

Urban Trends in the United States and the Global Core

Urban models tend to emphasize the generalized impacts of economic, technological, and demographic factors on the geography of cities. Behind these influences, however, lie powerful socioeconomic forces that shape the character of particular parts of the city, and that influence who lives there. Most urban areas have distinct ethnic neighborhoods that are primarily the result of the attitudes and practices of dominant groups within cities. The segregation between blacks and whites in many American cities is a case in point.

The Rise of Residential Segregation in the US

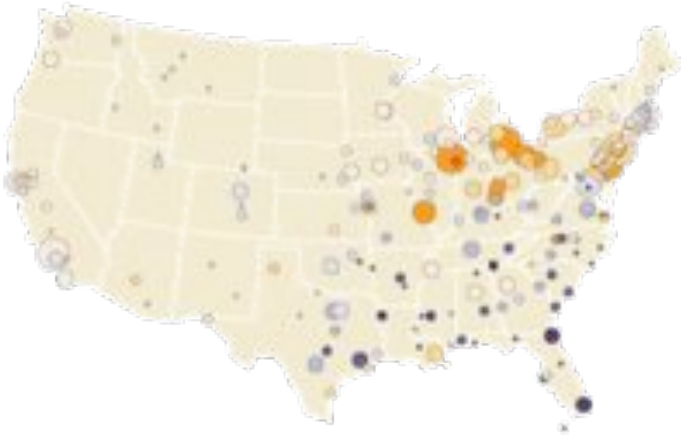
Agglomeration is the nucleation - or clustering - of people and businesses for the mutual benefits of existing in close

proximity with each other. For example, businesses are able to share labor pools, technological and financial amenities, as well as benefit from **ancillary industries** (support large-scale industries).

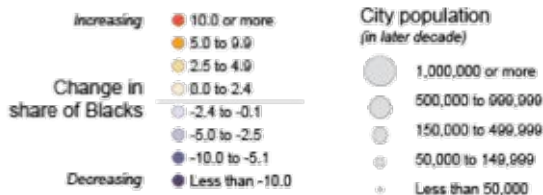
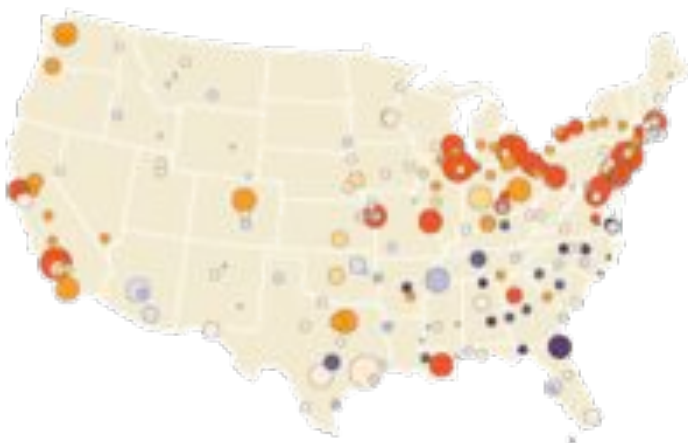
One of the most key events in the US that led to urban growth and increased **residential - or affinity - segregation** (which is by choice), were the Great Migrations. The **First Great Migration** involved the relocation of around 1.6 million African Americans in the early 20th century, when strict legislation limited immigration into the U.S. and brought about a shortage of labor in many industrial and manufacturing centers in the Northeast and Midwest. These cities became common destinations for Black migrants from the South. Cities that experienced substantial changes in racial composition between 1910 and 1940 include Chicago, Detroit, New York City, and Philadelphia.

The **Second Great Migration** occurred during and after WWII involving more than 5 million African-Americans. These migrants flooded into many of the cities that were destinations before the war in a process called **chain migration**, following friends and relatives that had made the journey earlier. **Jim Crow Laws** had been created in much of the Southern States as far back as 1890. These laws established **forced segregation** and separate facilities between Whites and Blacks (e.g., drinking fountains, bathrooms, seating in restaurants), and encouraged many Blacks to seek more favorable surroundings. Poor economic conditions further spurred a larger migration flow than was the case in the previous period, and resulted in the creation of large Black population centers in many cities across the Northeast, Midwest, and West. Blacks, predominantly in the southern States of the U.S., were forced to live separately from the whites until the **Civil Rights Act of 1964**.

The First Great Migration:
1910-1940



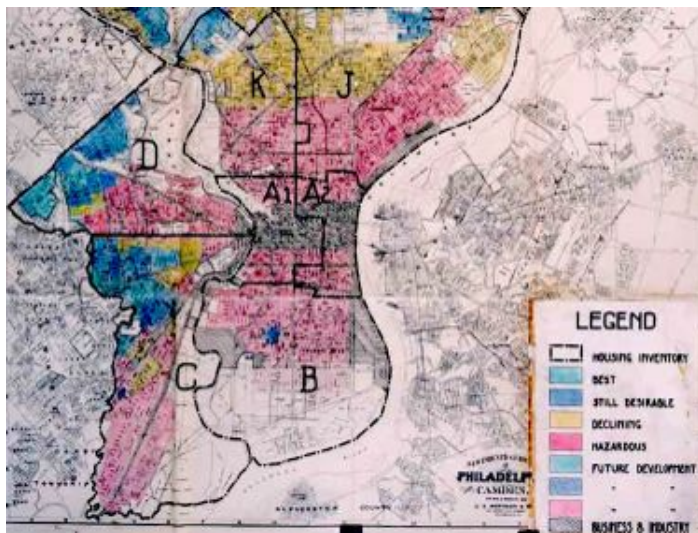
The Second Great Migration:
1940-1970



To the degree that there is a correlation between race or ethnicity and class, a similar pattern of population distribution can be found. In the United States, it is possible to find large areas where certain populations live in high-quality housing while other populations live in low-quality

housing. Several programs, both official and unofficial, were developed in the northern cities to keep African Americans confined to certain parts of the city in distinct **ethnic neighborhoods**. The ethnically diverse imprint of multiculturalism is evident in cities throughout the U.S. in places like “Chinatown” (in many cities including New York), “Little Haiti” (Miami), or the “French Quarter” (New Orleans).

A common practice, especially during the time of the Second Great Migration, was **redlining**, which was the practice of denying, or charging more for, services such as banking, insurance, access to health care, or certain businesses (often based on race). Some banks or lending institutions would mark a red line on a map to delineate the area where they would not invest. Later the term was applied to discrimination against a particular group of people (usually by race or sex) irrespective of geography.



A 1936 security map of Philadelphia showing redlining of lower income neighborhoods

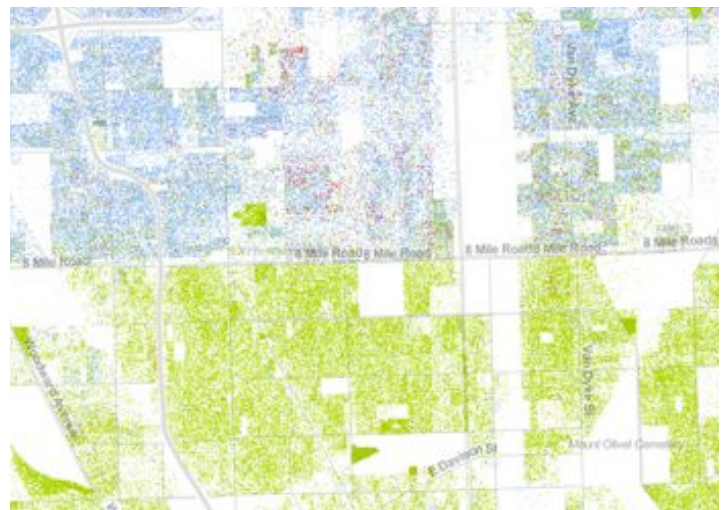
Another practice that led to further ethnic segregation in US cities was **blockbusting**. Utilizing this tactic, realtors and developers encouraged whites to sell their houses - often at a loss - by implying that racial minorities (Blacks, Hispanics, etc.) were moving into their previously racially segregated neighborhood, thus depressing real estate property values. This was advantageous for the realtors and developers because it brought them higher commissions from promoting turnover and selling more homes. This changed **ghetto** boundaries and generated “**white flight**”, in which Whites moved from the Northeast and Midwest often to the South (e.g. Detroit’s white population decreased by 1 million from 1950 - 1970). This process contributed to the draining of cities' tax bases when middle- and upper-class people left.

Abandoned properties in the cities and suburbs attracted criminals and gangs leading to **urban decay**, which is the sociological process whereby a city, or part of a city, falls into disrepair and decrepitude. Its characteristics are

depopulation, abandoned buildings, high local unemployment (and poverty), crime, and an extended, desolate, inhospitable city landscape.

Additionally, after World War II, aided by the construction of the **Interstate Highway System** in the 1960s, many White Americans left many industrial cities for new housing in the suburbs. The roads served to transport suburbanites to their city jobs, facilitating the development of suburbs, and further shifting the tax base away from the city, and exacerbating urban decay.

In addition, the development of new transportation systems changed the relative location of parts of the city. The old core areas, which were developed during the railroad and river transportation eras, were less accessible in the era of automobiles and freeways, whereas suburban areas were more so. As a result, by the end of the twentieth century, manufacturing jobs were more frequently found at the edge of the city than in the core. This produced a mismatch between potential employees among the lower-income population residing in the city centers and the availability of jobs in the suburban development zones.



In Detroit, among the most segregated cities in America, 8 Mile Road serves as a sharp dividing line (Blue = White, Green = Black, Red = Asian)

In 1968, the **Fair Housing Act** provided for equal housing opportunities regardless race, color, religion, or national origin. However, several practices persisted for decades, and even some to this day. For instance, **racial steering** is when realtors guide prospective homebuyers towards or away from certain neighborhoods based on their race. While this practice has been outlawed it is still very common now, and is often requested by the buyer.

Far and away the most powerful force in locating groups is their ability to pay for space. This produces general sorting by economic class that characterizes cities all around the world. The wealthy are able to have choices and choose

high-amenity locations in comfortable surroundings. The middle-class buy what they can afford, seeking to emulate the landscapes and lifestyles of the high-income populations. People with limited or no incomes are relegated to the lowest-quality housing in the locations with the least desirable features.

Emergence of the Rustbelt

Suburbanization holds special interest for human geographers because it involves transformation of large areas of land from rural to urban uses, affects large numbers of people, and rapidly creates distinct urban regions complete with residential, industrial, commercial, and educational components. *Suburbia* evolved into self-sufficient urban entities, containing their own major economic and cultural activities that were no longer appendages to the central city (**edge cities**). The Urban Realms model viewed these suburbanized cities as **polycentric** (multiple nuclei) metropolises consisting of "realms" of activity such as transnational corporations' headquarters, telecommunications hubs, and communities of foreigners.

Even as urban **sprawl** (the haphazard growth or extension outward, especially along the outskirts of a city) continued and cities were coalescing, residents left the urban cores by the millions and moved to the suburbs. Many of the so-called **inner cities**, the rings and sectors between the CBD and the suburbs, remained problem-ridden zones where city governments, having lost tax revenues as residents moved to the suburbs, were unable to adequately fund schools, public housing, and social services. Drug abuse, crime, vandalism, and other social problems afflicted newer areas of the inner city as well as older ones. The high cost of a downtown location (e.g., land rent) outweighed the advantages of agglomeration. The movement of firms and companies from the industrialized core to other locations is called **deglomeration** (de-agglomeration), and it affected older downtowns virtually everywhere in America.

Especially beginning in the 1970s, cities in the US Northeast and Midwest started to struggle to adapt to a variety of adverse economic and social conditions. They included the US steel and iron industries' decline, the movement of manufacturing to the southeastern states (**outsourcing**) and other countries (**offshoring**) with lower labor costs, the rise of automation in industrial processes, increased globalization, and the internationalization of American business. Major problems ensued, including population loss, brain drain, depletion of local tax revenues, high unemployment, crime, swelling welfare rolls, and poor municipal economies.

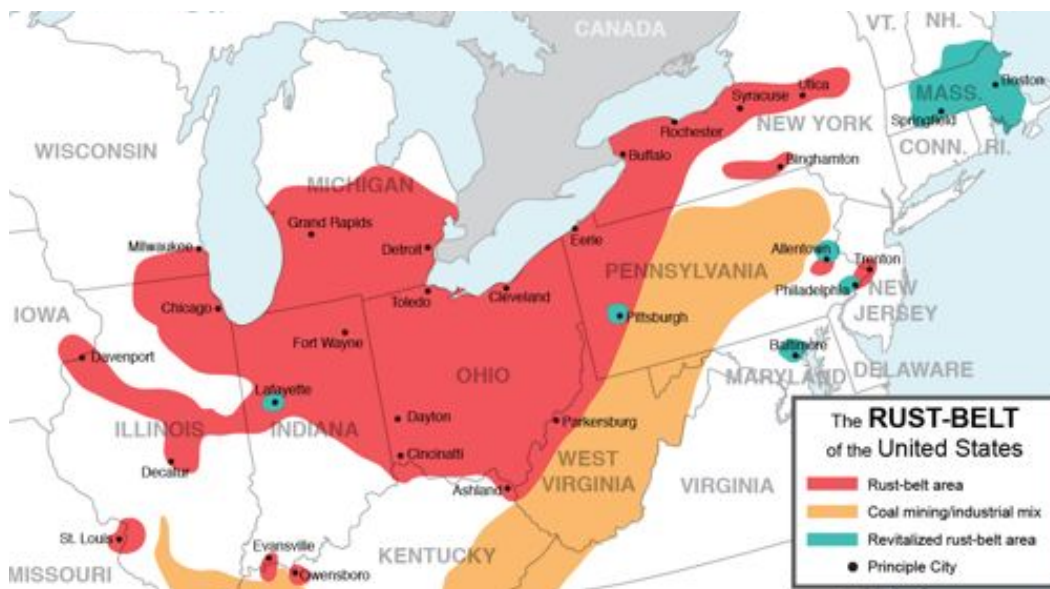


An abandoned steel plant in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania (demolished in 2007)

Urban Regrowth in the United States

As evidenced by data compiled by the US Census Bureau, the 1990s proved to be the first decade that city populations grew since before World War II. Several reasons for the urban revitalization included improvements in urban and economic policy, demographic factors, and aspects of place.

The changes in **urban policies** demonstrated the effects of government and nonprofit organizations to revitalize the central cities through public policies and incentives. Zoning laws were altered, providing for urban enterprise zones and building codes that created more appealing cityscapes. Many city governments enticed businesses to return through subsidies and tax incentives, and encouraged residents to return through the



investment in **higher-order amenities** (e.g., sports facilities, museums, zoos, etc.). Efforts in **commercialization** transformed parts of central cities, attracting residents and tourists into specifically designed areas, enticing them into spending time and money (e.g., Times Square in New York City).



Times Square in New York City, a dazzling and successful example of commercialization

Historic landmarks were often preserved and even rebuilt. Budgets were expanded to improve public safety through more police and fire departments. The creation of new **greenspaces** and open areas, such as parks, fashioned a more pleasing city environment. **Gentrification** efforts were made, leading to the rehabilitation of deteriorated, often abandoned inner-city housing with favorable locations relative to the CBD and central-city places of employment. Due to gentrification, the average incomes increase and average family sizes decrease in the area. However, this process may often result in the informal economic eviction of lower-income residents because of increased rent, house prices and property taxes.



A gentrified neighborhood in Haight-Ashbury, San Francisco

Economic policies and restructuring also led to the growth of cities since the 1990s. After a period of urban deglomeration and economic restructuring, the United States witnessed a massive expansion of the service sector (tertiary, quaternary, and quinary activities). Among other innovations, the internet helped to generate entirely new and lucrative enterprises. Through the agglomeration of high technology industries and research facilities, many cities grew into places of immense profit. Renewed entrepreneurship led to the growth of small and large businesses that benefit greatly through **face-to-face interaction**. Through their increased centrality, cities attracted more tourists, as well as permanent city-dwellers, who took a vested interest in the success of their new habitat.



Changing **demographic factors** also led to the growth of US cities due to the shifting patterns of household composition, age composition, and residential location. As women often chose to pursue careers before settling down and raising families, the enticement of the suburbs declined. As a result single-person households became more commonplace, and cities provided cheaper apartments and more jobs. Households without children also became more commonplace, as did terms such as “DINKS” (double income-no kids) and “yuppies” (young urban professionals). The “**graying**” of the US population was highlighted by the aging of Baby Boomers heading into retirement, and **empty-nesters** (with no children in their homes) looked for ways to downsize their living spaces and save money. Additionally, the rise of international immigration, especially from Latin America and Asia, led to even more urban dwellers.



Cities also provided a unique **sense of place**, where people have developed emotional attachments to urban locations based on cultural amenities, landscape features, and lifestyle factors. Through gentrification and commercialization, central cities regained or renewed their distinctiveness. The historic character of a nostalgic past and community pride

lured many people back to the cities. Exclusive cultural amenities, such as theaters, museums, sports venues, and restaurants further improved city centers as **spaces of consumption**. Furthermore, even though ethnic neighborhoods persisted and even expanded, the concentrations of populations with similar interests and lifestyles expanded due to the increased acceptance of diversity.

Modern Urban Trends in the United States

Census data has been collected every 10 years since 1790. The smallest level of census information is the **Block** – usually the size of one city block. A **Block Group** is a collection of several Blocks. **Census Tracts**, the most commonly used level of information, are at the approximate scale of an urban neighborhood and average about 4,000 inhabitants. Neighborhoods, **municipalities** (a political unit, such as a city, town, or village, incorporated for local self-government), and States may lose funds and power if their census numbers go down, so questions of data accuracy arise. Nonetheless, the last census taken in 2010 indicated that the growth of cities in the US has persisted since the 1990s.



Left: the former World Trade Center, NYC (modern architecture) and Right: the Wells Fargo Center, Minneapolis (with a postmodernist, art deco style)



As the American society has progressed from an industrially-focused economy to more of a service-based economy, so have the cityscapes of many urban areas. What has emerged is **postmodernism**, a reaction in architectural design to the feeling of sterile alienation that many people felt due to modern architecture. Postmodernism uses older,

historical styles and a sense of lightheartedness and eclecticism. Buildings combine pleasant-looking forms and vibrant colors to convey new ideas and to create spaces that are more people friendly than their modernist predecessors.



A gated community in Boca Raton, Florida

Regardless of the continued growth of cities since the 1990s, suburbanization remains alive and well in the US urban landscape. And several tendencies can be generalized during the same timeframe. One of the trends that has further delineated and segregated the suburban landscape between the wealthier and poorer residents has been the rise of **gated communities**. It has been estimated that more than 5 percent of Americans live in these fenced-in neighborhoods with controlled access gates for people and cars. It is difficult to determine how many gated communities there are in the United States is that most are privately developed. These make spaces “defensible” from undesired activities such as break-ins, drug dealing, or prostitution.



A teardown in Hinsdale, Illinois (in which 25% of houses were torn down and replaced between 1990 – 2010)

Another trend has been the increase in **teardowns**, or houses that new owners or developers buy with the intention of tearing it down to build a new home on the real estate. Reasons for developers to teardown can include increasing

the appeal of the property to prospective buyers or taking advantage of rising property values. Sometimes, even larger homes, often built to the outer limits of the lot are constructed, called **McMansions** because of their super size and their similar look. The process is especially common in older suburbs, where people wish to have larger homes, and yet do not want to move to far-out exurbs or new developments.



A McMansion along the Intracoastal Waterway in Fort Lauderdale, Florida

Problems of economic and environmental **sustainability** have arisen due to the expansion and sprawl of the suburbs. Because most suburbs and edge cities have been built at the automobile scale, mass transit and pedestrian access within these places become quite impractical. Internal road networks are severely limited in capacity, so densification is far more difficult than in the traditional grid network that characterizes traditional central business districts. Construction of medium- and high-density housing in suburbs and edge cities has proven to be very difficult.

Since the 1980s, **smart growth** methods have been utilized to create more compact urban centers and avoid sprawl through a design movement called **new urbanism**. It advocates transit-oriented, walkable, bicycle-friendly land use, including neighborhood schools, complete streets (for all ages and abilities regardless of their mode of transportation), and mixed-use development (combining residential, commercial and cultural uses) with a range of housing choices. Smart growth values long-range, regional considerations of sustainability while achieving a unique sense of community and place.

New urbanism and smart growth development has focused on urban and suburban infill, which focuses on the reuse and repositioning of obsolete or underutilized buildings and sites. This type of development is essential to renewing blighted neighborhoods and knitting them back together with more prosperous communities. This trend has also gained attention because it is perceived as more environmentally friendly, saving more energy, and leading to less pollution.



Celebration, Florida; an example of new urbanism

As urban environments have expanded, so has the need for new infrastructure and utilities, such as for clean water and electricity. As these places expand, so does the need for new spaces for industrial parks, correction facilities, airports, and shopping centers. However, while many residents want these amenities, they often oppose their development in their immediate areas. This attitude is best encapsulated by the critical acronym NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard). **NIMBYism** connotes that residents believe the developments are needed in society, but should be further away from them. A critical acronym to NIMBY is **BANANA** for Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anyone. The term is most often used to criticize the ongoing opposition of certain advocacy groups, suggesting that many of them seek a complete absence of new growth whatsoever.

The city is an ever-changing element of the cultural landscape, reflecting the desires of government officials, corporations, and citizens. The pulse of the city is created by the people and cultures who reside there. For it is the people, whether working independently or as part of global institutions, who continuously create and re-create the city and its geography.



Some classic examples of development that leads to NIMBYism: airfields, windmill farms, power lines, and power plants