Urban Foundations

Cities in America to 1945

Early American Cities

- The design of early American cities was highly influenced by European traditions
- The roots of many of these traditions can in turn be traced to Greek and Roman ideas about cities and city planning
- However, the situation surrounding the development of American cities makes these cities unique

Early American Cities

- Early American cities (circa 1600) functioned primarily as colonial outposts
- Strong trading ties to the “mother country”
- The very earliest cities on the continent were dominated by the economic function – little thought given to “ideal” plans or hierarchical social order

Early American Cities

- Earliest American values
  - Spirit of individualism
  - Equality: uniform size land lots (at least to start)
  - Low priority given to imposing public facilities (contrast with European cities of the same period)
  - Emphasis on survival and getting the job done

Guilford, Vermont

Old Rice Farm 1782
Early American Cities
- However, out of this situation, the predominantly European roots of American society began to assert themselves through the decades.
- Through the 1600-1790 period, America adapted European city forms to the New World’s unique challenges and opportunities.

Case Study: New York
- One of the cities we will spend some time thinking about in this course is New York.
  - A city that is simultaneously the best example of the American city and unlike any other American city.
- Q: Have you have been to New York?
  - What impressions do we have of the city?
  - How is it similar to other US cities?
  - How is it different from other US cities?
Case Study: New York
- New York is a good example of city development in the Americas, beginning with its colonial roots and going right up to the present day.
  - We will view a video case study now that focuses on the earliest period of European settlement on the site of New York.
  - I will pass out a question sheet to guide your viewing of the video.
  - Along with the specific facts we gain about NY, please also think of this as a good example of what happened in other places.

The Mercantile Epoch
- In many ways, a city growth focus was necessary for the survival of the early US.
  - Towns and cities in the former colonies were mainly linked to Europe through trans-Atlantic trade.
  - Few links among American urban centers.
  - To build a nation, American cities needed to develop as an integrated system, not as separate and unconnected units.
  - “United we stand, divided we fall.”

The Mercantile Epoch
- Q: what would you have done if you were in charge of creating an integrated urban system in 1790s America? Any specific steps come to mind?

The Mercantile Epoch
- Specific steps in the development of an American urban system included:
  - Design and construction of a new national capital in Washington, DC.
  - Establishment of an entire town- and city-based system of government (county seats, town halls, state capitals).
  - Westward expansion and the maturation of former frontier towns (St Louis, Santa Fe) into fully-functioning central places that serve their regions.
The Mercantile Epoch
• Specific steps in the development of an American urban system included
  • Construction of roads, bridges, and turnpikes to connect urban places
  • Development of water-based transport networks along the Atlantic coast, up the nation’s major rivers, and into other parts of the interior via canal construction

The Mercantile Epoch
• As the American urban system expanded and the nation’s transport network matured, cities became focal points of a diversifying economy
  • Key concepts explaining this evolution: specialization and comparative advantage (bottom line is each city focuses on doing what it does best)
  • Growing exchange of goods from one specialized center to other cities in the system

The Mercantile Epoch
• Vance’s "Mercantile Model" summarizes the complex urban and economic developments that took place in North America from first European exploration (circa 1492) through the 1800s
  • See pages 51 and 52 in your course text (Urban View 3.2: Vance’s Mercantile Model)

The Mercantile Epoch
• Q: if you were assigned with the task of coming up with a model or explanation for the settlement of North America, what might you try to do?
  • Are there different kinds of explanations that you might try to work out?
The Mercantile Epoch

- We are not going to take time to review the individual stages of Vance’s model in any more detail here, but please do this as part of your regular studying
  - Vance’s Mercantile Model is an important model for understanding the development of North America’s urban system
- A “reality check”: the urban expansion modeled by Vance resulted in the urban system evolution we see reflected in the following slides
The Mercantile Epoch
- The Mercantile Model outlines processes that built the American urban system
- The same processes also changed the urban systems of the European nations that initiated exploration
  - Key feature for Europe: the accentuation of key cities that were tied to development in America (port cities, industrial cities connected to American commodities)
  - Europe’s urban system changed along with America’s

Emerging Industrial Cities
- The last turn of the century (circa 1900) was a pivotal time in the development of cities in America
- Two key, linked occurrences
  1. Development of a real, domestic industrial base, and
  2. Maturation of urban places from frontier towns to full-fledged cities
- Other factors that also contributed to American industrialization
  - Mechanization of farming, leading to fewer rural jobs and rural-to-urban migration
  - High levels of agricultural production, meaning that small numbers of farmers could feed growing urban populations
  - Great influx of immigrants, contributing to an already-growing urban labor force
Emerging Industrial Cities

- Other factors that also contributed to American industrialization
  - The advantages of economies of scale, that allowed manufacturers to achieve tremendous cost-efficiencies in serving a growing, national market
  - The advantages of external economies, where cities themselves create a situation that encourages the rapid growth of firms

Emerging Industrial Cities

- A key characteristic of urban-economic systems that have emerged since 1800 is the geographic variation we see in development levels
  - The core-periphery model captures some important elements in this spatial variation
    - Wealthy, developed, growing core
    - Poor, needy, stagnating periphery

Emerging Industrial Cities

- Researchers have invested much effort in understanding the differences between core and periphery: what makes core regions so dynamic?
  - One explanation involves the business linkages that exist in the community
  - How connected a business network does a community possess?

Emerging Industrial Cities

- Two key types of business linkages
  - 1. Backward linkages: suppliers to the main, propulsive industry of a region (back from the industry to its suppliers)
    - Q: Think of any examples for D-FW?
  - 2. Forward linkages: companies that take the outputs of the main industry and further refine/value-add (forward from the industry to further markets)
    - Q: Any examples?
    - A growing, dynamic regional economy has a surplus of both types of links

Emerging Industrial Cities

- Many local linkages = a regional economy that encourages growth
  - Q: Why? In what way would an economy with low local linkages be poorly positioned for economic growth?
  - Observation: core regions of the world (such as the northeastern US) are characterized by high levels of local interlinkages

Emerging Industrial Cities

- The combined impact of linkages can be summarized in a further concept: the multiplier effect
  - Growth creating more growth
  - Example: a local business expands, hiring 1000 more employees
    - How many more people are working in the local region once this hiring is completed?
    - Answer: it depends on the level of local interlinkage, but it will certainly be more than 1000 net new jobs
Emerging Industrial Cities
- Methodologies exist to calculate the multiplier for each city
  - For a given new investment (dollars, jobs), what growth results locally?
  - Much controversy over methods used
  - Concept can be abused to make a political point (such as the spin-off value of building a new public facility, such as a stadium)

Emerging Industrial Cities
- Although growth and economic development were central to American cities in this period, it is important to acknowledge another set of forces at work: diseconomies
  - Diseconomies of scale: inefficiencies with too much growth
  - External diseconomies: inefficiencies from too much urban influence

Emerging Industrial Cities
- Important to acknowledge that for every economic boom, there is a bust
- Kondratiev waves and your textbook’s discussion of deindustrialization and creative destruction are important to a complete perspective on cities
  - Q: What does the phrase “creative destruction” mean to you? Can you think of examples?

Emerging Industrial Cities
- Essential idea behind Kondratiev waves: the world sees waves of technologies
  - Groups of technologies that work together to change the world economy
  - New waves replace older waves, producing a surge in activity
  - Periodic up-times and down-times in world economic fortunes connected to the cycling of technologies
  - Such waves have appeared regularly since the mid-1700s, and perhaps earlier

Emerging Industrial Cities
- A key lesson we learn from research in this area is that economic depression is an important component of future economic growth
  - Provides an opportunity for economic restructuring – getting rid of the old and making way for new industries and ideas
  - This is a hard lesson that many North American cities learned first-hand in the 1970s (and continues on to today)
Emerging Industrial Cities

The “Rustbelt”