on top of a Native American cemetery and later died of fright from ghosts in 1874. For Thrush:

in Seattle, visitors and residents alike tell and are told stories about this city: that it is built on Indian land, that that land was taken to build a great metropolis, and that such a taking is commemorated by the city’s Native American imagery. These stories in and of place, these place-stories, define Seattle with an indigenous pedigree.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, American Indians did not disappear the moment Europeans arrived and appropriated their land; they have remained a part of the cultural, economic, political, and social fabric of villages, towns, cities, suburbs, and rural communities scattered throughout North America. Native Americans responded to change brought about by European contact by modifying their physical surroundings and social structure in order to preserve as much agency over their way of life as possible. Such adjustments also included the adaptation, to one degree or another, of European commodities, religion, and standards of living. During the seventeenth century, some Native Americans even joined so-called “praying Indian towns” or villages in New England organized by Protestant ministers and laid out like English settlements. These praying towns ultimately failed to convert and assimilate large numbers of American Indians into Christian culture and also failed to protect those who did join from English colonists who coveted their land. These praying communities, like other indigenous settlements, gave way to subsequent generations of European settlers and their descendants who built modern towns and cities over the footprints of a Native American past.

### **Academics and the Origins of Urbanization in the New World**

There was a time when even the most preeminent of American historians argued that since there are no written documents from the pre-colonial Native American past, Native American history from the period could not be told. In 1965, Samuel Eliot Morison noted in *The Oxford History of the American People* that, “When we try to tell the story of man in America from the beginning, the lack of data quickly brings us to a halt . . . Thus what we mean by the history of the American People is the history in America of immigrants from other continents.”<sup>2</sup> Fortunately, with the evolution of Native American history

as a subfield within the historical profession and the rise of interdisciplinarity throughout academia, American history surveys now begin with a discussion of those inhabitants who were native to North America by the time of Columbus' arrival in the "New World." Contemporary scholars use several terms to describe indigenous North Americans and their descendants, the most common being Native Americans, American Indians or Amerindians, aboriginals, indigenous or first peoples, and, in the case of Canada, even more specified terms, such as members of the First Nations. European explorers and colonists, though, still enter the story in history textbooks very quickly. This brief reference to native people and their culture is what Native American scholar Vine Deloria, Jr. terms the "cameo theory of history."<sup>3</sup>

The tendency to dash past American Indians in history surveys is changing. Historians are now more comfortable in drawing upon the conceptual framework and methodologies of scholars outside their discipline to discuss aboriginal cultures. Archaeologist and anthropologists in particular have been useful for historians in addressing the formation and structure of pre-Columbian American Indian communities. In addition, new trends in historical research methodologies, including an increasing reliance on oral history to capture otherwise untold tales, the use of folklore, and the integration of visual artifacts within traditional scholarship, have allowed scholars to move past the exclusive use of written records.

The intellectual underpinnings informing the study of Native Americans and their culture have also changed significantly over the last few generations, enhancing our understanding of an indigenous urban past. Not surprisingly, scholars in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries commonly viewed American Indians and their communities as "exotic" and "different," ranking these cultures several notches below the "civilization" created by white Europeans, and hence unlikely to have ever established advanced urban centers and ways of life. Attitudes in the academy progressed after World War II, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s alongside the "Red Power" movement in the United States, which was analogous to the better-known fight for civil rights for African Americans. What came to be known as the "new Indian history" sought to recast Native Americans on their own terms rather than as victims of abuse who suffered genocide at the hands of European immigrants and their descendants. This new history emphasized that native peoples were motivated by their own unique cultural patterns that adapted to change over time.<sup>4</sup>

As with pre-colonial American Indian culture, historians also rely upon the work of scholars outside their discipline to determine what makes a place urban. In terms of classifying ancient settlements as "cities," the most influential line of reasoning remains that set forth by V. Gordon Childe, an Australian archaeologist, in his seminal 1950 *Town Planning Review* article, titled "The Urban Revolution." Childe conceived of human development in four distinct stages: Paleolithic, Neolithic, urban, and industrial. Childe's stages are bridged by three revolutions—the Neolithic, which brought settled agriculture,



the Urban, which saw the concentration of population in the first cities and the rise of manufacturing and trade, and the Industrial Revolution, in which human and animal power were replaced by alternate sources of energy that fueled complex machines. Childe traces the earliest cities to the settlements around the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in what is commonly termed the “Fertile Crescent” in modern-day Iraq around 4000 BCE (“before the common era,” also known as BC for “before Christ”). However, other arguments can be made that trace cities back even further, to places like Çatalhöyük in what is now the modern nation of Turkey, which housed about 6,000 people in 6500 BCE.<sup>5</sup>

Some urban theorists, most notably Jane Jacobs and Edward Soja, have even questioned Childe’s supposition that settled agriculture must predate urban settlement, and instead these scholars wonder whether the desire for humans to settle together in villages actually led to advances in agriculture. Archaeologists by and large, though, contend that a society must possess sufficient excess in its agricultural harvest to support specialized urban workers who do not farm. The existence of these nonagricultural laborers is therefore a key component in differentiating a true urban settlement from a large village. According to Childe, several other factors that help define a location as urban are: population size, density, monumental public buildings, a ruling class, a system of writing and predicative sciences, artistic expression, trade, a significantly sized non-farming population, and a society built on residence rather than familial ties.<sup>6</sup>

While Childe’s list provides considerable guidance in defining what is, and in some cases what is not, urban, there is considerable leeway amongst academics as to what are the most essential criteria for cities. Attempting to categorize American Indian settlements is a case in point. Should we look for physical signs of urbanization left on the landscape? Iroquois and Algonquin longhouses in the American Northeast were large enough to contain two hundred members of an extended familial network. Dense clusters of longhouses were typically surrounded by substantial palisades like the massive fortifications of ancient walled cities found in the Middle East. Other American Indian communities built extensive irrigation systems that could also help their communities be classified as urban. However, does physical infrastructure equate to urban cultural achievement? And must Native American ways of life and divisions of labor be similar to that of Mesopotamia or even Çatalhöyük in order to be considered urban? These questions attract, beguile, and ultimately may even confound urbanists (those who study and/or appreciate cities and the processes and characteristics of urbanization), yet they must be considered when studying and attempting to identify early America cities.

So when and where did the earliest American Indians live? Even with advancements in research methodologies and a greater appreciation of Native American history and culture, scholars still remain uncertain about the details of the process of populating the North and South American continents. The most popular theory holds that a land bridge provided a connection between

Asia and North America, although recent academic works reveal a growing skepticism of this explanation. According to the land bridge hypothesis, Asia and North America were joined by a 1,000-mile-long landmass known as “Beringia,” which was exposed when glaciers extended in size and the water level dropped. Somewhere between 10,000 and 80,000 years ago, conditions could have been cool enough to foster a 150-foot drop in the sea level that would have allowed people to travel between the two continents.<sup>7</sup>

Migrants from Asia eventually moved eastward from the Pacific coast of North America to the area later called the American Bottom; a floodplain along the Mississippi River in what is now southern Illinois and eastern Missouri, created by a melting glacier at the end of the Ice Age.<sup>8</sup> Newer data prompts scholars to ask if some early settlers used boats to come to the New World, even though it is generally thought that seafaring techniques did not arise until 10,000 years ago. Findings in South America have now pushed the date of the first marine voyages as far back as 50,000 years ago. While much has yet to be determined, the remaining physical evidence does indicate that there was migration to the North American continent as early as 13,000–18,000 years ago, although there were no semi-permanent settlements during this early period.<sup>9</sup>

According to historian Daniel K. Richter, semi-permanent settlements emerged in the Northeast around 1200 BCE, when native peoples involved in pre-farming techniques began to rely on earthen pits and clay pots for storage of excess food. These Northeast cultures were among the first the English colonists would encounter when they began to arrive in North America in 1497. (All years and centuries in the contemporary period known as CE “of the common era” or AD “anno Domini” are provided without such a specific notation.) By the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Iroquois in upstate New York lived in three types of communities—camps, hamlets, and semi-permanent towns. Towns were the largest arrangements, containing as many as 2,000 people apiece and averaging about two hundred people per acre. With this concentration, argues historian Daniel K. Richter, Iroquois towns “were the most densely settled places in the European or native Northeast before the nineteenth century.”<sup>10</sup> In the region of the American Bottom, though, there had once been an even larger and more permanent Native American settlement.

### **The (Once) Overlooked City of Cahokia**

In contrast to the Northeast, American Indians built several impressive and long-lasting cities in the Midwest and West, although they had ceased to function as thriving centers by the time European explorers and settlers arrived. The most astonishing of these urban achievements was Cahokia, situated east of present-day St. Louis, Missouri and inhabited between approximately 700 and 1400 AD. Cahokia was built by the later Mississippian people, and drew on the relative largesse of a strong maize-based agricultural system. Although

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unknown to Europe at the time, and thus not included in the canon of Western knowledge, Cahokia was actually one of the largest cities in the world. In fact, it was the most populous settlement north of what would become the nation of Mexico.

Cahokia arose out of the rich soils of the American Bottom, next to the Mississippi River at the juncture of Cahokia Creek and Canteen Creek. At its height around the year 1100, Cahokia was home to as many people as the European cities of London or Florence during the same period, albeit at a lesser density, given the widespread distribution of the Amerindian population. The Cahokia region consisted of two hundred mounds, with at least 10,000 people dwelling in the center and an additional 20,000 to 30,000 people spread out within a 50-mile radius. Archaeologist Timothy R. Pauketat argues that while it is difficult to determine the exact boundaries of sprawling Cahokia, the heart of the city contained as many people as an average city-state in ancient Mesopotamia. In comparison with modern cities, Pauketat notes that Cahokia was more than double the size of Washington, D.C. when it became the nation's capital in 1800.<sup>11</sup> [See "Table 3.4 All Urban Areas in the United States by Population Rank, 1790 and 1800."]

Amerindians did not call the city "Cahokia"; modern scholars have labeled it thus after the Native American group, the Cahokians, which lived in the region beginning in the 1600s. Despite its size and its political and economic dominance of a huge swath of the continent, the history of Cahokia as an urban center is obscured by the absence of stories about it within Native American culture. While the settlements of Chaco Canyon in the arid Southwest, discussed below, were commemorated and remembered in Native American song, no such folklore exists regarding Cahokia.<sup>12</sup> The physical manifestations of settlement are the primary sources used to glean the important story of this once massive American city. Biloine Whiting Young and Melvin L. Fowler argue in their book, *Cahokia: The Great Native American Metropolis* (2000), that Cahokia was "the most complex and elaborate achievement of Native Americans in what is now the United States of America."<sup>13</sup> Thus, we need to include it in our study of the urban past.

In terms of geography, Cahokia was a logical site to make a river portage (i.e. a place to carry canoes from one river to another) and confirms sociologist Charles Cooley's assertion that "population and wealth tend to collect wherever there is a break in transportation."<sup>14</sup> In the center of the large mounds that dominated the landscape was an open space referred to by archaeologists as the Grand Plaza, which was, in turn, surrounded by several lesser plazas. At the northern edge of the Grand Plaza stood Monks Mound (named after a group of French Trappist Monks who lived there in the early nineteenth century), the largest pre-Columbian earthen construction in the entire Western Hemisphere, covering about fifteen acres and containing more than twenty-five million feet of landfill. Experts have debated how long it would have taken to amass and shape such great quantities of soil, especially given the fact that the Native Americans in the region lacked draft animals, vehicles, and iron tools.