# BUILDING EMPIRE? THE NATION-STATE, EMPIRE, AND TRANSNATIONALISM IN U.S. URBAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

by Maureen Mahoney and Brian Foster, *NeoAmericanist*

The intrigue cities hold for us as Historians and Americanists seems a natural extension of our curiosity about culture, civilizations, politics, economics and power. It is at the level of cities—these modern crossroads of trade, ideas and materials—that the modern intellectual finds, in everyday stories, some of the most influential connections between institutions, cultures, and political and aesthetic movements. American history simply cannot be told without constant reference to its cities. And yet, while scholars often ask how cities shape societies and people into the things we recognize as culture(s), the city itself is often missed as an object of study, a research site or a unit of analysis. This is most pronounced when we consider the recent shift in historiography towards transnational history and the re-emerging history of imperialism and empire. While it seems trite to say that cities are as much the product of global processes as they are of local ones, U.S. urban historiography has largely overlooked, or only glanced at, the imperative relationship between cities and imperialism. By posing a series of provocative questions to Michael Adas, Thomas Bender, Andrew Sandoval-Strausz and Andrew Heath, NeoAmericanist hopes to inspire a (re)thinking of the connection between imperialism and the city. It is the wish of the editors that this forum and the questions raised throughout this introduction will generate a more vigorous discussion that will introduce the tricky yet indispensable themes of imperialism, empire, and transnationalism to U.S. urban historiography, and prompt reflection on how cities feature in the study of America more generally.

The highly localized focus of much U.S. urban historiography is addressed explicitly by Dr. Bender. Perhaps most significant is his focus on the often tense relationship between urban interests, on the one hand, and the interests of nation-states, on the other. Specifically, Bender argues that this tension has proven influential by forcing the writing and examination of urban history into an outlook that defines the city within the sovereign space provided by nations, or as simply one node among many in a national flow of ideas, material and money. Yet the interests of cities often run counter to the sovereign spaces in which they exist. As he explains, cities depend on porous borders for their success, while the nation-state relies on policed geographic and economic barriers to demarcate authority and sovereignty. The city is, then, quintessentially, a transnational or global locale that balances its place within both the fabric of the nation-state but also within larger global systems of trade. No city demonstrates this better than the metropolis of New York, which (like Tokyo, Paris, London, Toronto or Beijing) gains much of its population, wealth and cultural prestige from its central role in what geographers and urban studies scholars call a system of "global cities." While the nation is imperative to the success of these centers, their capacities and the romanticism about their built environments derives as much from the force they exert *across* national boundaries, extending their hinterland into "non-domestic" spaces—where the interests of the city actually reach further than those of the nation-state. Once so empowered, global cities rival the larger federated or nationalized systems of which they are a part, while simultaneously and somewhat paradoxically loaning force and reach to them.

But this transnational character and tension is not restricted to the megacities of the world. Cities traditionally thought of as "secondary" or non-"global cities" have historically exhibited and continue to participate in global or transnational systems. The Cleveland of the Progressive Era clearly demonstrates that secondary cities not only reflect but are shaped by the contending interests of national and global systems. An industrial city located on the shores of Lake Erie, Cleveland attracted a large number of immigrants to its burgeoning industrial core late in the 1800s. In spite of spontaneous neighbourhoods that connected parts of Cleveland's urban landscape into various global networks, the city maintained a predominantly local economic focus as a regional center.[1] Furthermore, laws in Ohio were designed such that the municipal legislature of Cleveland needed the approval of the Ohio State Legislature, located in Columbus, before aldermen could undertake any major projects. Even with an explosion of immigration, ideas, and material culture, Cleveland remained an archetypal "American" city bounded by the authority of political, economic, and geographic channels at the state and national level. But this did not prevent Cleveland from becoming a city with transnational and international reach. When some of the city's leading citizens embraced certain Progressive Era ideas in the early 1900s, enthusiasm grew around the possibility of using European social reform models, particularly in urban planning and architectural design. Resultantly, local municipal authority and elites used the legitimacy gained through participating in trans- and international movements to push back against state and national authority. In this way, and with the passage of Home Rule in 1912 by Mayor Newton Baker, which gave Cleveland city council control over its own legislation, future city development became simultaneously local *and* transnational, rather than focused on supplementing existing Statist ideas.[2]

This tension between the global city and the sovereign state, to which Bender's piece alludes, eventually spurred an interest in the possibility of cities becoming *the* sites of political power, global economic orders and sovereignty. However, belief in this possibility is waning. Perhaps in part because of the rising threat (or specter) of terrorism, and the concomitant increase in the security and surveillance used by nation-states to control and monitor populations and borders, cities seem to be falling back into their juridical orbit. As such, it might seem difficult, given the re-emergence of the nation-state in the last decade (and following the collapse of the triumphalism of liberal capital globalism in the 1990s), to imagine the city outside of this national community. Yet, Bender offers some important ways forward, encouraging the historian "interested in transnational and global approaches to U.S. History...to recognize how much of what we call global or transnational is mediated by cities." Bender's piece, then, leaves us with as many questions as answers, but places the city as a significant center in which it is possible to understand the channels and structure of empire and imperialism. As the new Americanists have explored in the literary cultural domain, historians are left with the job of perhaps better highlighting and elucidating on the social and economic power generated by the seemingly mundane—the everyday people, buildings and technologies created in the city.

Andrew Heath's piece emphasizes the problem of identity and the increasingly dispersed nature of empire, and focuses questions about the relationship between imperial methodologies and U.S. urban

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**1** On immigration, industrialization, and urbanization in Cleveland, see: David C. Hammack, Diane L Grabowski, and John J. Grabowski, *Identity, Conflict and Cooperation; Central Europeans in Cleveland*, 1850-1930 (The Western Reserve Historical Society, 2002).

**2** "Home Rule," *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, David D. VanTassel, editor, first accessed 28 February 2010.

history on the study of the latter. Perhaps most significantly, both Heath and Bender point out that, owing to historians' lingering reliance on narrow conceptions of the state, many struggle to see the city as a participant in economic, social and political networks that extend beyond traditional political channels. In this way, an important connection remains to be made between a revived literature on state formation and political economy and the history of cities. Specifically, urban historians have an unissued role to play in showing the historical roots of what many still misidentify as "extra-political" power, what we know as the political-economic power associated with lobbying, capital movement, populations and worker control. The problem of using the nation-state to frame our analyses of empire, specifically an empire mirrored and facilitated by cities, is that it is difficult, as Heath observes, to identify "at what point the nation ends and empire begins." But approaching the city as metropole might be one way through this dilemma, in that it facilitates a way of rethinking the nation. Exploring the city/metropole as simultaneously nation-bound and unbound may actually revise the very concept of the nation-state by showing the ragged, shifting, and overlapping edges between empire and sovereignty, frontier and state, domestic and foreign.[3] While the power of the metropole has historically shaped and continues to shape traditional channels of political power and law through lobbying or brute economic leverage, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the metropole's "extra-state" influence, exerted through the movement of capital and industry, as well as people and ideas about everyday life, depends on this ragged edge maintaining its ambiguity and malleability. It is in the process of acquiring and exerting influence that the boundaries and authority of states are continuously redrawn; it is in this process that metropoles play a part.

Baker's work in Cleveland, for example, helps to reveal the utility of city-as-metropole, since it was its interaction with the Ohio capital of Columbus, and not Washington. D.C., that facilitated Cleveland's transnational developments. Home Rule thus reminds students of imperial or transnational studies, and urban history in particular, that 'state' is rarely one entity or body of officials. Rather, it is a multi-level system that affects the daily life of and in a city in myriad ways. Recalling our comments above regarding the ragged, shifting, and overlapping edges between empire and sovereignty, it seems scholars can safely assume that empire has pervaded and shaped cities to an extent that is as yet unacknowledged. It is probably necessary that the ways in which cities are functions and products of both global and state-systems be problematized before they will be made clear. While challenging, this approach may offer important insight into how or when state-and-empire relationships overlap, shift, or bleed at the borders.[4] Burnham's City Beautiful Movement provides a strong case study in this regard, as its trajectory demonstrates that exclusive relationships were forged between cities located within the same nation-state and global system. After Cleveland's Group Plan, Burnham was commissioned to re-plan San Francisco. While his plans were halted by a massive earthquake in 1904, the requests he fielded from local experts

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**3** Kerwin Klein, F*rontiers of Historical Imagination*, (University of California Press, 1999), 7. Klein applies this metaphor to New West History to show that the very notion of historical imagination itself helps define what we see as metropole and province. This element of New West history, with its constant consciousness about larger dependency and interconnected networks, might serve urban historians well in their quest to define relative hinterlands for urban spaces as well as the hierarchy and need to order cities on a global stage.

**4** A similar point has been made by Ann Laura Stoler, "Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies," *The Journal of American History* 88.3 (2001): 94 pars. 24 Mar. 2010 http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/jah/88.3/stoler.html; idem, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (2002); Charles Bright and Michael Geyer, "Where in the world is America? The history of the United States in the global age," in Bender, Thomas, ed. *Rethinking American history in a Global Age* (Berkeley, 2002), 63-100.

and authorities to incorporate Parisian neo-classicism into their respective built environments placed both Cleveland and San Francisco into a global system of people trained in urban approaches to social reform. Recalling Taylor's article, "Embedded Statism and the Social Sciences," wherein he highlights the importance of seeing regional connections as one portion of larger global systems, both Cleveland and San Francisco remind us that through professional organizations like Burnham's Michigan Avenue firm in Chicago, global processes are funneled into and subsequently re-shape cities, as well as the nation-state from the inside out.[5]

But to return to the nation-state itself, there are other ways that transnational (as well as imperial) urbanism redefines and subsequently re-shapes the state that are interesting to consider. Looking again at Cleveland's Home Rule, it actually reveals how insignificant a particular level of government can be when locating a city within various global flows of ideas, people, or goods. Not only does this local event demarcate the boundaries separating the nation-state from either imperial or global communities, the limited breadth and reach of Ohio State authority is also revealed. What's more, Burnham's first large-scale planning commission, after the Columbia World's Fair of 1893, was the Washington, D.C. mall in 1901. This movement suggests contemporaneous commonalities between municipal and federal state levels, such that they might have overlapped as they by-passed Ohio and California legislatures. If the examples of Cleveland, Baker, and Burnham are in any way representative of the need to redefine boundaries, relationships, and shapes of both cities and states with a measure of fluidity or fragmentation, how relevant are the long-established methodologies common to imperialism to urban historians? How specifically should the field employ or adapt them?

Dr. Adas takes a strong stand on this issue. In his contribution he presents the argument that the U.S. inherited a colonial tradition from the British. Not only have these traditions endured, they have helped to determine mainstream conceptions of cities and city-building throughout the post-colonial period—particularly the early twentieth century. Instead of a disconnect between city and state interests, Adas suggests that cities and the state are at least mutually constitutive, if not two manifestations of the same power base and political agenda. How, then, does urban history proceed? Is it necessary to first critically engage with exceptionalism? If so, what subsequent approach would be more productive: explorations of colonial and imperial traditions, or moving *beyond* imperialism and its methodologies, by embracing transnational and global approaches? Or, are such binaries necessary? If U.S. urban traditions of imperialism can be connected to British colonialism—if, a century and a quarter later, important social and political networks emerged thanks to the many American provincial governors giving tours of the Philippine Islands to various European diplomats—is there more to be gained by playing with a combination of imperial, transnational and/or global methodologies? Alternatively, could the problem be one of definitions? Would urban historians be better served by developing definitions of imperialism, transnationalism, globalism, and conceptions of city and state relationships that are field- or project-specific?

Immigration is another process that has profoundly influenced not only city development, but also particular cities' relationships with other cities and nation-states world-wide. In his initial contribution, Dr. Sandoval-Strausz addresses specifically this process and its relevant themes. In most North

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**5** Peter J. Taylor, "Embedded Statism and the Social Sciences 2: Geographies (and Metageographies) in Globalization," *Environment and Planning A* 32 (2000): 1105-1114.

American cities, it is easy to see how spatial concentrations of Asian and Middle-Eastern immigrants have changed the overall urban landscape. Likewise, ample evidence exists to argue that enclaves of Polish, Russian, Irish, and Italian immigrants in Chicago's nineteenth ward during the Progressive Era had the same effect. By drawing attention to these processes, Sandoval-Strausz highlights how valuable transnationalism is for understanding the global position of American cities. That said, using his second response, Sandoval-Strausz goes on to highlight for urban historians the dangers of separating imperial and transnational approaches. As he reminds us, surges in immigration are often the result of imperial actions. Manila, capital of the Philippines, provides a strong example. As the urban improvements that Burnham's *Plan of Manila* of 1904 had promised failed to materialize, Filipinas/os began migrating in the 1920s to California in unprecedented numbers. Concentrated in Stockton, so many had arrived by the mid-twentieth century that the city was unofficially renamed 'Little Manila.'[6] To return to a question introduced above, should urban historians be separating imperialism from transnational and global studies? Or can a local urban landscapes be used to demonstrate the interconnections, if not mutually constitutive relationships, between imperial, transnational, and global processes? These questions also speak to an additional one raised by Heath: within and between cities, just *who* is imperializing *who*? Can immigration and resultant changes provide urban historians an opportunity to invert or challenge expected imperial relations?

Finally, we will end with a word on the possible pitfalls of an *exclusively* urban historical approach to imperialism. While calls for interdisciplinarity are made so often they border on platitude, Bender echoes Catherine Hall's observation that "no discipline, it must be clear, can do the work of analysing colonial cultures on their own," since various disciplines and sub-fields retain interests in particular questions and problems "worth holding on to." Nevertheless, the trick may well be in balancing these questions against the ghettoization that too often accompanies disciplinary and sub-disciplinary thinking. Simply put, while the questions urban historians ask are important, an interrogation of the assumptions within these questions is necessary for a thorough treatment of a topic as amorphous and controversial as imperialism and empire. It is precisely that kind of discussion we want to see take place.

**6** Gavin Shatkin, "Colonial Capital, Modernist Capital, Global Capital: The Changing Political Symbolism of Urban Space in Metro Manila, the Philippines," *Pacific Affairs* 78,4 (2005/2006): 581-585; David J. Pivar, "The Military, Prostitution, and Colonial Peoples: India and the Philippines, 1885-1917," *The Journal of Sex Research* 17,3 (1981): 262-263; Dawn Bohulano Mabalon, "Life in Little Manila: Filipinas/os in Stockton, California, 1917-1972," PhD Dissertation, Stanford University, 2004.

A Round Table on Building Empire: The Nation-State, Empire, and Transnationalism in U.S. Urban Historiography

## COLONIAL CITIES AND THEIR LEGACY

by Michael Adas

The way many of the convener's questions are posed obfuscates the profoundly colonial nature of early American cities. In approaching metropole-colonial issues such as these, it is critical to keep in mind that the United States began as disparate colonial enclaves and remained colonial for a century and a half before it became an independent nation. During this formative era, American urban design and society were shaped in planning, layout and architectural design by English precedents as well as French models and Iberian examples. Though somewhat distinctive colonial variants emerged, the urban influences of several European metropoles was apparent, often remarked upon by European visitors, and readily acknowledged by travelers, urban notables, and savants among the migrant residents in the colonies.

In the early modern period then, "transnational" models and exchanges, such as those envisioned by Mumford and scholars like Pirenne long before him, are indeed useful. As recent scholarship by Jack Greene and others has shown, cities on the eastern and southern seaboard of North America can best be understood as nodes in intersecting colonial trading, intellectual, and politico-military networks that extended over much of the Atlantic basin and had tendrils that reached into the Pacific and Indian Oceans and the China seas. The term transnational needs to be bracketed in this period and well into the 20th century because many, if not most, of the cities in the imperial circuits were in colonized societies not nations in any meaningful sense of the term.

This colonial legacy endured as a source of patriotic sentiment, aesthetic excellence, and tourist interest. Yet, in the last decades of the nineteenth century, when a distinctive pattern of American urban development was forged, it was regarded as a relic of the pre-modern, colonial past and relegated to the realm of the preservationists. The influence of Georges-Eugène Haussmann on the configuration of Detroit and other U.S. cities notwithstanding, Sullivan's skyscrapers, and Manhattan's grid were seen as a clear departure from European precedents. They also apparently owed little or nothing to colonial cities, whether they were in American-held enclaves, such as Manila or Panama City, or were showcase sites for colonial rivals. The miniscule size of the **formal** U.S. overseas empire was a critical factor in this regard, as was the fact that influences in terms of urban design and development flowed overwhelmingly from metropole to colony. This tendency was most readily visible in Manila, the capital of America's largest colonial possession. The layout and architecture of the new administrative sections of the city resembled a more modest Washington, D.C., and the harbor and its accompanying esplanade, despite "Orientalist" touches here and there, were modeled on comparable areas in rapidly growing U.S. cities in the fin de siècle.

The overwhelmingly one-way transmission of urban influences, particularly those related to sanitation—including sewage and clean water systems—and commercial and transportation improvements was also determined by the low regard on the part of the American colonizers for virtually all of the Spanish institutional arrangements and physical changes introduced in the centuries preceding the U.S. takeover of the islands in 1898. Like those encountered in Cuba and Puerto Rico, Spanish cities in the Philippines—with special emphasis on Manila—were viewed as chaotic, filthy, crowded and

disease-ridden. Indigenous precedents, insofar as they still existed, were simply beyond the purview of American engineers and planning. The physical makeover of the colony spearheaded by Republican and Democratic Progressives—epitomized by William Howard Taft—which was arguably the centerpiece of what was touted as the American variant of the civilizing mission, was all about modernizing technologies, knowledge and projects, emanating from the continental United States. As the much-touted Filipino exhibitions at turn of the century World's Fairs amply attested, other than side-show curiosities and model American-style elementary classrooms, the indigenous peoples from the Philippines or Hawaii had little to contribute to American city building or any other aspect of American life.

However blinkered, this perception was reinforced by the fact that societies which became US colonies had not historically been highly urbanized, in contrast, for example, to China, India and much of the Islamic world. And this may help to account for the fact that historians of US overseas expansionism have not produced studies, such as those by Thomas Metcalf on the fashioning of a British imperial capital at New Delhi or Gwendolyn Wright's engaging study of French colonial architecture in North Africa, that explore the interplay between urban planning and design in the metropole and the colonies. And in the case of informally colonized areas, such as China, with which Americans were increasingly engaged at various levels from the mid-19th century, political and economic decline led US colonizers to assume that Chinese cities were poorly planned, shabbily built and unsanitary—hence hardly worthy of emulation. Unlike the Philippines, Hawaii and Puerto Rico, where Americans had conquered and then set about administering, US colonizers felt little compulsion to engage in efforts at urban renewal over most of Africa and Asia that was colonized by various European powers and by the early 20th century, the Japanese.

To some extent the neglect of colonial urbanization and built environments in US historiography has been countered in the past few years by studies, including Warwick Anderson's study of disease and medicine in Manila and David McBride's Missions for Science on the Carribean, even though these works are not centered on urbanization per se. Interesting comparisons were also made by participants in a recent conference at Johns Hopkins between American city planning and development in the Philippines, and that in European and Japanese imperial enclaves in Asia in the 19th century fin de siècle. These suggest that in the American case, influences on planning, organization and administration were predominantly one-way—from the US metropole to colonial cities. Consequently, greater attention to the latter may not have had an appreciable impact on thinking and writing about US urban history in this era.

Fragmentary research and writing on the post-colonial period in the second half of the 20th century suggests that these trends persisted, but that urban impact of US interventionism overseas reached a whole different level of magnitude. Though these processes extend beyond the purview of this forum, at least two major trajectories of urban transformation can be discerned. On the one hand, the transfer of US skyscraper architecture and dense core urban design over much of the developing (and developed European and Japanese) world. On the other, the fragmented, refugee-packed, dysfunctional urban environments in cities like Saigon and Baghdad that have proved to be major consequences of American interventions in post-colonial nations. Few historians have taken up the provocative challenge of Samuel Huntington's advocacy (in the case of Saigon in the 1960s) of this mode of forced urbanization as a counter to peasant or sectarian insurgencies in the post-colonial world. Perhaps more than any other US overseas initiatives, these urban implosions serve to underscore the consequences of the implementation by the denizens of the "new" American empire of Naomi Klein's "shock doctrine" approach to non-compliant societies in the post-colonial developing world.

A Round Table on Building Empire: The Nation-State, Empire, and Transnationalism in U.S. Urban Historiography

## HIDDEN METAPHORS OF EMPIRE

by Andrew Heath

The cant of empire echoes in studies of urban America. From Arthur Schlesinger Sr.'s "urban imperialism" to Kenneth Jackson's "crabgrass frontier", imperial metaphors have structured the way historians approach the city for nearly a century.[1] More often than not they are little more than organizing tropes: a convenient shorthand for expressing patterns of metropolitan life, but nothing more.

When my research on the American city in both the antebellum and postbellum periods encountered imperial figures of speech, I began to wonder whether these metaphors were worth exploring further. The literature I explored suggested links between the nation's western expansion and the way cities grew, as well as ideas about what they ought to look like, and how they should function. The optimism and anxiety empire-building engendered in citizens between the Mexican-American (1846-1848) and Spanish-American (1898) wars seemed interwoven into the fabric of the urban form and metropolitan culture in the United States. With imperialism very much on my mind—I wrote my dissertation proposal at the same moment U.S. troops marched into Iraq—it struck me that the rise of American empire and the emergence of the big city at the same historical moment might be more than a historical coincidence.

As the convener of this roundtable suggests, there may be lessons to be taken from the work of Amy Kaplan. The parallels she draws between the rhetoric of manifest destiny and domesticity in antebellum American literature enabled her to find links between the frontier and the hearth. Referred to as "manifest domesticity," Kaplan locates a discourse that blurred the boundaries between public and private spheres and gave women a vital role in the nation's civilizing mission.[2] Such an approach suggests the potential rewards for historians who look for traces of empire in unlikely places. Where Kaplan found empire in the homes of American citizens, others might locate it in their streets and built environments.

It is not entirely fair though to suggest that historians have not already been doing so for some time; for the student of the nineteenth and early twentieth century there is a rich literature on empire and the American city. Judd Kahn's *Imperial San Francisco*, now thirty years old, argued that Progressive era boosters' imperial ambitions underpinned their West coast urban designs. Since then, the likes of William Cronon, Eugene P. Moehring, Gary Brechin, Adam Arenson, and David Scobey have explored the ways in which empire has shaped the development of the American metropolis. Drawing on Kaplan's method, meanwhile, Sheryl Streeby's *American Sensations* analyzes the "double axis of city and empire" in

1 Arthur M. Schlesinger Sr. "The City in American History." *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 27, no. 1 (1940): 43-66; Kenneth T. Jackson. *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.

2 Amy Kaplan. "Manifest Domesticity." *American Literature* 70, no. 3 (1998): 581-606.

nineteenth-century popular culture.[3]

Yet despite the richness of these studies no recognizable school has coalesced: it is not easy to identify a historiographic tradition exploring empire and the city in the way we can point to the New Urban History, for example, or the New Suburban History. This may owe something to accidents of academic production. Historians who might be working individually on questions that pertain to imperial urbanism have not had the big conference or influential edited collection that helps define them as a collective. It is striking, indeed, that the collaborative work that has come out on this theme tends to focus on British, French, or non-Western examples.[4]

But there is surely more at work here than factors purely internal to the academy, and I wonder whether historians have been paradoxically hurt by the richness of their work. The authors I cite above have used 'empire' to examine aspect of urban history as diverse as political economy, ecological transformation, the built environment, and social control, amongst other things. Taken together, their findings suggest how manifold approaches to empire can enrich our understanding of the city. We can see for example how ideas of civilization and savagery migrated easily from the Western frontier to the urban frontier; how cities extended markets and remade ecosystems; and how experiments in rebuilding European capitals shaped the way Americans thought about urban design and governance in their own metropolitan centers. There is an eclectic array of theoretical approaches here that echo the broader literature on colonialism: the neo-Marxist urban geography of David Harvey preferred by some, the postcolonial theory of Edward Said by others.[5]

I am loathe to privilege any one of these approaches over the others as I think each can cast into relief how both the process of imperial expansion and the ideology of empire have shaped aspects of the American city, but it is worth noting that works that draw together these disparate threads in a single setting—a Herculean task—are rare. David Scobey's *Empire City*, a wonderfully rich study of Civil War era New York, certainly manages this, as does Jonathan Schneer's *London 1900*.[6] It is telling that the former is written very much in the vein of American Studies, while the latter takes a snapshot of the city at a particular moment and illuminates through forensic examination of institutions, places, and people a hitherto invisible imperial presence. Empire it seems is so embedded in the city, those larger ones of the Civil War and Progressive eras in particular, that the conventional chronological approach of the historian cannot always reveal its countless interconnections.

The dynamics of academic production and the eclecticism of subject matter and theoretical approach

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**3** Judd Kahn. *Imperial San Francisco: Politics and Planning in an American City*, 1897-1906. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979; William Cronon. *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1991; Eugene P. Moehring. *Urbanism and Empire in the Far West, 1840-1890*. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2004; Gary Brechin. *Imperial San Francisco: Urban Power, Earthly Ruin*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999; Adam I. Arenson. "City of Manifest Destiny: St. Louis and the Cultural Civil War, 1848-1877." (Ph.D., Yale University, 2008). David M. Scobey. *Empire City: The Making and Meaning of the New York City Landscape*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002; Shelley Streeby. *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002. p. 5.

**4** See for example Felix Driver and David Gilbert, eds. *Imperial Cities: Landscape, Display and Identity*, *Imperial Cities: Landscape, Display and Identity*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999.

**5** David Harvey. *Consciousness and the Urban Experience.* Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1985 and *The Urbanization of Capital*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1985; Edward W. Said. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Knopf, 1993.

**6** Jonathan Schneer. *London 1900: The Imperial Metropolis*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.

then have left us with an imposing but fragmented literature on empire and the American city. In this way the field mirrors the patterns of American empire it takes as its subject. Like the American state, the American empire has never been a leviathan but rather an ever-shifting and often contested constellation of institutions, practices, and ideologies resting on a mixture of formal and informal power.[7] While its decentered nature may make it harder to write a history of U.S. imperialism than some of its European counterparts, it makes it all the more imperative for urban historians to analyze empire in the metropolis. The field should embrace this challenge since the diffuse influence of empire extends well beyond the neo-baroque plan of Washington D.C.

But how might this be done? First we should perhaps consider what we mean by empire: a term with a complex history in America. The definition of this roundtable—namely "control by one population or culture over the affairs and internal matters of another"—is a useful starting point. Yet, I think we need to ask in what ways the American city is imperial and who is actually doing the imperializing.

Identifying the subjects and objects of imperial power is therefore crucial and this historical context might lead us away from grand theorizing. New York I think can provide an instructive example. Gotham was an imperial city in 1770 and 1870 but in very different ways. Over the course of a century it was transformed from a place on the periphery of one empire—a colonized city that itself acted as an agent of colonization in subordinating African and Native-American populations—to the economic and cultural metropolis of another.[8] Fast forward another hundred years and its imperial role was quite different yet again, though this time perhaps in terms of scale rather than kind as its hinterland attained global proportions. There are certainly continuities here for the historian to explore. As Lawrence Vale argues, there is a close relationship between the built environment and power in almost every urban setting. By exploring diverse sites of power, such as colonial court houses, Civil War era penitentiaries, and twentieth-century skyscrapers, we might be able to read the aspirations of empire-builders.[9] We can look too at the patterns of domination, subordination, and resistance within the city as slaves, wild "Celts", and new immigrants have been subject to surveillance and civilizing missions, which as Catherine Hall points out were "as necessary in Manchester as in Calcutta."[10] And of course we can trace the economic links that gave some New Yorkers power—whether formal or informal—over their own metropolis and more remote climes. But the meanings attached to empire, the identity of imperializers and imperialized, and the patterns empire left in urban space and society were subject to continual contestation and change.

There may be another lesson in New York as it illustrates how federalism complicates the American relationship between metropolis and empire. France had its imperial city in Paris and colonial cities like Algiers and Saigon; London was the center of the British Empire and the focal point for symbolic displays of power so richly explored in recent work. In contrast, the polycentric nature of the American nation, and the decision of the founders to locate political power in an insalubrious Maryland swamp, meant that American cities could harbor imperial ambitions of their own. Historiography itself reflects this through

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**7** I have been influenced here especially by William J. Novak. "The Myth of the 'Weak' American State." *American Historical Review* 113, no. 3 (2008): 752-772.

**8** For a recent study of New York as a city within the Early Modern British Empire see Carl H. Nightingale. "Before Race Mattered: Geographies of the Color Line in Early Colonial Madras and New York." *American Historical Review* 113, no. 1 (2008): 48-71.

**9** Lawrence J. Vale. *Architecture, Power, and National Identity*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.

**10** Catherine Hall. "Cities of Empire." *Journal of Urban History* 27, no. 2 (2001): p. 193.

scholars' application of imperial frameworks to not only D.C. and New York, but also San Francisco, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Boston, St. Louis, and Chicago. The mid nineteenth-century battle between civic boosters to expand their city's contado to the Mississippi Valley and Pacific—a kind of U.S. equivalent to the Scramble for Africa that was often framed in a rich imperial idiom—provides ample evidence of these aspirations. The practical consequences of such rivalries—the extension of public and private corporate power and the rapid growth of a transcontinental railroad network—remade not just cities but the nation itself. When Civil War era Americans spoke of imperial or empire cities they were usually referring to specific cities in competition with one another, even if they drew on tropes of American empire-building —especially manifest destiny—to do so. In the great era of continental conquest, imperial ambitions spurred competition between cities of the nation-state as each vied for supremacy.[11]

I wonder whether the nation-state can provide a complementary focus for urban historians. There is after all a definitional problem—one that is particularly acute in the American past—over at what point the nation ends and empire begins. Studies on the process of internal colonization have suggested the blurred boundaries between the two in other settings. While in the United States, western expansion was often understood by contemporaries as both the consolidation of the nation-state and the extension of benevolent imperial power.[12] I am far from convinced that for my period at least these processes are separable.

Acknowledging this point may broaden the horizons for scholars of cities and empires. One of the most salutary trends in nineteenth-century urban history over the past decade or so has been the integration of urban and national history. Ignoring the cry in the 1990s for synthesis, historians have instead imaginatively found links between the development of city and nation through case-studies that shed light on both. In the work of Drew Einhorn and Sven Beckert we see ties between local and national political economy; Bruce Dorsey relates gendered cultures of urban reform to nation-building; while Margaret E. Farrar's *Building the Body Politic* shows the common foundation to urban design and national construction in Progressive Era Washington D.C.[13] Each study in very different ways reveals the potential rewards of locating national preoccupations in seemingly local phenomena and it only requires a minor conceptual shift to replace nation- with empire-building. To Dorsey indeed the terms are interchangeable. While in Beckert's discussion of how in New York a Gilded Age bourgeoisie cast an industrial proletariat as "the other," the influence of postcolonial theory on this seemingly nationally rooted literature is palpable.[14]

I would like to conclude then by suggesting that we may know more about the relationship between American imperialism and the nation's cities than we necessarily realize. But that is not to suggest that more work does not need to be done. While I am inclined to reject calls for an overarching theory of

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**11** This is hardly a new discovery. It is well documented in New Deal era literature, including Schlesinger Sr. "City in American History" and Louis Hartz. *Economic Policy and Democratic Thought: Pennsylvania*, 1776-1860. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1948.

**12** Michael Hechter. Michael. *Internal colonialism*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1999.

**13** Robin L. Einhorn. *Property rules: political economy in Chicago*, 1833-1872. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991; Sven Beckert. *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie*, 1850-1896. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001; Bruce Dorsey. *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002; Margaret E. Farrar. *Building the Body Politic: Power and Urban Space in Washington, D.C.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008.

**14** Dorsey. *Reforming Men and Women*. p. 8; Beckert, *Monied Metropolis*. p. 179.

how empire has shaped the city—not least because of the protean nature of the empire in question—urban historians can learn (and have learnt) much from the insights of postcolonial literary theorists, practitioners of subaltern studies, architectural critics, scholars of state formation, and economists, as well as of course historians working on imperial and colonial cities beyond the United States. It is the eclecticism of the literature that these approaches have inspired that I think has made the field at once so exciting and so difficult to see. As more research is undertaken, and as the boundaries between empire and nation in American historiography become ever harder to define, I hope urban historians will overcome their partial blindness and recognize the myriad ways imperial practices and ideologies have left their mark on the city.

## GLOBALIZATION: CITY VS NATION-STATE?

### RESPONSES TO QUESTION OF US EMPIRE AND URBAN HISTORY

by Thomas Bender, New York University

**1.** Why have historians of urban America not considered themes related to imperial ambitions? First, I would say that such blindness is not unique to US urban historians. Those historians who have written about the transformation of European cities and the emergence of metropolitan life in them—architectural historians in particular—do not connect the vast increase of resources to the formal colonies and the extraction of wealth by means of a free trade imperialism from less developed parts of the world, so-called informal colonialism. The architectural historians referenced by the convener of this roundtable, including Gwendolyn Wright, Lawrence Vale, Zeynep Çelik, and Nezar AlSayyad, have focused on the architecture of empire, but an equally important question to explore is the imperial architecture of the metropole. Oddly, the word imperial is often used in reference to the neo-classical architecture of European and American cities at the turn of the nineteenth into the twentieth century, while imperial connections pertaining to the social, economic, and even cultural history of the metropole are largely omitted. Second, in the American case recognition of imperialism and empire in everyday life has been ignored by most subfields until very recently. Empire was sanitized as "westward expansion."

There is also a general disconnect between the study of American international activity and domestic activity. William Appleman Williams, who did make the connection, made it with agriculture and a Jeffersonian tradition of empire. The split is furthered by the American tradition of exceptionalist thinking—which denies both empire and class. Even debates about empire are contained continentally. We ask ourselves whether we are doing the right thing, but it is entirely self-referential. We do not factor in what is happening at the other end. It is all we, so the imperial nature of our activity in the world is domesticated in a way that blocks what goes on beyond our borders.

**2.** As I have already suggested, the biggest thing missing from urban historiography is the importance of empire in drawing money to the metropole. Here some cities are more relevant than others. San Francisco accumulated significant resources as the metropole for US Pacific imperial interests. New York profited more globally. And in both cases the result is an exceptionally strong financial sector because of the pattern of American empire after the fiasco of the Philippines and the turn to financial "missionaries." Wars of empire have had a huge impact on cities. There has been some scholarship on this, but war production and military bases and military research has transformed cities and regions. One of the reasons California schools were so strong in the 1950s was the federal assistance they received on a per capita basis to accommodate children of defense related workers, which was a huge percentage of workers in the state, particularly the Bay Area, San Diego, and LA.

**3.** There is a global system of cities, and the domesticity of our approach to urban history misses that. There is a lot of discussion of the internal hierarchy of cities, but the global hierarchy is very important

for both the flow of capital and migrants, which are or should be big themes (or should be) in urban history. In fact, there is an interesting tension between the logic of nations and cities that would warrant exploration. Cities require open borders for their success—the more people, things, ideas, and money that passes through them, the more they thrive. Nations, as sovereigns, tend to be protective of borders. There are different interests at work here. Whatever global history there is in the modern era is managed by cities. Cities, even inland ones like Chicago, are connected (as W. Cronon has shown) to world markets. We need more than trade statistics, we need maps of the networks of cities inside and beyond national borders, and we need to distinguish between mutually beneficial and exploitative networks. Long ago, Saskia Sassen suggested that global immigration patterns emerge after and in the same channels as capital, though in the opposite direction, from colony (formal or informal) to the metropole. That is worth studying historically.

**4.** Several years ago, when globalization seemed to be located in cities, I thought that cities might significantly change their position in relation to nations. The rise of the modern nation-state was a triumph over cities. It is noteworthy that the word city does not appear in the U.S. Constitution, and cities are legally not political units but rather administrative units of the states. That is why they must get permission from the state legislatures for so many local policies. I thought that the example of Singapore, Hong Kong (after the "hand over"), and the re-emergence of Shanghai might be an indicator that the triumph of nations over cities in the early modern and modern period might be tempered, making for a new perspective of cities. I am not so sure any more that such a transformation is underway. But I think for those of us who are interested in transnational and global approaches to U.S. history, it is important to recognize how much of what we call global or transnational is mediated by cities. And this has an unstudied impact on cities, and gives cities a role (also unstudied) in the transnational processes that are increasingly of interest. This is especially true in the cultural domain (and historians might try to explore the relations of cities to some of the ideas about the circulation of culture in the work of Arjun Appadurai) and the economy. This might be the place to revive the long abandoned but vital subfield of economic history.

**5.** As suggested by my interest in more empirical work than the Pease/Kaplan approach, interesting though it is, and broader considerations than architectural or planning historians offer, I think we historians can do what we have always done. Beg, borrow, and steal ideas and data, but do our own work, as we seem to have the widest possibilities.

## AMERICAN EMPIRE AND THE URBAN LANDSCAPE

by A. K. Sandoval-Strausz, Department of History, University of New Mexico

If we want to think about the relationship between imperialism and cityscapes, we immediately run into two major issues: first, the characteristics of European and American empires and their place in global histories; second, the epistemology of the study of urbanism. Since Dr. Bender and Dr. Adas have thought and written so authoritatively about the former, my comments will focus on the latter from the standpoint of a historian of the urban landscape.

We might begin with the epistemological status of the built environment. NeoAmericanist has inquired why "so few historians studying urban America" have "asked questions or incorporated themes related to American imperial ambitions." While I do not dispute the basic contention here, it is important to recognize that there are two contrasts being drawn. The explicit one is geographic: the scholars cited as having done exceptional work on colonial urbanism—Gwendolyn Wright, Lawrence Vale, Zeynep Çelik, and Nezar AlSayyad—have written primarily about European imperialism. But there is another, unspoken contrast here: these scholars all work in schools of architecture and were trained as architects or architectural historians rather than as "historian historians," as those of us with history degrees are affectionately called in architecture circles.

Why is this important? Because architecture scholars routinely do something that most historians do not: they see buildings and landscapes as intrinsically worthy of study and inherently valuable as historical evidence. As Robert Fishman pointed out at Harvard University's 2005 "Reconceptualizing the History of the Built Environment in North America" conference, for many years urban historians all but ignored the visual aspects of cities. They only "learned to see" well after they had established most of the field's foundational epistemological commitments, among which was a focus on textual and quantitative sources rather than visual ones. It is only relatively recently that "historian historians" have joined architectural historians in interpreting cityscapes themselves as historical artifacts, however incompletely: we remain primarily textual in our orientation despite the fact that while words are easily used to mislead, it is hard to be hypocritical with lumber or stone. (Or, put more succinctly, "Talk is cheap; buildings are expensive.")[1]

Under these conditions of scholarly production, it stands to reason that architectural historians working on Europe have taken the lead in studying urbanism and empire. There is simply so much extant, extensive, and conspicuous French, British, and Spanish colonial architecture that scholars who think first and foremost about the built environment have a great deal to work with. These and other European powers spent decades and in some cases centuries constructing entire urban landscapes in their overseas possessions in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Not only that, but many of these landscapes were designed by renowned architects and scrupulously documented by colonial authorities. This has made it even easier

1 Robert Fishman, "Site Reading: How Urban History Learned to See," abstracted at the conference website: http://warrencenter.fas.harvard.edu/builtenv/fishman.html; A. K. Sandoval-Strausz, *Hotel: An American History* (New Haven, 2007), 6.

for an architectural profession long devoted to admiring individual genius to be interested in their work overseas and to find the kind of records needed to complement their reading of surviving structures. The resultant scholarship, particularly that on French and British imperial urbanism, has been enormously impressive and important, and has been followed by a new generation of more devotedly postcolonial research in the form of books like Indigenous Modernities and Making Lahore Modern, which challenge some of the basic assumptions of previous studies.[2]

By contrast, the landscapes of United States imperialism typically have not followed the pattern of European empires. We need give no quarter to disingenuous claims of American colonial exceptionalism to recognize that they have looked rather different—and in a way that made them easier for both architectural historians and historian historians to overlook. Other than U.S. imperialism on its "home" continent (on which more shortly), the American empire has produced fewer, smaller, and less permanent landscapes: while the U.S. sectors in Manila or the Panama Canal Zone are certainly major artifacts that have accommodated tens of thousands of people, they are simply not of the same order of magnitude as the colonial sections of Casablanca or Bombay. In addition, the American colonial built environment was (and is) much more intensively commercial than its European counterparts. If governors' palaces and segregated dwellings for colonial officials typified French and British colonies, the artifacts of the U.S. empire were better characterized by the countless hotels and resorts that bound Caribbean and Pacific possessions into an expanding touristic imperium, or by South American company towns like Fordlandia or the managerial enclaves of the United Fruit Company. The reason this is an epistemological issue is that until very recently, architectural history tended to ignore commercial buildings and instead focus on the traditional triumvirate of domestic, religious, and governmental structures. Thus, even those scholars most likely to notice American imperial landscapes would have been inclined to downplay them as unimportant or ephemeral, especially as compared with the architectural pageantry of European colonial urbanism.[3]

Despite these architectural and intellectual obstacles, historians have indeed published some extremely insightful books on American imperial urbanism. These works are not always as elaborately theorized as their European counterparts, but they certainly fit the NeoAmericanist criteria for this roundtable. Robert Rydell's All the World's a Fair (1987) interprets world's fairs and expositions as

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**2** On the traditional intellectual habits of architectural historians, see Thomas Hubka, "Just Folks Designing: Vernacular Designers and the Generation of Form," *Journal of Architectural Education 32* (1979), 27-29; Dell Upton, "Architectural History or Landscape History?," *Journal of Architectural Education 44* (1991), 195-199. On French and British colonial urbanism, see Paul Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989); Gwendolyn Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Chicago, 1991); Zeynep Çelik, *Urban Forms and Colonial Confrontations: Algiers under French Rule* (Berkeley, 1997); Norma Evenson, *The Indian Metropolis: A View Towards the West* (New Haven, I989); Thomas R. Metcalf, *An Imperial Vision: Indian Architecture and Britain's Raj* (Berkeley, I989); Mariam Dossal, *Imperial Designs and Indian Realities: The Planning of Bombay City, 1855-1875* (Oxford, I991). Recent reinterpretations of colonial urbanism include Jyoti Hosagrahar, *Indigenous Modernities: Negotiating Architecture and Urbanism* (New York, 2006); Swati Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta: Modernity, Nationalism and the Colonial Uncanny* (New York, 2006); Steven Nelson, *From Cameroon to Paris: Mousgoum Architecture In and Out of Africa* (Chicago, 2007); William J. Glover, *Making Lahore Modern: Constructing and Imagining a Colonial City* (Minneapolis, 2007); Zeynep Çelik, *Empire, Architecture, and the City: French-Ottoman Encounters, 1830-1914* (Seattle, 2008).

**3** Richard Longstreth, "Foreword" to Bernice L. Thomas, *America's 5 & 10 Cent Stores: The Kress Legacy* (New York, 1997), viii; Richard Longstreth, "Architecture and the City," in *American Urbanism: A Historiographical Review*, ed. Howard Gillette, Jr. and Zane L. Miller (Westport, Conn., 1987), 165; A. K. Sandoval-Strausz, "Spaces of Commerce: A Historiographic Introduction to Certain Architectures of Capitalism," Winterthur Portfolio, forthcoming.

domestic architectural expressions of the American imperial mindset in the early decades of overseas expansionism. He shows, for example, how Chicago's World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 divided the official "White City," the Beaux-Arts-inspired expression of American nationhood and power, from the unofficial and commercialized "Midway," with foreign exhibitions situated according to their ranking in the racial hierarchy of the day. Annabel Wharton's Building the Cold War (2001) clearly demonstrates how the U.S. government subsidized the construction of Hilton hotels in geopolitically important cities like Cairo, Athens, and Jerusalem. The ostentatious modernism of these hotels, particularly conspicuous in the shorter, older, and less geometric urban landscapes of North Africa and Asia Minor, was intended to symbolize the cosmopolitanism and military-technological prowess of the United States. Meanwhile, the hotel interiors, which featured the very finest accommodations, amenities, food, drink, and décor, used consumer goods to help persuade the urban elites of unaligned nations to place themselves in the economic orbit of the capitalist superpower. Most recently, Coll Thrush's Native Seattle (2007) has documented the indigenous origins of this northwestern metropolis. He shows how native settlements and economies in what they called "the crossing-over place" were overlaid and then displaced by white migrants as they built Seattle. Over the decades, whites expelled, ignored, or exoticized Indians, who nonetheless eventually managed to reassert their own identities in the city around the turn of the new millennium. Ultimately, Thrush's work reminds us that the entire U.S. urban system has for centuries been an imperial project in which newer built environments have tended to erase both the surviving landscapes and the historical memory of the continent's first inhabitants.[4]

Redirecting our gaze to future scholarship, there are any number of ways in which an explicitly imperial interpretation of U.S. urban history could augment the existing strengths of the field. The sub-discipline of tourism studies has become very active, and given the well-established relationship between tourism and empire—not to mention the economic importance of pleasure travel to urban economies and the increasing global integration of the travel industry—there is much to be said about landscapes of tourism. I also expect to see more work on American company towns abroad; it is becoming apparent that these were more common than previously supposed, and such scholarship would enjoy a methodological boost from existing histories of domestic company towns. We might also hope for historical studies of the built environment of American military power; with the long history of U.S. naval bases and the twentieth-century proliferation of army and air force installations around the globe, this should tell us a great deal about the everyday life of attempted global hegemony.[5]

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**4** Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions*, 1876-1916 (Chicago, 1985); Annabel Jane Wharton, *Building the Cold War: Hilton International Hotels and Modern Architecture* (Chicago, 2001); Coll Thrush, *Native Seattle: Histories from the Crossing-Over Place* (Seattle, 2007).

**5** On tourism, see, for example, Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York, 1976); Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York, 1992); Dennis Judd and Susan Fainstein, eds., *The Tourist City* (New Haven, 1999); Hal Rothman, *Devil's Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1998); Catherine Cocks, *Doing the Town: The Rise of Urban Tourism in the United States, 1850–1915* (Berkeley, 2001); Richard Gassan, *The Birth of American Tourism: New York, the Hudson Valley, and American Culture, 1790-1830* (Amherst, Mass., 2008). On company towns abroad, see Greg Grandin, *Fordlandia: The Rise and Fall of Henry Ford's Forgotten Jungle City* (New York, 2009); James Martin, "Work and Leisure in the United Fruit Company's Caribbean, 1899-1960" (Doctoral dissertation, University of New Mexico, 2008). On company towns in the United States, John Garner, *The Company Town: Architecture and Society in the Early Industrial Age* (New York, 1992); Carl Smith, *Urban Disorder and the Shape of Belief: The Great Chicago Fire, the Haymarket Bomb, and the Model Town of Pullman* (Chicago, 1996); Margaret Crawford, *Building the Workingmans Paradise: The Design of American Company Towns* (New York, 1996).

That said, I'd like to use the remainder of my contribution to focus on one particular area of American urban history that I think very much needs to be reinterpreted in the context of U.S. empire-building. The history of postwar urbanization and suburbanization is among the strongest in the entire field of American history. From the foundational texts of the 1980s by Kenneth T. Jackson and Arnold Hirsch to the superb monographs of the past fifteen years by Thomas Sugrue, Richard Longstreth, Becky Nicolaides, Robert Self, Alison Isenberg, Eric Avila, Kevin Kruse, Matthew Lassiter, and others, we enjoy a rich understanding of the urban crisis and the suburban surge, including details of deindustrialization, property-rights activism, tax policy, trade-group lobbying, historic preservation, retail sales strategies, and national political realignment.[6]

But the metropolitan America that these historians have so successfully explored is not the one we see around us. The existing urban-suburban historiography was born and developed in an era of urban crisis when many observers were wondering whether big cities had become obsolete. This period was bounded by the catastrophic Watts Riots of 1965 and the even more destructive Los Angeles Riots of 1992; it was emblematized by the municipal near-bankruptcies of the 1970s and the crack cocaine and crime epidemic of 1985-1991. It stood to reason that scholars who were surrounded by symptoms of an urban crisis would seek to explain its historical roots. Since then, however, the nation's cities have changed dramatically, and in the estimation of most urbanists, they have made a comeback, with many cities gaining population in ways not seen in decades.

It is impossible to understand the roots of this new phase in American metropolitan history without considering immigration and empire. The most important demographic fact in the survival of scores of U.S. cities is the arrival in the past fifty years of tens of millions of newcomers from Latin America and Asia. As Mike Davis pointed out ten years ago in Magical Urbanism, Latinos and Asian Americans have become the most urbanized populations in the United States. The urban-suburban historiography must therefore move toward a new paradigm that is both multiracial and transnational. The existing literature still treats the metropolitan geography of the United States as a question of black and white and of purely domestic population moves, and to be fair, this racial dyad was indeed the heart of the story at least up until the 1980s; indeed one need only read Thomas Sugrue's Sweet Land of Liberty (2008) to see that this paradigm can still drive extraordinary historical thinking and writing about American urbanism and suburbanism. But future metropolitan histories will have to explain transnational factors that have

**6** Arnold Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (New York, 1983); Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York, 1985); Thomas Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, 1996); Richard Longstreth, *City Center to Regional Mall: Architecture, the Automobile, and Retailing in Los Angeles, 1920-1950* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998); Becky M. Nicolaides *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (Chicago, 2002); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, 2003); Dolores Hayden, *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000* (New York, 2003); Alexander von Hoffmann, *House by House, Block by Block: The Rebirth of America's Urban Neighborhoods* (New York, 2003); Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley, 2004); Alison Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It* (Chicago, 2005); Howard Gillette, Jr., *Camden After the Fall: Decline and Renewal in a Post-Industrial City* (Philadelphia, 2006); Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, 2007); Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, 2007).

operated between the United States, Latin America, and Asia.[7]

The dynamics of empire and the shape of the built environment would play important roles in this proposed new history. The story of American involvement in other nations' internal affairs are essential to explaining the sources of immigration to the United States. Providing a more up-to-date synthesis of postwar metropolitan history is important because in its absence, much of the available writing on urbanism leans rather too heavily on terms like "globalization" and "neoliberalism." As Michael Peter Smith has pointed out, these discourses are teleological and tend to minimize the agency of immigrants. And because they are economistic approaches that emphasize an abstracted demand for labor in urban metropoles and a ready supply of workers in the developing world, they cannot explain the reality of migrant flows that are extremely uneven: some lands very distant from the U.S. send large numbers of migrants, while others that are very close and in similar economic circumstances send few. In writing about the importance of immigrants to sustaining American cities, it is essential to emphasize that immigrant flows tend to follow old imperial linkages. If we want to explain how and why tens of millions of Latin Americans and Asians moved to U.S. cities in the same period that saw tens of millions of whites leaving them, we will have to revisit the history of U.S. political, economic, and military involvement in places like Mexico, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Korea, the Dominican Republic, Vietnam, El Salvador, and Guatemala.[8]

The built environment will be even more central to a new metropolitan history. In large part this is because the very definitions of urban and suburban—and the very different distributions of people, homes, businesses, money, labor, and inequality that they entail—are at base about landscape. But it is also because much of what I wrote in that last paragraph seems so obvious, suggesting a need to defamiliarize the postwar city in order to restore agency and contingency to its history. By the early twenty-first century, the close association of people of color with big cities has become so intuitive that the word "urban" has become a stand-in for "black and Hispanic, and sometimes Asian" (as in "urban youth," "urban schools," and the movie genre called "urban"); meanwhile, "small-town" is an accepted euphemism for "white" (as in so many of Sarah Palin's coded appeals to her noticeably homogeneous political base). But this was never automatic or inevitable; it needs to be explained, in particular by problematizing the ethnoracial character of urban America. For example, the largest populations of Latinos initially came to this country or were brought here from Mexico and Puerto Rico to perform agricultural labor in rural areas. Yet most soon relocated to cities, establishing new colonias and attendant urban economies—this at a time when other populations and job opportunities were leaving for the suburbs. This new postwar urban history will thus have to explain how so many migrant workers and deracinated political refugees managed to survive and in many cases thrive in areas that federal policy, state legislatures, and mainstream capitalism were in the process of abandoning. It will have to proceed "from the bottom up" by exploring how immigrants

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**7** Mike Davis, *Magical Urbanism: Latinos Reinvent the U.S. Big City* (London and New York, 2000); Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York, 2008). For a key move beyond the black-white binary, see Scott Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles* (Princeton University Press, 2008).

**8** Michael Peter Smith, *Transnational Urbanism: Locating Globalization* (Oxford, 2001). On the relative size and origins of immigrant populations, see Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, *Immigrant America: A Portrait* (Berkeley, 2006), Ch. 3. For key texts on Latino urbanism, see Victor M. Valle and Rodolfo Torres, *Latino Metropolis* (Minneapolis, 2000); Daniel D. Arreola, ed., *Hispanic Spaces, Latino Places: Community and Cultural Diversity in Contemporary America* (Austin, Texas, 2004); David R. Diaz, *Barrio Urbanism: Chicanos, Planning, and American Cities* (New York, 2005).

occupied physical locations and shaped residential, economic, and social space; the next urban history must be a history of the landscapes of housing, small-scale retail, quotidian public sociability, and place identity.[9]

While this proposed history is very time- and place-specific, it also raises a few methodological and epistemological issues that might usefully be applied to the study of empire and urbanism more generally. To begin with, it certainly takes its direction from vernacular architecture and cultural landscape studies in proposing certain changes of focus: away from grand buildings like colonial headquarters and consular residences and toward the unremarkable but numerous buildings that make up most of the cityscape; and away from elite-centered processes like design and planning and toward everyday use and reuse by the actual inhabitants of buildings and neighborhoods. It also suggests that the vector of empire has been reversed. In terms of the built environment, imperialism means more than wealthy and powerful nations constructing ouptposts, bases, or entire cities abroad that function as instruments of political, economic, and military domination. It also means formerly or currently colonized populations migrating by the millions into imperial centers and transforming the patterns and characteristics of urban life there. In many cases, this will signal the transformation of the Other into the Neighbor and the corresponding importation of new forms of urbanism from Latin America, Asia, and Africa into the colonial metropoles of Europe and North America.[10]

**9** For a revealing look at the motivations of Puerto Rican agricultural workers who moved to Philadelphia, see Carmen Teresa Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia: Puerto Rican Workers and Postwar Economies* (Philadelphia, 2001), Ch. 3. See also Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, *A Tale of Two Cities: Santo Domingo and New York after 1950* (Princeton, 2008).

**10** For an introduction to vernacular architecture and cultural landscape studies, see J. B. Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven, 1986); Michael P. Conzen, ed., *The Making of the American Landscape* (New York, 1990); Paul Groth and Todd Bressi, eds., *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes* (New Haven, 1997); J. B. Jackson, *Landscape in Sight: Looking at America*, ed. Helen Horowitz (New Haven, 2000); Chris Wilson and Paul Groth, eds., *Everyday America: Cultural Landscape Studies after J. B. Jackson* (Berkeley, 2003), or any volume of *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* or its successor journal, *Buildings & Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Forum*.

## RESPONSE

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The political economy of empire has emerged as the leading theme in this roundtable, and any synthesis of urban and imperial histories will have to contend with the intertwining of strategic and commercial imperatives across borders. The challenge of interpreting how these imperatives shape the urban landscape is, I think, implicit in two of Dr. Bender's comments. "Wars of empire have had a huge impact on cities," he points out, citing how "war production and military bases and military research have transformed cities and regions." He also mentions the "global system of cities," highlighting Saskia Sassen's influential work on how "global immigration patterns emerge after and in the same channels as capital." The simultaneous influence of strategic power and immigration on the cities of the United States is apparent when we look at the growth of the Sunbelt (see, for example, Sunbelt Rising, the forthcoming volume edited by Michelle Nickerson and Darren Dochuk). Historians have come to understand the importance of the Cold War-era military-industrial complex in the expansion of cities from southern California to Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and the South. As we continue to think about the Sunbelt, though, we need to clarify the simultaneous influence of geopolitical and more strictly economic causes of the massive Hispanic and Asian immigration to the region.

I would hypothesize that a closer look at the Sunbelt would suggest greater emphasis on imperial geopolitics as a builder of cities. Whether in the era of the white "silent majority" or the dawning of the multiracial "new urban majority," Sunbelt cities display a palimpsest of empire. In the 1950s, 1960s, and part of the 1970s, the U.S. government poured billions upon billions of dollars into defense research and production and its civilian offspring, the aerospace industry and the space program. From the military contractors in San Diego and Los Angeles to the Johnson and Kennedy Space Centers in Houston, Texas, and Orlando, Florida, the exigencies of the Cold War shifted urban growth to the south and west, greatly increasing the population of these regions. Meanwhile, in the wake of the civil rights movement, widespread "white flight" gave rise to vast tracts of racially homogeneous suburbs throughout the nation, including the Sunbelt. Then in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, immigration dramatically changed the region's demographics, with its biggest cities becoming "minority-majority" municipalities in which non-Hispanic whites accounted for less than half the population. The key here is that this immigration was not an even flow of people from throughout the developing world—it was particularly pronounced in certain regions. While more research will be required to verify all the details, it seems very likely that given the prominence of Mexicans, Cubans, Vietnamese, and Cambodians, this wave of immigration is better explained by empire than by finance, though to be sure these two factors are complexly intertwined.

One example of how these factors interact can be found in North Texas. While Houston is more commonly cited as an example of government spending-driven urban development and diversity of recent immigrant populations, Dallas also offers an important instantiation of these phenomena. In the Oak Cliff neighborhood, located just southwest of the Trinity River, the population grew from 90,000 in 1940 to 158,000 in 1950 to over 200,000 in 1960, in substantial part due to employment opportunities

in nearby defense plants. The area was centered on a thriving commercial main street on Jefferson Boulevard, around which residential districts quickly expanded; demographically, it was approximately 95% white. Beginning in the 1960s, white families frightened by the prospect of school segregation began to flee the neighborhood; while the area saw none of the more than two dozen bombings that greeted the first black Dallasites who sought to move to previously all-white districts, a significant proportion of Oak Cliff's population demonstrated their opposition to integration by moving to nearby suburbs. The neighborhood only began to regain population in the 1980s and 1990s with an influx of Mexican (the most recent episode in a long history of labor and capital exchanges across the Rio Grande) and Salvadoran (many driven from their homeland by a civil war between a U.S.-backed military government and rebels supported by Cuba) immigrants. These newcomers revivified main street commerce and repopulated the surrounding neighborhoods by starting businesses in empty storefronts and renovating vacant houses; the area is now about 90% Hispanic, and a local newspaper report has dubbed it "the Latino Main Street of Dallas." Oak Cliff thus reveals the complexity of empire and capital, which together drew two populations to one neighborhood through two eras; it has been and continues to be a harbinger of a new era in the U.S. in which transnational dynamics strongly influence the shape of the urban landscape.