

US Cities

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial will cover the evolution of U.S. cities and urban expansion from a sociological perspective, through the definition and discussion of:

1. Colonial Settlement
2. Metropolitan Era
3. Urban Decentralization
4. Megalopolis

1. COLONIAL SETTLEMENT

In the U.S., cities proliferated with **colonial settlement**, in which colonial powers established communities with the land that they had taken. The first wave of **urban expansion** in the United States—which is the growth of urban areas to cover more geographical space—was spawned by colonialism. Native Americans did not, on their own, cluster into cities the way that colonists did. Colonists brought the European urban model with them and set up colonies.



TERMS TO KNOW

Colonial Settlement

Occurs when colonial powers establish a community in a territory they have occupied.

Urban Expansion

The growth of urban areas to cover more geographical area.

2. METROPOLITAN ERA

A second wave of urban expansion occurred as cities like New York, Chicago, Buffalo, Cleveland, and Detroit emerged as strategic and efficient places to locate cities with respect to trade and the geography of the United States. They were all located along waterways and could be easily accessed with ships, so they facilitated trade. They were natural, convenient places to set up human populations, given the technology of the day.

This occurred in the earliest beginnings as a country, during what is called the **metropolitan era** in U.S.

history, which lasted from 1860 to 1950--ten years short of a century.

IN CONTEXT

In this period, America emerged as a global power and solidified itself as a nation. It underwent the Civil War, which united the country; it fought World War I and World War II, emerging from World War II victorious and strong, ushering in America's supremacy on the global stage.

Also in this period, industrialization was gaining a foothold in American society, which caused cities to solidify and become specialized producers of a particular industrial commodity. For instance, Chicago was known, among other things, as a meat packing city--it was the home of industrial meat production. Detroit, on the other hand, was home to automobiles and automobile production.

The U.S. cities specialized in industrial production, and industry being housed in cities brought many people to cities, bringing all kinds of immigrants from Europe to come live in these cities. This was the crowning metropolitan moment in American history--the metropolitan era. The first boom of cities in the metropolitan era peaked in 1950.



TERM TO KNOW

Metropolitan Era

Refers to the time period from 1860-1950 when urbanization expanded in the United States due to historical circumstances and industrialization.

3. URBAN DECENTRALIZATION

After 1950, you begin to see urban decentralization, with the move to suburbanization. **Urban decentralization** is the social movement of people away from cities to the suburbs. The suburbs exploded after about 1950. Wealthy people living in urban centers wanted to get away from them, desiring to escape from the crime-ridden, dirty inner-city streets where they didn't feel safe. They wanted to live in comfort and quarantine themselves away from the urban grit, so they moved to more exclusive suburbs.

Cities worsened in the 1970s and '80s as manufacturing jobs started to leave the cities, fueling more people who could afford it to leave the cities. As there were fewer manufacturing plants and the jobs left, there was more poverty, crime and problems, which created an impetus to get out.



TERM TO KNOW

Urban Decentralization

Social movement of people away from city centers to the suburbs.

4. MEGALOPOLIS

Today, with the spread of suburbs and exurbs--farther out suburbs--you see the rise of the megalopolis.

Megalopolis or megalopolises are extensive, sprawled urban areas containing a city and numerous suburbs.

Inner cities, in the information age, have seen something of a rebirth as entertainment districts. People have cashed in on the economic transitions in the information age--they need entertainment and inner cities have provided this entertainment space.



TERM TO KNOW

Megalopolis

An extensive metropolitan area containing numerous cities and suburbs.



SUMMARY

Today you explored an introduction to evolution of U.S. cities, learning about urban expansion from the time of **colonial settlement** through the **metropolitan era**, followed by **urban decentralization** and the current rise of the **megalopolis**.

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Zach Lamb.



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